

One rank, one pension: Ex-Servicemen hold nationwide protests

Written by JPNN

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JPNN/New Delhi/June 14, 2015/Hundreds of ex-servicemen took to the streets today across the country protesting delay in the implementation of the 'One Rank, One Pension'(OROP) policy, demanding that Prime Minister

Narendra Modi forthwith fulfil his promise made a year back on it. The former soldiers have threatened to go on a relay hunger strike from tomorrow and also seek the intervention of President Pranab Mukherjee. The protests come after talks -- both formal and back-channel -- with the government failed as the ex-servicemen were not given a specific timeline for the implementation of the long-pending OROP. In Jaipur, Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar today sought to assuage their concerns, saying the promises made will be kept and that they should be "patient". "I assure you whatever we have promised that all would be done... But some people need to be patient," Parrikar said addressing a conference here on challenges and solutions regarding border safety.

Close to 22 lakh ex-servicemen and over six lakh war widows stand to be the immediate beneficiaries of the scheme which envisages uniform pension for the defence personnel retiring in the same rank with the same length of service, irrespective of their date of retirement." Currently, the pension for retired personnel is based on the Pay Commission recommendations at the time when he or she retired. So, a Major General who retired in 1996 draws less pension than a Lieutenant Colonel who retired after 1996. The ex-Defence personnel said this policy was "lopsided" and needed to be rectified. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has assured us that it will be implemented, but it has been one year," said Col. (retd) Anil Kaul, the media advisor to Indian Ex-Servicemen Movement (IESM) at a rally in Jantar Mantar in the national capital. Protests were also held in Punjab, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and other states covering over 50 cities, he said. Maj. Gen. (retd) Satbir Singh, vice-chairman of IESM, told the media that the protests will continue till OROP is implemented.

The ex-servicemen maintained that they were not against any government but are pressing to get their long-pending dues. They also said that they have sought an appointment with the President Pranab Mukherjee to take up this matter. The Modi government has said that it is committed to OROP, one of its key poll promises, but has been unable to implement it till now, they said. In his 'Mann Ki Baat' radio talk, Modi had assured ex-servicemen that his government would soon resolve the OROP issue but this has not happened, they lamented. "The Prime Minister's voice still echoes in our minds when he roared at the ex-servicemen rally on September 15, 2013, in Rewari and demanded a white paper on OROP from the UPA Government. He did not stop there, but declared that had there been BJP government in 2004, OROP would have been reality by now," a statement released by the Indian Ex-Servicemen Movement (IESM), which is spearheading the agitation, said. It said that ex-servicemen had

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believed Modi as they had found a leader who had the will to approve the long-standing demand of OROP. "Ex-servicemen all over India not only voted for Modi (PM candidate) but as they also were the opinion makers in rural India where a majority of the defence personnel reside. Consequently BJP received an unprecedented mandate," it said.

Interestingly, some farmers' groups and students from Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University also joined the protests today. The slogan of 'Jai Kisan, Jai Jawan' was raised as a group of farmers joined the protest at Jantar Mantar here to support the ex-servicemen. Even though the government has said it is committed to implementing OROP, there has been no official word on why the scheme is getting delayed, they said. Defence ministry sources said that the OROP file is with the Finance Ministry for a final budgetary approval. Meanwhile, a group of ex-servicemen considered to be close to the RSS, wrote over the weekend to Finance Minister Arun Jaitley seeking the implementation of OROP so as to not "breach the trust" lakhs of retired soldiers. In an open letter, it also sought that a definite date be declared for the implementation of OROP. Recalling that Modi had at a September, 2013, rally at Rewari promised to look after armed forces personnel if elected to power at the Centre, the Akhil Bharatiya Poorva Sainik Seva Parishad said OROP is a burning and emotive issue. "The ex-servicemen across the country felt that finally here was a political party that is friendly and empathetic towards the cause of a soldier. As a result, most of us went all out to campaign for the BJP throughout India," Lt Gen. (retd) VM Patil, president of the Parishad, said in the letter. Agency