

# Business Standard

## Odisha govt to identify bonded labourers

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Odisha government will identify bonded labourers in the state and has decided to spend Rs 4.5 lakh in each of its 30 districts.

The Socio-Economic Caste Census - 2011 has reported existence of 8,400 bonded labourers in the state, Director (Special Projects) of Panchayati Raj Department, S N Girish said.

The government has meanwhile increased the rehabilitation amount of bonded labourers from Rs 20,000 to Rs one lakh, he told the meeting convened by Odisha Human Rights Commission (OHRC).

OHRC acting chairperson Justice B K Mishra said legal cases would be initiated against persons who employ people from lower castes and dalit communities for customary services and pay them remuneration below specified minimum wage.

He met collectors of four coastal districts and discussed on complete elimination of bonded labour system as per the directives of National Human Rights Commission.

"If someone is found to have employed another person at less than the specified minimum wage, he or she would be liable for prosecution under Section 108 of IPC. Such employment would be deemed as bonded-labour," said Justice Mishra.

Caste-based bonded labour system is prevalent in many parts of the coastal region of the state where members of barber or washerman communities are employed in customary services for measly remuneration. The system is called "Bartan."

Labour Secretary G Srinivasan said identification of caste-based bonded labourers would be carried out through district vigilance monitoring committees.

Labour Commissioner Sachin Ramachandran said awareness campaigns would be launched AT gram panchayat and block and panchayat levels for identification of bonded labourers.