



Keynote Address by the General Secretary, Sanchar Nigam Pensioners' Welfare Association at the open session of All India conference at Ernakulam on 23rd September 2024:

Respected Comrade President, Hon'ble MP, Esteemed Guests, Veteran Trade Union Leaders, Respected Members, and Dear Friends,

It is with immense pride and honor that I stand before you today at this prestigious All India Conference of the Sanchar Nigam Pensioners' Welfare Association (SNPWA). Today, we gather not only to celebrate our shared accomplishments but also to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the welfare of all retired employees from BSNL, MTNL, DOT, and related organizations.

Our journey began in 1946 when our forefathers came together to form an association to serve active employees. In 2019, recognizing the growing needs of retirees, we evolved into an exclusive body dedicated to serving the needs of pensioners. Throughout our existence, we have remained a neutral, apolitical organization, rising above divisions of caste, creed, color, or political affiliation.

As our tagline, "Hand in Hand, Shoulder to Shoulder," aptly conveys, we are united in our cause. Solidarity, compassion, and a relentless drive to protect the rights and welfare of our members are the core values that guide SNPWA. We stand as a symbol of fraternity and unity for all who have dedicated their years in service to our nation.

As Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." This sentiment resonates deeply with our journey—SNPWA has demonstrated that by working together, even the most formidable challenges can be overcome.

Our Vision and Current Focus:

While the past few years have seen significant progress, many challenges still lie ahead. Our association has been relentlessly pursuing several key issues on behalf of our members:

1. Pension Revision:

We continue to fight for timely revisions to pension benefits, ensuring our members receive what they are rightfully entitled to. The bureaucracy in DOT and the existing political dispensation have been neglecting the pensioners of BSNL/MTNL through their callous, insensitive actions. For seven years, this unprecedented apathy has caused great suffering. Despite a clear Union Cabinet decision from 2000 that absorbed employees from DOT into BSNL/MTNL would be treated on par with Central Government employees in all respects, the current government has brazenly violated this promise.

This disregard for nearly 5 lakh aging pensioners is both shameful and unacceptable. So many of the senior citizens have been allowed to breathe their last during the last seven years without enjoying their rightful benefits due to the utterly callous and shameless inaction of the present Government, aided, advised and abetted by the DOT establishment. However, the more the government delays justice, the stronger our resolve becomes to fight for our rights until our demands are met.

2. Commutation of Pension:

The timely payment of the commuted value of pension after 10.8 years remains a pressing concern. We are demanding swift action and clarity on this matter, which deeply affects the financial security of many of our members.

3. Date of Increment and Pension Increase:

Following the recent Supreme Court judgment, we are working diligently to ensure the increments and pension increases are implemented without further delay. This is a crucial step toward addressing long-standing disparities in pension benefits.

4. Fixed Medical Allowance and CGHS Reforms:

We are advocating for an increase in the fixed medical allowance for retirees who have surrendered their outpatient facility under CGHS. Moreover, SNPWA has been at the forefront of pushing for critical reforms within CGHS. Our efforts have already brought about significant improvements, particularly for senior citizens, by simplifying cumbersome procedures and ensuring cashless treatment at hospitals. Diagnostic charges and consultation fees have been revised to current standards, enhancing healthcare accessibility for our members. Unnecessary knocks at the doors of the Wellness centers for each and every consultation and diagnostic tests are now diminished to a great extent.

As Winston Churchill wisely said, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." We draw strength from this as we continue to face these challenges head-on, pursuing long-lasting solutions.

5. Group Health Insurance:

SNPWA is proud to have introduced a comprehensive group health insurance scheme for BSNL, MTNL, and DOT retirees. This scheme is unique, offering cashless treatment at leading hospitals across the country without waiting periods or caps. The affordable premium and hassle-free process, without the need for medical certificates, have been warmly received by our members, particularly given the escalating costs of medical care.

6. Strengthening the CGHS Mechanism:

We remain committed to further strengthening the CGHS mechanism across the country. Our focus has been sustained and unwavering, and we assure you that SNPWA will continue striving to address the existing gaps and challenges within CGHS to improve the system for all pensioners. Charges for consultation and a host of diagnostic tests have been raised to more or less match with the current market rates, making the scheme more attractive. Unnecessary knocks at the doors of the wellness centres have been brought down considerably by avoiding repeated visits for consultations and diagnostic tests, which till now was so cumbersome. Streamlining the entire mechanism in which our efforts were considerable, has been a huge relief for the beneficiaries.

Our Commitment:

SNPWA stands as a pillar of support for all pensioners, and our primary mission remains the safeguarding of every retiree under our care. We have proven that collective strength, when guided by a clear purpose, can move mountains. We have overcome bureaucratic hurdles, engaged with government bodies, and ensured the voices of pensioners are heard. Our progress thus far is a testament to our unwavering dedication, and we will continue this fight until our demands are met.

As Henry Ford once said, "Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success." The growing strength of SNPWA reflects this truth-our unity is our greatest asset, and through our collective strength, we can achieve even more.

Our association continues to grow, with many retirees from various sectors joining our ranks. This expansion reaffirms the trust that pensioners place in SNPWA. We are committed to intensifying our efforts, particularly in addressing the urgent concerns of senior citizens.

In conclusion, while our journey has been long and arduous, the strides we have made thus far inspire great hope. As the saying goes, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." We have already taken many such steps, and with your continued support, we will stay vigilant, united, and dedicated to ensuring the welfare of every retired employee who has served our nation with distinction.

Thank you, and I look forward to a productive and engaging conference ahead.

JAI SNPWA

JAI PENSIONERS' UNITY