



PRESS RELEASE

Celebrating 'freedom from barriers', Railways Minister gives away 6th NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Awards

New Delhi, Aug 14: The 6th NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Awards were given away by Railways Minister Suresh Prabhu at a simple ceremony here today. These awards are given to individuals and organisations working to create an accessible and barrier-free society for persons with disabilities in the areas of built environment, transport, ICT, services, and aids and appliances. Some of the notable work that was celebrated included a smart cane and other assistive technology developed by an IIT Delhi professor; a one-stop resource app on disability; and aviation industry's first employee with disability, among others.

A major reason for people with disabilities not being seen in the mainstream of society is the lack of access. A recent survey conducted by NCPEDP found that only 0.56% of students with disabilities were in higher education in India despite the mandated 3% quota. Similarly, trends show that less than 1% people with disabilities are meaningfully employed across sectors, with only 0.3% of the mandated 3% quota in government jobs being filled. The concept of Universal Design is intrinsic to access. It signifies design that is usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone regardless of age, ability, or situation. Universal Design is not only meant for people with disabilities but is also equally needed for the ageing population.

This point was emphasized by Dr. Babli Moitra Saraf, Principal of Indraprastha College for Women while speaking on behalf of all organizational awardees. "We are all 'temporarily-abled'. We have to as a nation factor into our planning the special needs of the varied segments of our population," Dr. Moitra said. "We need user-friendly infrastructural landscapes that are not only built but maintained as operational, so that those with disability, including those by age or by disease, do not have to struggle to carry a piece of baggage into a railway compartment or be denied travel because they cannot use the toilets," she added.

Speaking at the occasion, Javed Abidi, Honorary Director of NCPEDP said, "What is it that we celebrate tomorrow on August 15? It is freedom. But we have to ask ourselves if everyone in this country is truly free? Can everyone step out of their houses with dignity? Can everyone access information freely?"

He appealed to the Railways Minister to take up the issue of accessibility of the country's largest state machinery. This includes not just the railway stations and



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the coaches but also making their website and online systems accessible to people with disabilities.

Awardees of the sixth edition of the awards include, among persons with disabilities, Abha Khetarpal (Delhi); Priti Shah Soni (Bhopal); Sandeep Kumar (Delhi); while Simon George (Kochi) won a special mention. In the category for working professionals, the Award went to Archana Konwar (Dhemaji, Assam) and Prof. M. Balakrishnan (Delhi). Winners among companies and organisations were Accenture, DJ Academy of Design, Indraprastha College for Women, Mindtree Ltd., Sightica Solutions, and a special mention for HR Johnson for their Red Ramp campaign.

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