

Minister Amar Bauri admits the need to fill up 23 vacancies of Lone sports officer, but doesn't commit on deadline

Ranchi: As the state celebrates a Deepika or a Nikki bound for Rio, the sports ministry knows well the mess beneath the glitter.

Grassroots sporting activities seem to have taken a back seat in Jharkhand due to a severe manpower crisis that also threatens to jeopardise the much-hyped Kamal Clubs to be set up across 24 districts to tap and nurture budding talents.

Except Latehar, none of the districts has a sports officer, the key man responsible for implementing government schemes, holding yearly selection trials, taking care of day-boarding and other sports centres, among others.

If sources are to be believed, recruitment of district sports officers (DSOs) did not take place in the past two decades. At the time of the formation, Jharkhand had only three while five others came from the Bihar cadre. Over the years, most retired, but successive Jharkhand governments kept dragging their feet about filling up the vacancies, undermining the execution of sporting activities to nurture talent.

Now, even as the Raghubar Das government goes gaga about setting up Kamal Clubs across districts from July 30 to "identify talents and promote sports", the department concerned has displayed little urgency to fill up these vacancies, the key to achieve the twin desired goals.

Latehar DSO Umashankar Jaiswal, who is practically now the in-charge of all the 24 districts, mostly stays in capital Ranchi. Currently, he is busy with a camp for football coaches sponsored by the sports department as a part of skill development programme underway at the mega sports complex in Hotwar since July 20. It will conclude on July 31. After this, similar camps will be held for wrestling, archery and kabaddi coaches between August and September, keeping Jaiswal busy in Ranchi. "My job is to follow the directives of my bosses. Since I am asked to coordinate the camps for coaches, I am doing so," he told The Telegraph .

As a result, the once-famous government hockey centre for boys in Latehar is virtually defunct. "The centre lacks sporting gear, kits, infrastructure. There is no regular coach and training has stopped months ago. Now, who will send the requisitions to the government without a DSO?" asked a source at the centre.

An official in the sports department explained: "We can only allot funds, give directions and approve plans. But work and activities on the ground have to be done by a DSO."

Citing the case of Ranchi district, which also lacks a DSO, he added: "For example, we have given funds for laying fresh grass at Birsa Munda Football Stadium months ago, but the work is getting delayed inordinately. We can neither question the deputy commissioner nor the deputy development commissioner, because it isn't their priority and they have thousand other tasks. After everything, if they get time, they focus on sports."

Sports minister Amar Kumar Bauri, however, said his department was concerned about the DSO crisis. He added that recruitments would be done soon but couldn't specify a deadline. "Last year, we tried to fill up vacancies on a contract basis with experienced players from various disciplines in the state. However, the process was scrapped as we later got busy preparing regulations for a permanent recruitment. The draft was cleared by the cabinet three-four months ago and sent to Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) for action. Now, you should check with the JPSC as to when they will start hiring," Bauri told The Telegraph on Friday evening.

JPSC chairman D.K. Srivastava, who had told this correspondent on July 18 that he would get back, hadn't till this afternoon, despite repeated calls on his phone.