

# **The Times of India**

## **CM assures Marathas of education, job quota**

Mumbai: Chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said his government is committed to providing reservation to Marathas in employment and education. The statement follows the massive response to state-wide Maratha rallies that are being held to demand Maratha reservation, a halt to "gross misuse" of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, and the death penalty for the accused in the Kopardi gangrape-murder case.

The previous government had promulgated an ordinance in 2014 to provide 16% reservation for Marathas, who constitute 34-36% of the state's population, but the high court stayed it.

"My government is honestly committed to providing reservation to Marathas. We are (also) solving problems faced by the community by (promoting) financial empowerment, employment and entrepreneurship," Fadnavis told TOI.

He said the state government has drafted an action plan to provide employment opportunities to 5 lakh Maratha youths with skill development and finance. "Large sections of Marathas have faced educational and economic backwardness. It's a legacy created by apathy for a long time... Marathas should come forward to work unitedly on solutions to issues raised by the community... We will find an amicable solution with the help of all," Fadnavis said.

The Fadnavis government had ignored initial protests, sparked by the gangrape and murder of a girl in Kopardi village, Ahmednagar district. But after the Aurangabad rally, attended by over five lakh people, law enforcing agencies made it clear to the CM that if he ignored the ongoing protests, his government would pay a heavy price. Fadnavis had earlier made a statement that he was prepared for a dialogue with the agitating Marathas.

A senior bureaucrat told TOI, "We are working out an action plan for a dialogue with the Maratha community, before they plan a morcha in Mumbai."

A convener of the Maratha Kranti Muk Morcha said there will be no compromise unless there is specific commitment to meet Maratha

demands. "We will not accept assurance. We are keen on written orders," he said.

Since 1990, three commissions have observed that Marathas are not a backward community. As such, they are not eligible for reservation in employment and education. The reports were submitted in 1990, 2000 and 2008. A strong demand for reservation was made for the first time in 1997, but it was not pursued. A fresh demand was made in 2005 by the Maratha Mahasangh. In 2013, the state government appointed a cabinet sub-committee headed by the then industries minister Narayan Rane to study the demand. Rane recommended 20% reservation.

Following the Congress's debacle in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, the then chief minister Prithviraj Chavan realized that if Marathas were granted reservation, the Congress may improve its chances in the yet-to-come assembly polls. Accordingly, his government promulgated the reservation ordinance (which also gave 5% to Muslims), but it did not prevent the Congress-NCP combine's assembly poll rout. As of now, the matter is in the high court.