

50 Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

Originally, the Constitution of India did not make any provision with respect to the Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities¹. Later, the States Reorganisation Commission (1953–55) made a recommendation in this regard. Accordingly, the Seventh Constitutional Amendment Act of 1956 inserted a new Article 350-B in Part XVII of the Constitution². This article contains the following provisions:

1. There should be a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities. He is to be appointed by the President of India.
2. It would be the duty of the Special Officer to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for linguistic minorities under the Constitution³. He would report to the President upon those matters at such intervals as the President may direct. The President should place all such reports before each House of Parliament and send to the governments of the states concerned.

It must be noted here that the Constitution does not specify the qualifications, tenure, salaries and allowances, service conditions and procedure for removal of the Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities.

COMMISSIONER FOR LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

In pursuance of the provision of Article 350-B of the Constitution, the office of the Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities was created in 1957. He is designated as the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities.

The Commissioner has his headquarters at Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh). He has three regional offices at Belgaum (Karnataka), Chennai (Tamil Nadu) and Kolkata (West Bengal). Each is headed by an Assistant Commissioner.

The Commissioner is assisted at headquarters by Deputy Commissioner and an Assistant Commissioner. He maintains liaison with the State Governments and Union Territories through nodal officers appointed by them.

At the Central level, the Commissioner falls under the Ministry of Minority Affairs. Hence, he submits the annual reports or other reports to the President through the Union Minority Affairs Minister⁴.

ROLE OF THE COMMISSIONER

The Commissioner takes up all the matters pertaining to the grievances arising out of the non-implementation of the Constitutional and Nationally Agreed Scheme of Safeguards provided to linguistic minorities that come to its notice or are brought to its knowledge by the linguistic minority individuals, groups, associations or organisations at the highest political and administrative levels of the state governments and UT administrations and recommends remedial actions to be taken⁵.

To promote and preserve linguistic minority groups, the Ministry of Minority Affairs has requested the State Governments / Union Territories to give wide publicity to the constitutional safeguards provided to linguistic minorities and to take necessary administrative measures. The state governments and UT Administrations were urged to accord priority to the implementation of the scheme of safeguards for linguistic minorities. The Commissioner launched a 10 point programme to lend fresh impetus to Governmental efforts towards the preservation of the language and culture of linguistic minorities⁶.

VISION AND MISSION

The vision and mission of the Commissioner are mentioned here.⁷

Vision

Streamlining and strengthening implementation machinery and mechanism for effective implementation of the Constitutional safeguards for the Linguistic Minorities, thereby ensuring protection of the rights of speakers of the minority languages so as to provide them equal opportunities for inclusive and integrated development.

Mission

To ensure that all the states / U.T.s effectively implement the Constitutional safeguards and the nationally agreed scheme of safeguards for the linguistic minorities for providing them equal opportunities for inclusive development.

FUNCTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

In more detail, the functions and objectives of the Commissioner are as follows⁸ :

Functions

1. To investigate all matters related to safeguards provided to the linguistic minorities
2. To submit to the President of India, the reports on the status of implementation of the Constitutional and the nationally agreed safeguards for the linguistic minorities
3. To monitor the implementation of safeguards through questionnaires, visits, conferences, seminars, meetings, review mechanism, etc

Objectives

1. To provide equal opportunities to the linguistic minorities for inclusive development and national integration
2. To spread awareness amongst the linguistic minorities about the safeguards available to them
3. To ensure effective implementation of the safeguards provided for the linguistic minorities in the Constitution and other safeguards, which are agreed to by the states / U.T.s
4. To handle the representations for redress of grievances related to the safeguards for linguistic minorities

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. A linguistic minority is a group of people whose mother tongue is different from that of the majority in the state or part of a state. Thus, the linguistic minorities are determined on a state-wise basis.
2. Part XVII is entitled as 'Official Language' and consists of four chapters. Article 350-B is contained in the fourth chapter entitled as 'Special Directives'.

3. The constitutional safeguards for linguistic minorities are explained in [Chapter 65](#).
4. So far, 52 reports have been presented.
5. India 2013, Publications Division, Government of India, p. 1012.
6. Annual Report 2011–2012, Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India, p. 38.
7. 47th Report of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities, July 2008 to June 2010, p. 222.
8. *Ibid.*