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Headless for a year, Safai Karamchari commission gets some vacancies filled

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Written by Dheeraj Mishra
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(Express Photo by Tashi Tobgyal/File)

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The National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK), after being headless for close to a year, has finally got a chairperson, vice-chairperson and member on board — though several posts still remain vacant.

According to an office order by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on Monday, the president approved the appointment of M Venkatesan as chairperson, Anjana Panwar as vice-chairperson, and Dr P P Vava as member. Sources said they are likely to take charge in March, and the tenure will last till March 2025.

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All three are BJP leaders — Venkatesan in Tamil Nadu, Panwar in Rajasthan, and Vava in Kerala. The NCSK is India's top body for sanitation workers and eradication

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As the commission itself is running on a temporary basis, the posts in the commission are filled either through deputation or co-terminus basis, except for the post of Secretary, which is filled under the Central Staffing Scheme.

Sources told [The Indian Express](#) that the commission had been continuously writing to the ministry on the situation. “These posts are filled by the ministry. We have been writing to them every month and apprised about the vacancy,” a source had said.

Ramon Magsaysay Awardee and convenor of the Safai Karmachari Andolan, Bezwada Wilson, explained the issue with the current arrangement: “There are two big problems with this commission. First, it does not have any powers and works as a non-statutory body on government resolution. Why this disparity when you have SC/ST commission as a statutory body, you have a human rights commission as a statutory body? Due to this, the commission is not able to implement its own orders or directions. The second big problem is that the chairperson and members are political appointees, so they don’t question the government or speak against their schemes,” he said.

Earlier this month, [The Indian Express](#) had reached out to former members of the commission to speak about the vacancies. Among them was Panwar, who said: “The commission is a big support for the last man standing in the line, that is, sanitation workers. Thousands of safai karamcharis have benefited, their problems and grievances have been resolved, which is why it is important NCSK run at full strength.”

Another former member, Jagdish Hiremani, said the commission is important since its chairperson and members regularly do ground visits to assess the situation of sewage workers. “Members visit different locations and meet safai karamcharis

The commission was constituted on August 12, 1994, as a statutory body by the Parliament. Its tenure was extended from time to time up to February 2004, after which the Act lapsed. Since then, the commission has been operating as a non-statutory body under the ministry, with its tenure extended from time to time through government resolutions.

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On the status of the commission, MoS for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Atha-wale said in the Parliament on February 8: “There is no such proposal for converting the commission into a statutory body.”

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