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DURBAR MAHILA SAMANWAYA COMMITTEE

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DURBAR MAHILA SAMANWAYA COMMITTEE – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Introduction:

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), an organization of sex workers, functions as an exclusive forum of female, male and transgender sex workers and their children, from both brothel based and mobile populations. DMSC has 52 branches and a membership of about 40,000 sex workers across West Bengal, India. DMSC demands decriminalization of adult sex work in all its aspects, social recognition of sex work as a service sector occupation and establishment of sex workers' right to self-determination. DMSC also seeks to abolish or reform all laws which restrict the human rights of sex workers and limit their enfranchisement as full citizens.

Vision of Durbar:

Durbar seeks a world where all marginalized communities live in an environment with equal respects, rights status and dignity. We hope for a social order where there will be no discrimination based on class, caste, gender, religion or occupation. All the people of the world will live in peace and harmony.

Mission:

Durbar's mission is to enhance a process of social and political change in order to establish rights, dignity and improvement of social status including quality of life for all sex workers as a part of the global movement to establish the rights of marginalized people through the following:

- Changing the attitude of the people towards marginalized people in general and towards the sex workers in particular.
- Strengthening the struggle for enhancing self-respect of sex workers.
- Changing the unjust and illogical practices, laws, customs and policies that surround sexual services and sex workers.
- Uniting sex workers and empowering them through capacity building.
- Challenging the power-based relations within and outside the sex sector.
- Building networks among various individuals, groups, organizations and movements.

Activities of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee in the year 2024 – 2025

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, our core values are not just statements; they are the foundation of our identity and actions. These values guide our interactions, inform our strategies, and shape our vision for a more equitable society. As we reflect on the past year, we take pride in how our commitment to Respect, Recognition, Integrity and Commitment has driven our initiatives and empowered the marginalized communities we serve, including sex workers, Nachnis, Sabars, Mundas and others.

Over the past year, we have exemplified our commitment by tirelessly working to empower these marginalized communities. Our multifaceted approach encompasses education, healthcare and cultural enrichment, building an inclusive environment where every individual can thrive. Through our efforts, we have created opportunities for personal and professional growth, ensuring that community members are equipped with the resources and support they need to lead fulfilling lives.

Durbar Celebrated Its First-Ever Iftar Party

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee hosted its first-ever Iftar party, marking a significant milestone in its history. The event aimed to promote unity and inclusivity among diverse communities, bringing together local Muslim individuals and sex workers to observe Ramadan and celebrate solidarity in Kolkata.

The Iftar celebration on April 8, 2024 commenced with Muslim attendees performing Salah, the Islamic prayer, followed by the breaking of the fast at sunset. The event emphasized the significance of faith and devotion during Ramadan, while creating a sense of fellowship. Attendees then gathered to enjoy the Iftar meal, where Ms. Bishakha Laskar, Durbar's Secretary, personally ensured that every individual felt valued and respected. The act of sharing a meal not only satisfied physical hunger but also created bonds of friendship and understanding among all.

The significance of the Iftar party lies in its symbolism of inclusivity and acceptance, providing a rare opportunity for sex workers to engage in cultural and religious practices often overlooked or marginalized in mainstream society. By participating in the Iftar celebration alongside their Muslim peers, they experienced a sense of validation and belonging.



Durbar Observed 29 years Of Sex Workers' Movement on May Day

“Gatar Khatiye Khai, Sramiker Odhikar Chai” - with this slogan, Durbar organized May Day at Abinash Kabiraj Street, Sonagachi on April 30, 2024 where we observed 29 years of Sex Workers' movement on May Day by focusing on advocating for the rights of sex workers. The event aimed to emphasize the recognition of sex workers as legitimate workers, enforce Supreme Court directions of 19th May 2022, attain constitutional rights, protect from police interference and violence and abolish the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act.

The gathering included representatives from the sex worker community, various social paths and labor unions, all coming together to support the



cause. The speakers, including Ms. Bishakha Laskar, Ms. Paramita Dey, Mr. Rabindranath Chakraborty and Ms. Rama Debnath emphasized the importance of recognizing sex workers as laborers, deserving of rights, legal support and fair treatment. Additionally, cultural performances by Komal Gandhar and a folk singer added emotional depth to the event, highlighting the struggles and societal pressures faced by sex workers community.



The May Day celebration served as a platform for Durbar to reinforce its commitment to advocating for the rights and dignity of sex workers. The event underscored our efforts in raising awareness, advocating for policy reforms, empowering sex workers, creating solidarity and educating the public. The speakers reiterated the significance of International Workers' Day in recognizing the struggle for justice across all occupations, emphasizing the collective commitment to creating a more equitable and inclusive society where every worker is valued, respected and provided with the rights and protections they deserve.



Durbar Opens New Education Centre for Children of Sex Workers in Bowbazar

In Bowbazar, Kolkata, Durbar joyfully opened a new Education Centre on 2nd May 2024, to provide education to the children of sex workers. Through this initiative, these kids will be able to participate in extracurricular activity and get education in a safe and caring environment. At now, the centre provides individualized care to fifteen children, each of whom is attended to by four dedicated teachers. Classes take place between 5 and 7 PM on Monday through Saturday, giving the kids regular academic teaching and chances to express their creativity via dance. In addition to meeting their educational needs, this all-encompassing strategy promotes their general growth and gives them the tools they need to imagine and strive for a better future.



Durbar Commemorating the Death Anniversary of Dr. Smarajit Jana

To mark Dr. Smarajit Jana's (21 July 1952 to 8 May 2021) death anniversary, the sex worker community and members of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee met at 12/5 Nilmoni Mitra Street, Kolkata on 8th May 2024. The founder of DMSC, Dr. Jana, devoted his life to promoting

the rights and dignity of Sex Workers. After a minute of silence, flowers and garlands were offered in his honor to start the event.



People in the community and members of the organization gave moving testimonies about how Dr. Jana changed their lives, emphasizing his steadfast support and efforts to combat discrimination in society. The occasion confirmed Dr. Jana's lasting legacy and dedication to justice, equality. In order to make sure that Dr. Jana's legacy continues to inspire and direct their work for years to come, Durbar and its members committed to keep pushing for the rights and welfare of sex workers.

Raising Awareness on Cervical Cancer

On 16th May 2024, Durbar organized a powerful awareness campaign on cervical cancer within the office with ground level workers in association with IIT Kharagpur. A specialist team who are working with cervical cancer spoke with workers about the cancer spread and how to avoid it. The team underscored the vital need of timely identification by routine screenings and immunization against HPV, the primary cause of cervical cancer. They also distributed a flip book with all the staff to understand briefly about the topic. They covered risk factors unique to the group of sex workers and gave crucial advice on protecting reproductive health and getting medical attention when needed while giving everyone in Durbar's network access to information that may save lives. The program created a safe space for discussion with the ultimate goal of lowering the incidence of cervical cancer and enhancing the general health of sex workers.



Durbar joins at CREA's Renew 2024: South Asian Sex Workers Summit in Kathmandu

Sex workers from India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka participated in the Renew 2024 conference, which CREA arranged in Kathmandu, Nepal from 29th to 31st May 2024. Jagriti Mahila Maha Sangh gave a dance performance to start off the summit, which also featured talks delivered by activists and leaders of the sex worker community from South Asia. Keynote speakers included leaders from many regional groups as well as CREA's Geetha Mishra.

As a representative of our organization, Ms. Bishakha Laskar stressed the importance of decriminalizing and accepting sex work as a respectable profession. Workshop topics included anti-trafficking, online safety and how internet services affect sex work. Shohini Ghosh presented a talk on sex work in Bollywood and a screening of the film "Zindagi Tamasha" followed by a discussion with its director, Sarmad Khoosat was featured.



The event also included cultural performances by our cultural group Komal Gandhar team and also a photography session by Anita Khemka and discussions on legal advocacy. The summit concluded with the launch of a publication on feminist allyship and the sharing of advocacy messages for the upcoming UN Human Rights Council session.



Awareness Program 'SAKHI' for Sex Workers' Legal Rights

On 13th June 2024, Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee and the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) Kolkata held an awareness program called 'SAKHI' to inform women, especially sex workers, about their legal rights. Key speakers included Mou Ghatak Majumdar, Pradip Ghosh, Ankita Nag and Krishna Nandi from DLSA, and Bishakha Laskar from DMSC. The DLSA representatives explained their services, emphasizing that Sex Worker women and children can access legal aid without income restrictions and outlined the eligibility criteria for men. They also discussed the benefits of mediation services for resolving disputes.

This program addressed the specific challenges faced by sex workers. Issues like lack of rent receipts, difficulties in obtaining birth certificates for their children and personal legal problems were highlighted. DLSA representatives suggested solutions, such as local leaders issuing certificates for school admissions. Personal stories from sex workers illustrated their struggles with legal documentation and family issues. DMSC proposed setting up an Aadhaar center to help sex workers obtain an essential ID card.



The event also emphasized the importance of having a DLSA mediator, Ms. Krishna Nandi, Para Legal Volunteer available at the Abinash Clinic run by DMSC every Monday, providing sex workers with convenient access to legal advice and support. DLSA representatives assured that legal services would be provided free of charge. The program successfully spread important information about legal rights and services, highlighting the need for continued advocacy and created legal support to empower vulnerable communities.



Durbar's 29th Birthday Celebration: A day of honouring the past, embracing the future

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee celebrated its 29th birthday on 12th July 2024 with a vibrant event held in Sonagachi. The celebration brought together members, well-wishers and dignitaries who honored Durbar's long-standing commitment to the rights and welfare of sex workers. The event featured speeches from Mr. Debasish Kumar, Member of Legislative Assembly; Mr. Anjan Paul, Ward Councillor; Ms. Rupa Chakraborty, General Secretary of Tucc and others that emphasized Durbar's critical role in the community, the organization's future



endeavors, and the importance of collective efforts to ensure dignity and security for sex workers.



A key highlight was the honoring of elderly sex workers, where Durbar initiated financial support for 250 community members, starting with an initial group of 80. This tribute was not only a gesture of financial assistance but also a profound acknowledgment of their invaluable contributions. The celebration also included a heartfelt tribute to Dr. Smarajit Jana recognizing his instrumental role in shaping the organization's journey.

This event also featured a documentary presented by Komal Gandhar, Durbar's cultural wing, chronicling the organization's evolution and unwavering commitment to justice for sex workers. Children's performances added vibrancy to the celebration, making it a day of reflection, gratitude and renewed commitment to Durbar's mission of advocating for the dignity and rights of sex workers.

Durbar and Self Regulatory Board

DMSC is against any force exercised on sex workers, be it by clients, pimps, brothel owners, local goons, police or traffickers. Following the principal objective to dissociate sex work from all sorts of criminal association, by 2000, it formulated an anti-trafficking program through a platform called 'Self Regulatory Board' or SRB. SRBs were established in 33 sex work sites in West Bengal, in this year DMSC has established three more SRBs in Maldah, Alipurduar and Dinhata rigorously monitoring entry of young girls (below 18 years of age) and women into sex trade or are somehow forced or coerced into selling sex who are unwilling. SRBs comprise of five to six members of the sex worker community, a MP (Member of Parliament) or Councilor, a representative of the local police, local medical officer, a lawyer and a representative from a Civil Society Organization. In this financial year SRB has brought to the Board a total of 774 individuals of which only two underage girls were identified and the rest of them wanted to continue sex work willingly.

Durbar also organized quarterly SRB meetings with the presence of the executive board members and SRB team in all its fields to discuss the facts regarding the problems and possible solutions. On this year, Durbar also organized several SRB meetings in various red light areas.



Prophylactic Rights - A Book on Sex Work and Rights

The book *Prophylactic Rights*, which addresses issues related to sex work, HIV/AIDS and anti-trafficking in India, was launched at the central office of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee on 22nd July 2024. During the event, Simanti Dasgupta, the author, spoke about DMSC's efforts to combat trafficking in the sex industry through the Self Regulatory Board and their long journey advocating for workers' rights. She highlighted the struggle of sex workers with the tagline, "Gatar Khatiye Khai, Shramiker Adhikar Chai".



Sekhar Basu Mallick reflected on his experiences with DMSC and his collaboration with Dr. Jana during the early 1990s, remembering his friendship with Dr. Jana. At that launching event, the Secretary of DMSC also expressed gratitude to both the author and all attendees for their contributions to the success of the program.



South Asia Dance Equity's Workshop with Komal Gandhar to promote cultural equity

Komal Gandhar - a socio-cultural society, part of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, organized a focus group workshop on the 'South Asian Dance Equity' (SADE) on 30th July 2024, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council. Dr. Parthana Purkayastha, the SADE project lead, and prominent figures from the arts and social sectors. Komal Gandhar will collaborate with the Jaivant Patel Company in the UK to present the rich cultural heritage of India's red-light districts, including a performance inspired by the legendary gramophone artist Indubala Dashi.



Dr. Purkayastha presented the project's goals, emphasizing the importance of equity for marginalized communities. The collaboration aims to expand the narrative of South Asia's cultural heritage, moving beyond mainstream figures like Rabindranath Tagore. A significant discussion during the workshop focused on the preservation of Indubala Dashi's artifacts, with a suggestion to organize a heritage walk in Sonagachi.

The workshop concluded with expressions of support from various participants, including dance artist Sujoy Thakur; LGBTQ+ rights activist Ms. Ranjitha Sinha; Ms. Papiya Adhikari, Indian film actress; Dr. Sayan Bhattacharya, curator and education officer of Indian Museum; Ms. Anindita Banerjee Tamta, Managing trustee of Parivaar India. The event underscored the historical achievements of Komal Gandhar, particularly its victory at an international dance competition in 1998, which marked a milestone for the sex workers of DMSC. The upcoming UK performance by Komal



Gandhar is expected to enhance global awareness and appreciation of India's diverse and often overlooked cultural heritage.

Khuti Puja Marks the Beginning of Durbar's 12th Durga Puja Celebration, Along with Rakhi Bandhan

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee held Khuti Puja on 19th August 2024, marking the start of 12th Durga Puja celebrations, themed "One Era of Durbar's Durga Puja." The Khuti Puja symbolizes the foundation of the structure that will house the idol of Goddess Durga, transforming the space into a sacred site. The ritual holds deep cultural significance for us, as it represents their continuous journey to create a space of respect and dignity for sex workers in Sonagachi and beyond.

Mr. Madan Mitra, MLA of Kamarhati Municipality and Mr. Debasish Kumar, Member Mayor in Council of Kolkata Municipal Corporation and other dignitaries from various path of society emphasized the importance of inclusivity and critiquing the historical exclusion of sex workers from cultural and religious festivities and advocating for their rightful participation in Durga Puja. The ceremony was overseen by Durbar's Secretary, who emphasized that Khuti Puja not only marks the beginning of the festival but also reaffirms Durbar's commitment to maintaining Bengal's cultural traditions while creating an inclusive space for the sex worker community. Rakhi Bandhan event, which took place alongside Khuti Puja, was a poignant expression of unity and solidarity. Ms. Sunanada Sarkar, Ward 18 Councillor, explained the historical significance of Rakhi Bandhan, tracing its origins to Rabindranath Thakur's initiative to create unity in divided times. By tying Rakhis, sex workers symbolized their bond and collective strength against social stigma. Mr. Tarak Nath Chatterjee and Mr. Madan Mitra delivered speeches advocating for the inclusion of sex workers in religious and cultural festivities like Rakhi Bandhan, challenging societal exclusion. This event



also featured a powerful cultural performance by Durbar's cultural wing, Komal Gandhar, which invoked the spirit of resilience through the dance performance to the song "Jago Durga." The ceremony concluded with a sense of unity, as sweets were distributed to all participants.



Seva Kendra & HALO Heritage's Visit at Bowbazar Education Centre

On September 19, 2024, representatives from *Seva Kendra Calcutta* and *HALO Heritage* visited Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee's Bowbazar Education Centre to observe *students' progress* and promote *hygiene practices* among children. The visitors, including Mr. Sukhendu Bank, Mr. Ashish Henry, Mr. Rahul Das and Ms. Reshmi Chatterjee, were warmly welcomed and introduced to the center's holistic education program supporting children of sex workers. The guests engaged in interactive sessions focused on hand washing and tooth brushing, teaching children proper hygiene techniques while making learning fun. Enthusiastically participating, the children practiced each step and expressed joy in learning.

Following these activities, the visitors distributed sweet buns (prepared by SEVA Kendra) and other refreshments. They encouraged the children to continue their education and prioritize health, creating positive habits like saying "Thank You" to express gratitude.

In their feedback, the guests commended this center's impactful work, recognizing Durbar's role in shaping the future of these children through education and life skills to empowering the children and enhancing well-being. Durbar extended heartfelt thanks, inspired by the visitors' continued support.



Asurodalani - Celebrating Women's Empowerment and Triumph of Virtue over Oppression

On September 20th, a cultural program titled Asurodalani was held at Birendra Mancha in Shyambazar, organized by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee's cultural wing Komal Gandhar. This event highlighted the struggle against devaluation of women and celebrated the awakening of virtuous strength and resilience.

The evening was graced by Ms. Bishakha Laskar, Secretary of Durbar; Mr. Sujay Thakur, the esteemed dance guru of Komal Gandhar and Dr. A.K. Singh. Through powerful performances, the program beautifully illustrated the empowerment of women, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil and the unbreakable spirit of womanhood.

This event served as a testament to dignity and empowerment of women, with each performance radiating the grandeur of feminine strength and solidarity.



Bringing Festive Joy to Elderly Sex Workers by Distributing Sarees

In celebration of Durga Puja, Durbar took the initiative to distribute sarees to elderly and financially weak sex workers within the community. This thoughtful gesture was more than just a support; it was a heartfelt attempt to bring joy and a sense of belonging to those who have contributed immensely to Durbar's journey over the years. Often, these people, especially those facing financial hardships or social isolation, feel excluded from celebrations that others enjoy so freely. Recognizing this, Durbar stepped forward to bridge that gap, ensuring that they too can partake in the festive cheer.

We believe that festivals are meant to be shared and through this small effort, we aimed to uplift the spirits of community people, allowing them to experience the true essence of Durga Puja.



Durbar in Collaboration with Infosys Distributed New Clothes for Children in Titagarh and Seoraphuli Education Centers

Ahead of Durga Puja 2024, Dishari, an initiative by Infosys, extended its support to children of sex workers at the education centers run by Durbar in Titagarh and Seoraphuli on 5th October 2024. Durbar welcomed Dishari's thoughtful gesture of distributing new clothes to these young learners. This event brought joy and excitement to the children, offering them a chance to celebrate the festivities with added warmth and joy. Through this collaboration, Infosys and we highlighted our shared commitment to supporting the welfare and happiness of children from this community backgrounds, creating an environment of inclusivity and care within the community.





Durbar Celebrated One Era of Durbar Durgotsav

Durbar celebrated its 12th Durga Puja on 7th October 2024 in Sonagachi, titled “**দুর্বার দুর্গোৎসবের এক যুগ**” or “One Era of Durbar Durgotsav,” reflecting 12 years of unity in hosting West Bengal’s best event. This festival, which ran from Panchami through Dashami, was organized with support from the sex workers community and other allies, creating a unique and inclusive atmosphere in Sonagachi among community members.

The inauguration on Mahachaturthi was significant, with prominent dignitaries like Mr. Madan Mitra, Ms. Ellora Saha, Dr. Shanta Dutta and others participation. A notable moment was the unveiling of the Durga idol by one of the old aged sex worker Kamala Singh. Throughout the event, speeches by various dignitaries underscored the contributions of the sex worker community. For instance, Ward 24’s councillor Ellora Saha highlighted the irony of societal prejudices, questioning who truly defames marginalized neighborhoods. Other speakers praised the community’s unity, with Mr. Rajesh Sinha pledging support and Ms. Swapna Tripathi stressing unity for women’s rights.



The celebration featured cultural programs organized by Komal Gandhar, including evocative dance performances that resonated with the spirit of Durga. On Mahasaptami, Durbar also recognized the Ahiritola Yuvak Brinda Puja Committee, strengthening cultural ties within the local puja fraternity. Rituals continued through Mahashtami, with the community engaging in sacred offerings and the powerful Sandhipuja, marking the transition between Ashtami and Navami. On that day Khichuri-bhog was also distributed among Sonagachi.



Dashami marked the festival's emotional farewell, with the Devibaran and immersion rituals symbolizing gratitude as the community bid farewell to Maa Durga. The event ended with prayers and offerings, closing another meaningful chapter of Durbar's Durga Puja, which celebrates inclusivity and social justice. This year's celebration underscored Durbar's ongoing movement for the dignity and rights of sex workers community, through building unity among marginalized groups and leaving a lasting impression of strength and solidarity.



A Celebration of Solidarity and Inclusion: Bhaiphonta and Bonphonta Celebration

On November 3, 2024, Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee hosted a heartfelt Bhaiphonta and Bonphonta ceremony, celebrating solidarity and inclusivity. The event extended blessings to brothers, sisters, and women, transcending societal roles and boundaries, while emphasizing community empowerment and advocating for the rights and dignity of sex workers. Distinguished attendees included MLA Debasish Kumar, artist Parimal Pal, and Descendant of Sovabazar Rajbari Debraj Mitra, who received Bhaiphonta from sex workers, symbolizing respect and unity. Dr. Dipanwita Hazari, a renowned gynecologist and obstetrician, Dr. Agnimita Giri Sarkar, a distinguished consultant physician, and other esteemed dignitaries graciously received 'Bonphonta' from the sex workers, symbolizing solidarity, respect, and the spirit of inclusivity. Key highlights included saree distribution to community members, uplifting messages from DMSC leaders, and participation in the Chetla Agrani Club's Bhaiphonta with Kolkata's Mayor Firhad Hakim. The event underscored the significance of women's well-being, sparking conversations on neglected rights and dignity.



DMSC Celebrates Karthik Puja with Community Spirit

On November 16th and 17th, 2024, Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee organized vibrant Karthik Puja celebrations at Sonagachi Lane Field and Sethbagan Field in Kolkata. The event brought together sex workers, community members, and outsiders in a spirit of inclusivity and festivity. Participants engaged in traditional rituals, including the joyous 'Sindur Khela,'

symbolizing unity and celebration. This gathering highlighted the cultural significance of the festival while fostering solidarity and strengthening bonds within the community. The event was a beautiful reminder of DMSC's commitment to empowering and uplifting marginalized voices through shared traditions.



Spreading Warmth and Unity: Durbar's World AIDS Day Initiatives

To mark the World AIDS Day, On December 1, Durbar organized blanket distribution programs in Durgapur and Asansol. The Durgapur event was graced by social workers Tarun Roy, Lal Babu, and Mayor-in-Council Dharmendra Yadav, while the Asansol program saw the presence of Block President Kanchan Roy, Youth President Biman Dutta, Dr. Mahadev Majhi, Dr. Barun Khan, Secretary of Paschim Bardhaman DLSA, among others. DMSC's Secretary, Bishakha Laskar added inspiration and leadership to both events, whose unwavering dedication to the cause resonated with all present.



Durbar's Commitment to HIV/AIDS Eradication: A World AIDS Day Program at ICMR-NIRBI

On the occasion of World AIDS Day 2024, Bishakha Laskar, DMSC's Secretary, and Senior Research Executive Dr. Protim Ray attended a program at ICMR-NIRBI, where they highlighted Durbar's steadfast commitment to eradicating HIV/AIDS within the sex worker community, showcasing DMSC's success in reducing new infections to below 1%. Their words underscored the collective efforts and progress made towards a healthier, more inclusive future.



World Human Rights Day Celebration: Winter Relief and Community Support

On December 10, World Human Rights Day was celebrated at Asansol Durbar Samiti, organized by DMSC's Asansol branch. The event saw the distribution of winter shawls to 105 sex workers, with special guests including Asansol Municipal Corporation Mayor-in-Council Meer Hasim, Shiv Das Roy from Royal Steel, Dr. Rupam Mondal, Block Medical Officer, and Kanchan Roy, Inspector-in-Charge of Niamatpur. The program also provided lunch for 688 sex workers and 100 children of sex workers, highlighting DMSC's continued commitment to their well-being.



Chalo Paltai's Winter Relief Initiative: Supporting Senabona and Kotshila Villages

Under the supervision of DMSC, the organization 'Chalo Paltai' distributed winter clothes and essential daily materials to the villagers of Senabona and Kotshila in Purulia, supporting DMSC's ongoing efforts to enhance education and healthcare in these communities ahead of Christmas.



Celebrating Two Decades of Unity: The 20th Sabar Rights Day

The Amlasole Birsa Munda Gram Unnayan Committee, Amlasole Yuba Kalyan Samity and Lagadori Gram Unnayan Committee proudly organized the 20th annual Sabar Rights Day from December 28 to 30, in collaboration with the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee. This three-day celebration was a vibrant showcase of sports, culture, and unity, marking two decades of honoring the rights of the Sabar community. The highlight of the event was the Sabar Cup football tournament, featuring 16 teams from the Sabar, Lodha, and Munda communities. In addition to football, participants enjoyed various activities such as races, archery, musical chairs, and handi bhangha, building a spirit of camaraderie and celebration among attendees.





A Call for Dignity and Recognition: Collaborative Strategy Meeting on Labour Rights for Indian Sex

On January 12, 2025, the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee convened a groundbreaking strategy meeting to reimagine the future of sex work in India. Inspired by Belgium's progressive legislation recognizing sex work as legitimate labor, the gathering brought together sex workers, academics, legal experts, and human rights activists to advocate for dignity, justice, and equality.

Belgium's Model: Senior Advocate Anand Grover highlighted Belgium's landmark legislation, which grants sex workers employment contracts, health insurance, and safety measures. He stressed the need for similar regulatory frameworks in India to protect sex workers' labor rights.

Challenges in India: Professor Prabha Kotiswaran emphasized the complexities of adapting Belgium's model to India's vast sex worker population, noting the exploitation by intermediaries and the need for stringent accountability mechanisms. Advocate Tripti Tandon highlighted the lack of serious discourse on third-party accountability in India, while Dr. Rupa Khetrapal discussed the conflation of sex work and trafficking in the U.S., which hinders progress.

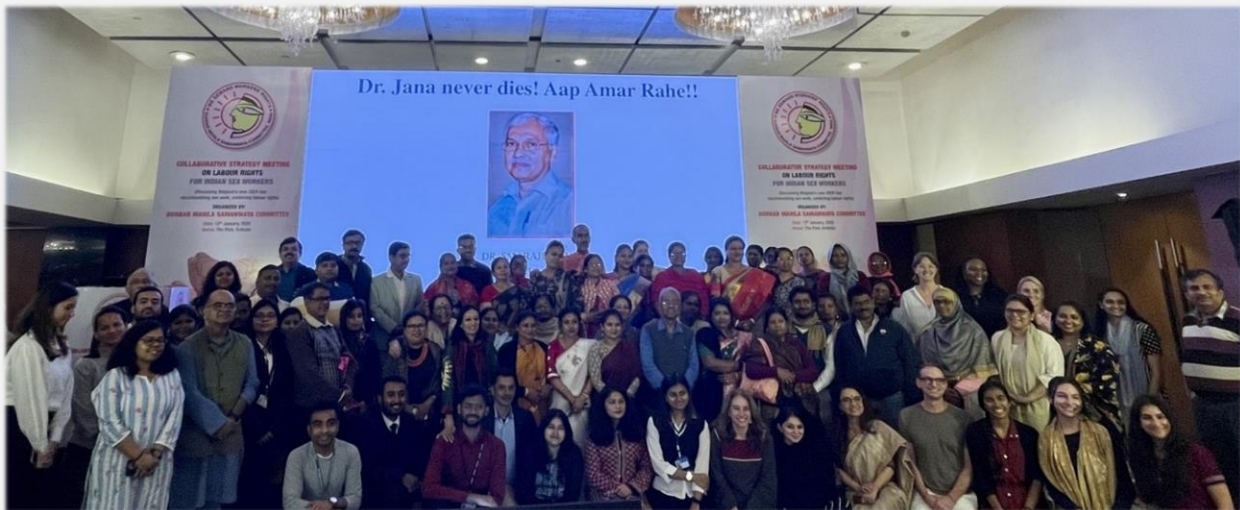


Community-Led Movements: Radhika Saxena of CREA underscored the importance of amplifying sex workers' voices, while Dr. Kingshuk Sarkar called for recognizing sex work as legitimate labor to ensure access to labor rights and social security.

Dignity and Empowerment: Speakers like Dr. Aparna De and Advocate Kallol Basu emphasized the constitutional right to dignity, urging society to respect all forms of work. Moumita Chakraborty and Fr. John Kerketta called for collective action and trade union recognition to empower sex workers.



The meeting was a powerful call to action, urging India to move beyond stigma and recognize sex work as work. By learning from global examples and fostering inclusive dialogue, the path toward dignity, rights, and equality for sex workers becomes clearer. DMSC announced the formation of a Strategic Committee dedicated to advancing the movement for the rights and dignity of sex workers in India. Let us build a society where every individual is respected and protected.



**DMSC's Felicitated at Acharya Satyendranath Basu
Smarak Bijnan O Prajukti Mela**

From January 22 to 26, 2025, *Acharya Satyendranath Basu Smarak Bijnan O Prajukti Mela* was organized by Paschim Banga Bijnan Mancha, supported by Uttar Kolkata Udayer Pathe. The event featured an inter-school scientific model presentation, promoting innovation and scientific curiosity. DMSC actively participated in this by setting up a stall showcasing Durbar Prakashani's books and its initiatives. In recognition of its involvement, DMSC was felicitated by the organizers. This participation reflects DMSC's commitment to broader community engagement beyond its core advocacy.



AGM 2025: Shaping the Future

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee successfully held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Digha, Purba Medinipur from January 28 to 30, 2025. The three-day gathering brought together DMSC members, staff and community representatives to review the past year's work, assess challenges and plan future strategies.

Day 1: Key Announcements & Organizational Challenges

The AGM commenced with the Secretary presenting an overview of DMSC's work over the past year, highlighting key achievements such as the organization of its first-ever Iftar party and the financial support of ₹2000 provided to older sex workers. However, challenges were acknowledged, particularly gaps in reaching sex workers for enrollment and communication barriers between community members and leadership. To address these, increased field visits, public relation efforts, and active engagement of branch committees were proposed.

Day 2: Departmental Presentations & International Insights

On the second day, various departments of DMSC - Administration, Education, Anti-Trafficking, Public Relations, Networking, Research, Documentation, and Sports - shared their achievements and challenges. Komal Gandhar, DMSC's cultural wing, also reflected on its progress. Notably, DMSC currently runs 10 education centers across red-light districts, catering to children of sex workers and marginalized communities.

A significant highlight was a virtual session with UTSOPI, a Belgium-based sex worker-led organization, where the project facilitator shared insights on labor rights advocacy. Translated by activist Mona Mishra, the discussion emphasized the need for strong political engagement and strategic policymaking to advance sex workers' rights. The session was followed by group discussions, where participants brainstormed ways to strengthen DMSC's work.



Day 3: Future Planning & Community Engagement

On the final day, staff from the Targeted Intervention Project shared their field experiences and challenges. A key session focused on the 2022 Supreme Court directives on sex workers' rights. Representatives from Purulia's Nachni community and Amlasole's Sabar community also shared their experiences of empowerment through DMSC's interventions. A concluding group discussion charted the path for the next year's initiatives and the grand celebration of DMSC's 30th anniversary in July 2025.

The Annual General Meeting concluded with an experience-sharing session, reinforcing the spirit of collective action and commitment to strengthening the movement for rights and dignity.



Saraswati Puja Celebration at Rahul Vidya Niketan & Education Centers

On February 3, 2025, Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee celebrated Saraswati Puja with great enthusiasm at its children's home in Baruiপুর and across 11 education centers in Titagarh, Seoraphuli, Asansol, Kalinagar (Basirhat), Matia (Basirhat), Ghatal, Kalna, Siuri, Purulia, Chetla, and Bowbazar.

Around 300 children from sex workers' families and other marginalized communities came together to worship Goddess Saraswati, seeking blessings for knowledge and wisdom. The event fostered a sense of joy, togetherness, and cultural connection. After the puja, all the children were served *Khichuri Bhog* as prasad, marking the occasion with warmth and festivity.



DMSC remains committed to nurturing the education and well-being of children in marginalized communities, ensuring that cultural and spiritual celebrations continue to be an integral part of their lives.



Joyful Picnic for Education Center Children at Seoraphuli

On February 8, 2025, DMSC organized a fun-filled picnic in Seoraphuli Durbar Samity for the children from the Education Center. The day was filled with laughter, games, and delicious food, creating a joyful atmosphere for all. The children enthusiastically participated in various activities, while the staff also joined in, making the event even more memorable. The event was made possible with the generous contribution of social activist Shri Pranab Ganguly. This picnic served as a refreshing break, strengthening bonds and bringing happiness to the children and caregivers alike.



Children's Drawing Competition at Kalinagar Durbar Samity

On February 11, DMSC organized a drawing competition for the children of Kalinagar Durbar Samity. The event encouraged creativity and self-expression, as children enthusiastically showcased their artistic talents. Their colorful and imaginative artworks reflected their dreams and emotions. The competition fostered joy and confidence among the participants, making it a memorable experience.



DMSC remains dedicated to nurturing the creative potential of children from marginalized communities through such engaging activities.

A Day of Joy and Refreshment: Picnic at Rahul Vidya Niketan

On February 19, 2025, a joyful picnic was organized at Rahul Vidya Niketan, Baruipur, for the children's refreshment. The day was filled with fun activities, laughter, and delicious food, providing a much-needed break from their daily routine. The children enjoyed games and spent quality time together, making beautiful memories. This special event was supported by social activist and writer Mr. Prasanta Kumar Ghosh, whose contribution made the gathering possible. The event aimed to bring joy and relaxation, ensuring their overall well-being and happiness.



Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee successfully held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Digha, Purba Medinipur from January 28 to 30, 2025. The three-day gathering brought together DMSC members, staff and community representatives to review the past year's work, assess challenges and plan future strategies.

Soaring for Dignity: DMSC's Powerful Ode to International Sex Workers' Rights Day

On March 3, 2025, Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee celebrated International Sex Workers' Rights Day in Sonagachi, Kolkata, with a vibrant event uniting sex workers, activists, and supporters. The day began with the secretary recalling the 2001 Millennium Milan Mela, a landmark event that birthed this global observance despite initial opposition. Speakers like RTI activist Amitava Choudhury and advocate Paromita Dey praised DMSC's pioneering efforts in advocating for labor rights and dignity. A symbolic pigeon release preceded a rally of 500 participants marching from Sonagachi to Hedua, chanting slogans like "We earn through our labor, we demand workers' rights!" Red and white banners fluttered as the procession echoed resilience and hope. Closing remarks by DMSC leaders emphasized self-respect as key to recognition. District units across West Bengal also joined, amplifying the movement's call for equality and dignity.



Blossoms of Unity: Basanta Utsav 2025 Celebration

On March 11, 2025, DMSC hosted Basanta Utsav at Sonagachi, Kolkata, celebrating spring with vibrant colors and unity. Secretary Bishakha Laskar opened the event, highlighting its four-year legacy. Guests like Councillor Rajesh Sinha praised DMSC's inclusive efforts. Children from Bowbazar, Sethbagan, and Titagarh Education Centres performed lively dances, while Komal Gandhar's traditional Bengali Holi songs added cultural richness. The festivities peaked with attendees playing Holi, sharing sweets, and breaking societal barriers, symbolizing equality and harmony. This joyous event underscored DMSC's commitment to community, education, and social justice. Meanwhile, children of Asansol Durbar Samity joyfully celebrated Basanta Utsav on March 11, 2025, embracing Holi with vibrant colors and cheer. Their spirited participation echoed DMSC's mission of fostering community and hope across region.



Spring of Solidarity: Celebrating Women and Workers' Rights

In celebration of International Sex Workers' Rights Day and International Women's Day, nearly 500 sex worker didis and their children gathered for a vibrant Basanta Utsav on March 12. The event, organized by Durgapur Durbar Samiti with full support from Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, was a colorful and joyful expression of unity, strength, and cultural pride. The celebration was also held at DMSC's district fields in Titagarh and Seoraphuli on March 18, where the spirit of togetherness echoed through the festivities.

Attendees celebrated their collective identity, fought for their rights, and reinforced the importance of solidarity among marginalized communities. The evening concluded with a community dinner, bringing everyone together to share in the joy and warmth of the occasion.



DMSC's Iftar Celebration 2025

On March 24, DMSC hosted a heartfelt Iftar gathering, uniting staff and community members across faiths. Attendees broke their fast with prayers and traditional delicacies, embodying harmony. DMSC's Secretary highlighted their commitment to inclusivity, celebrating Hindu and Muslim festivals alike. The evening resonated with joy, laughter, and a profound sense of togetherness, reinforcing DMSC's role as a beacon of unity in diverse times. A truly memorable celebration of shared values!



Nurturing with Care: Special Lunch at Kotshila Education Centre

On March 29, 2025 DMSC organized a special lunch for the children at the Kotshila Education Centre of Purulia District. The initiative aimed to promote care, nourishment, and well-being among the young learners. The children enjoyed a wholesome meal in a joyful and friendly environment. Such efforts reflect DMSC’s continued commitment to supporting education and child welfare in the community.