

In Odisha, Dharmendra Pradhan launches Ujjwala sanitary napkin initiative

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UNION PETROLEUM Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Sunday launched the Ujjwala Sanitary Napkin initiative in Bhubaneswar, which will expand women's access to hygiene products and provide them with employment opportunities in every district of the state.

The Central scheme will be a counter to the Odisha government's Khushi scheme, in which sanitary napkins are provided free of cost to female students of government and government-aided schools in the state.

In the first phase of the Ujjwala Sanitary Napkin initiative, around 100 local manufacturing units will be set up by oil marketing companies at Common Service Centres (CSCs) across 93 blocks in all 30 districts of Odisha. CSCs are facilities set up to deliver the Central government's e-services in rural and remote locations.

The cost of setting up each manufacturing unit is expected to be Rs 2.94 crores, and the sanitary napkins will be priced at Rs 42 per pack of eight pads. Each manufacturing unit will employ five or six Ujjwala beneficiaries with an aim to provide employment to nearly 600 women across all districts. The women will first receive training in manufacturing and sale of sanitary napkins.

"This initiative will provide

women with an opportunity to earn between Rs 5,000 and Rs 15,000 per month," Pradhan said at the event. "Only distributing money to women through revolving funds is not enough. Do the women of Odisha want charity from the (state) government or open a bank account on their own effort? The Central government will help you do so."

The Union minister also emphasized on the need to make the use of sanitary napkins a mass movement, noting that as per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) report, the overall use of sanitary napkins in Odisha is 33.5 per cent.

Pradhan said the new initiative will be one way for Ujjwala beneficiaries in poor and rural areas to earn during the hours saved from no longer having to cook on firewood. "In every centre, around five women will be involved in the production, another five in marketing," he said, adding that Ujjwala, which has benefited 35 lakh women in the state, will reach 45 lakh women.

Each facility will have the capacity to produce between 1200 to 2000 pads each day. The sanitary pads will be made of biodegradable substances such as virgin wood pulp sheet, non-woven white sheet and a gel sheet.

Sterilisation rooms will be set up at the units to ensure the products are packed in a hygienic manner.

— WITH PTI INPUTS