

DNA, Mumbai, 14 Dec 2007

## 'Convert PIL into a criminal writ'

**Mayura Janwalkar**

Social activist Kewal Semlani, who sought information from the solid waste management department of the corporation on Thursday, asked permission of the bench presided by Chief Justice Swatanter Kumar and Justice JP Devadhar to convert his existing PIL against the pathetic work conditions of conservancy workers into a criminal writ petition. Statistics, collated through an RTI application, revealed that 122 conservancy workers of the BMC died between April and September 2007.

Seamlani was, however, directed to apply to the court registry and follow the official process of converting it to a criminal writ petition. "If the PIL is converted into a criminal writ petition, we will accuse BMC officers of offence under section 304-A of the IPC that pertains to causing death due to negligence," Semlani said.

As per the statistics, 288 of Mumbai's *safai karmacharis* died in 2004-05, 246 in 2005-06, and 247 in 2006-2007 till April.

The 122 deaths in the last six months are only of conservancy workers who sweep the streets. They form a small fragment of the 22,000 workers deployed by the BMC for the cleaning of Mumbai. Others include sewerage workers who clean manholes, storm water drain workers, bio-medical waste workers and morgue staff.

Seamlani had written a letter to the Chief Justice last year pointing out the deplorable work conditions of the conservancy workers and inadequate safety measures taken by the BMC. The letter was then converted to a suo motu writ petition.

Seamlani had brought before the court the 'sub-standard' safety equipment like hand gloves and masks provided to the workers. He had contended that as a result of this a number of workers had contracted infectious diseases and skin ailments. The court had appointed a three-member committee that included Semlani to look into the work conditions of these workers.

*j\_mayura@dnaindia.net*

**conservancy  
workers**