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A Rulebook Alone Cannot Guarantee Dignity; Every Hand in Aviation Must Ensure It



CHENNAI – 5 Nov, 2026 A Rulebook Alone Cannot Guarantee Dignity; Every Hand in Aviation Must Ensure It: Manmeet Kaur Nanda.

“Merely framing rules, enforcing them or having a handbook will make no difference unless the last person dealing with a passenger with a disability understands and implements what is written in it.” Emphasizing the need to translate accessibility commitments into ground-level action, Manmeet Kaur Nanda, Additional Secretary, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), called for making continuous sensitization and training an integral part of India's aviation ecosystem to ensure safe, dignified and independent air travel for persons with disabilities.

Highlighting the human cost of inaccessible air travel, Nanda recounted the experience of a para-athlete who had to travel to Egypt and compete in an international sporting event using a broken wheelchair after her original wheelchair was damaged by an airline. Despite this ordeal, the athlete went on to win a medal. Describing such experiences as barriers that the entire aviation ecosystem must collectively eliminate, she stressed that airlines, airport operators, ground-handling personnel, security agencies, customs and immigration officials must undergo regular induction and refresher training. She underlined that the Handbook's coverage of all 21 specified disabilities, including invisible disabilities, would help build greater sensitivity and preparedness among frontline personnel. Calling for measurable accountability, she advocated accessibility performance indicators, time-bound grievance redressal mechanisms and dedicated dashboards to monitor the performance of airlines and airports. Reiterating the principle of “Nothing About Us Without Us”, she emphasized the active involvement of persons with disabilities as trainers and partners in shaping and evaluating aviation services.

Stuti Kacker, Former Secretary, DEPwD and Advisor, Asia-Pacific Network for Accessibility (APNA), highlighted the significant contribution of civil society organizations, disability rights activists, the media and the judiciary in advancing India's accessibility movement. Acknowledging the pioneering efforts of disability rights advocates, she observed that accessibility is a fundamental right, not an act of charity. She emphasized that Universal Design, inclusive mobility and sustained collaboration are essential to ensuring dignity, independence and equal opportunities.