

INSIDE DELHI

Unwritten rule

They call themselves the "invisible minority" — the physically and visually handicapped people, even though they constitute two to three per cent of the total population. Why? Because despite a fight for their rights, they have remained neglected.

For quite some time now, the disabled group activists have been demanding a Disabled Rights Act because they genuinely feel they should get what is due to them as a right and not in charity. Voices have been raised and with equal intensity, assurances too have been given by the people who matter.

But the delayed introduction of the Disabled Rights Bill in Parliament is only demoralising the activists. However, even that little bit of effort made in integrating them in different spheres of work, receive further setbacks by unsavoury incidents.

Take the case of Preeti Singh, whose sight was impaired during childhood. Refusing to be bogged down by life's twists and turns, she has fought her way up and today is a successful marketing manager for a private company, besides being an aerobics instructor and an active worker for various disabled groups in the city.

Preeti recently decided to start her own marketing consultancy and, after the necessary running around, did manage a loan from Delhi Financial Corporation. However, under DFC requirements, it was essential for her to open a current account in a bank. Last week, Preeti reached the Zakir Nagar Branch of State Bank of India — the country's premier banking institution. She was refused permission to open a current account.

Though no reason was cited, Preeti says, she failed to convince the bank manager that it was a requisite for her to start her own company. "I asked them for the rules book and it nowhere mentioned that handicapped people cannot open current accounts. When I pointed it out to the officer, he said that it neither mentioned that they can," says a bitter Preeti.

The manager, however, told her that she could open a savings account. But shocked by the attitude, Preeti has now decided to explore the possibilities in other nationalised banks, besides submitting a complaint to the Grievance Cell of SBI and the Human Rights Commission. "Let us see, how far this goes on," says the determined fighter.

