

To

The Chief Secretary,
Government of West Bengal,
Kolkata -700001

Date:- 12 August 2009

Dear Sir,

This is with reference to the conditions of the people in cyclone affected areas of South 24 Parganas. As you know, the Supreme Court orders make prevention of hunger and starvation “one of the prime responsibilities of the Government - whether Central or State”. According to the 8th May 2002 order of the Supreme Court “the responsibility for implementation of the order of this Court shall be that of the CEO/Collector. The Chief Secretary will ensure compliance with the order of this Court.”

In order to ensure the implementation of the court orders , on 8 July 2009, a report of a study done by Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity (PBKMS) (Dukher Shesh Nei: One Month After Aila) was submitted by me to your office as well as to the concerned District Magistrates and the Principal Secretary , Department of Disaster Management, Government of West Bengal. One of the main issues highlighted in the report was the total inadequacy of food relief provided to the cyclone affected people, which was much below the West Bengal Relief Manual norm of 12 kgs per head for adults and 6 kgs for children.

While another one and half months have passed since the submission of this report, there has been only further deterioration in the food situation of the disaster struck people in South 24 Parganas. Some of the more distressing features of the situation and the inadequacy in the response of the district administration are given below:-

1. As the GR received by people in the district was inadequate (this amounted to a maximum of 4.4 kgs per head in the first month, according to the PBKMS study referred to above), people were highly dependent on relief provided by NGOs. However from July onwards, this help became negligible. People have therefore been forced to migrate or live in semi starvation.

2. A number of people began to apply to the Panchayats and blocks for GR. According to reports that I have received, till date about 4505 such applications have been received by the administration in 20 GPs of 4 blocks in the district. In addition, about 3000- 4000 people gave deputations in 8 blocks of the district from 20th July to 27th July 2009. One of their first demands was for free food grains or GR. Similarly, on 31st July 2009, the District Magistrate was also informed about the people's problem by PBKMS district committee members.

3. As none of this led to any change in the food situation, I continued to get complaints about hunger and semi starvation. I therefore made enquiries from the Relief Secretary, the District Magistrate, various BDOs and BROs. These enquiries revealed that the problem was not one of inadequate supplies but of mismanagement. Both the relief Secretary and District Magistrate claim that sufficient food stocks are available. However, many blocks claim that they do not have adequate supplies of food grains and have sent requisitions for the same to the district, but have received no response. Some blocks claim that Panchayats have not informed them about people's hunger and the need for food grains. They also claim that they have received no directions from the district administration directing them to provide GR to those in need. The District Magistrate on the other hand claims to have sent a letter asking all BDOs to provide GR.

In the midst of all this confusion, the problem of hunger persists, inspite of sufficient stocks being available.

4. To make matters worse, some people in Kakdwip block are alleging that Panchayats have been selling rice at Rs.9 a kg without providing people with receipts. As no such scheme for sale of food grains by Panchayats exist, there are allegations that Panchayats have been selling food grains meant for free distribution as relief.

I request your intervention in this matter to ensure that the people in South 24 Parganas district do not suffer unnecessarily.

Looking forward to your response ,

Yours sincerely

(Anuradha Talwar)

For your kind information and action:-

1. Shri ML Meena, Principal Secretary, Department of Disaster Management, Government of West Bengal
2. Dr.NC Saxena, Commissioner of the Supreme Court
3. Shri Harsh Mander, Commissioner of the Supreme Court
4. Shri Biraj Patnaik, Special Advisor to the Commissioners.