

Life miserable in Gujarat relief colonies: court panel

Legal Correspondent

30,000 persons are facing acute food and livelihood distress; government "apathetic"

- *None of 81 colonies was set up or assisted by State government*
- *It misrepresented facts, denying existence of colonies*

New Delhi: A Supreme Court-appointed committee has found that 4,545 families comprising around 30,000 persons affected by the post-Godhra riots are still living in difficult and pathetic conditions in 81 relief colonies across Gujarat with acute problems in getting food and livelihood security.

In its report, N.C. Saxena, heading the committee of court commissioners, said: "None of the colonies was set up or assisted by the State government. Only five of the 81 colonies had government or government recognised schools, and only four served mid-day meals to children." Of the five schools, which had centres under the Integrated Child Development Scheme, four served supplementary nutrition to children and the other, to nursing and expectant mothers. After scrutinising the report, a vacation Bench consisting of Justices Arijit Pasayat and D.K. Jain on Monday posted the case for further hearing after the summer vacation. The court is monitoring the ICDS and other Centrally- sponsored schemes in various States. The report said the commissioners received disturbing information on acute food and livelihood distress of the internally displaced people in Gujarat. It was brought to their notice that the government was not carrying out the court directions.

In response to the committee's letter seeking details, the government said there were no relief colonies of the people displaced by the 2002 violence. Three members deputed by the National Commission for Minorities in October 2006 visited 17 relief colonies and observed the difficulties faced by the residents, Dr. Saxena said.

The commission, in its report, said, "The violence put an end to the means of livelihood [of the residents in the relief colonies] since their old clients were unwilling to use their services. The impression the team received is that very few of them were employed in service."

Directions violated

Dr. Saxena said the commission report clearly established that the government had misrepresented the situation to the court-appointed commissioners by denying the existence of these colonies. "It also established prima facie evidence of the fact that the directions of the court with regard to food and employment schemes were being violated."

Dr. Saxena said, "My colleagues completed a full survey" and found "only three colonies had PDS shops, and only 725 out of the 4,545 families were recognised as below poverty line, although their poverty as internally displaced persons facing an economic boycott was acute."

Shocked at the condition of the people in these colonies, the report suggested that a contempt notice be issued to the Chief Secretary and other officials for misrepresenting facts and furnishing incomplete and inaccurate information to the commissioners.

"All families who continue to live in relief colonies must be given Antyodaya cards, as internally displaced persons who lost all their belongings, face fear and economic boycott and are too afraid to return to their original homes; primary schools with mid-day meals should be opened in all 81 relief colonies immediately and they should have fully functioning ICDS centres and PDS shops should be opened in all colonies where these are not available within a distance of three km," says the report.