

To Sri Khalil Ahmed,
District Magistrate ,
South 24 Parganas District,
Alipore,
Kolkata.

Date:-11 August 2009

Dear Shri Ahmed,

This is with reference to the condition of people in Aila affected areas of your district. As you are aware from the PBKMS survey report which I handed over to you last month (“Dukher Sesh Nei: One Month After Aila”), the provisions of food grains for the population affected by Cyclone Aila in your district has been far from adequate. The average food grains distributed in South and North 24 Parganas was 1.38 kgs only, according to figures given by the Department of Disaster Management and the figures that were collected from the PBKMS field survey showed that the maximum amount distributed was 4.4 kgs per head. This shows a very poor implementation of the West Bengal Relief Manual norms, which clearly states that 12 kgs per adult and 6 kgs per child of Gratuitous Relief (GR) are to be distributed within one month of any disaster.

While this was the situation one month after Cyclone Aila, subsequent reports in the past one and a half months from various NGOs and trade unions in the area point towards a worsening situation. In spite of this, no concrete steps are visible on the ground to ameliorate people’s hunger.

On the other hand , in clear violation of the law and of all norms of humanitarian functioning, I have received reports that Gram Panchayats in Kakdwip block have sold rice that they had received as post- cyclone relief for free distribution at Rs.9 per kg to local villagers. Contrary to all legal norms, no receipts of any kind have been given by the Panchayats to the people who bought this rice.

In my discussion with you over the phone last evening, you had asked for specific areas from which reports of hunger were being received. I am attaching for your information and action a list of blocks and Panchayats in Annexure 1 where applications for relief have been given by villagers who are facing hunger. The number of applications are 4505 from 4 Blocks and 20 Panchayats, showing the wide spread nature of the problem.

The administration and officials at the Blocks and Panchayats have repeatedly informed the applicants that they are unable to give people food grains as GR, as there are inadequate supplies with them. Nor have they received any direction that allows them to distribute the food grains available with them as GR. In addition, I have received reports that in Namkhana, Kultali and Pathar Pratima blocks, requisitions for food grains for distribution as GR have been made to the District administration, but have met with no response. Also, the State Government has said that it is not aware of any such problem in your district as they have received no such reports or requisitions for food grains from you. You yourself had informed me yesterday that the problem was not one of supply of food grains of which there is an adequate stock in the district but one of not knowing where the need was there for food.

After talking to people at various levels in the district and in State Government, it seems to me that the problem in South 24 Parganas is therefore not one of paucity of food grains but of sheer apathy to the plight of the people.

In the circumstances I would request you to take the following steps:-

- order an enquiry into the sale of relief food grains in Kakdwip block , with exemplary punishment for those found guilty.
- make arrangements for immediate distribution of GR to the 4505 applicants listed in Annexure 1 and to any others who may request food grains;
- make arrangements to ensure that people receive adequate GR in the form of food grains till their own livelihood sources are restored, till the harvest in 2010;
- recommend that all Aila affected people are declared BPL for the next two years so that they can get the facility of State Government subsidised rice (at Rs.2 per kg);

I look forward to your response.

Thanking you,

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.

Annexure 1: No of Families Applying for Food

Block	Gram Panchayat	No of Families Applying for Food	Total Families
Pathar Pratima	Brajaballavpur	572	
	Durbachati	193	
	Banashyamnagar	305	
	Heramba Gopalpur	167	
	Achintanagar	1198	
	Ramganga	69	
	Shrinarayanpur	13	
	G Plot	794	3311
Namkhana	Haripur	40	
	Frejarjung	45	
	Shibrampur	65	
	Budhakhali	101	
	Narayanpur	311	
	Mousuni	50	612
Kultali	Gurguria	117	117
	Bhubaneswari		

Mathurapur 2 No	Kumrapara Nagendrapur Kankandighi Dighirparh Khari	465 (total for all GPs)	465
Total			4505