

Mizoram told to act on starvation of Chakma tribals

On January 5, 2011, Supreme Court Commissioners in the right to food case directed the Mizoram government to immediately provide food and nutrition to over 4,000 Chakma tribal villagers who have been starving for weeks in Lawngtlai district.

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OVER 4,000 Chakmas including men, women and children have reportedly been starving for several weeks in four villages – Parva I, Parva II, Parva III and Kamtuli under Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in Lawngtlai district of Mizoram. Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF), an NGO, which moved to the Commissioners of the Supreme Court (in the case: CWP 196/2001, PUCL v. UOI and others) after inaction by the state government of Mizoram, stated that no food grain under the Public Distribution System has been distributed to the poorest of the poor families since October last year. The authorities of CADC and the state government of Mizoram failed to take cognizance of the severe starvation although the matter was brought to their attention, MCDF stated.

Acting on the MCDF's complaint the Commissioners of the Supreme Court in the right to food case on 5 January 2011 issued direction to Mizoram Chief Secretary, Vanhela Pachuau to urgently supply food grain to the poor families from backlog of October 2010 and issue ration cards to all who don't have ration cards.

Further, in their order of January 5, 2011, Commissioner of the Supreme Court Dr N. C. Saxena and Special Commissioner Harsh Mander directed the Chief Secretary of Mizoram to "undertake a survey in all these villages and identify the families, who suffer from acute malnutrition, identify starvation & hunger related deaths (if any) and share information on the full coverage of all these residents of all food and livelihood schemes such as ICDS [Integrated Child Development Scheme], MDM [Mid Day Meal scheme], NREGA [National Rural Employment Act] and pensions in the district Lawngtlai. Please also send us a copy of instructions that would be issued in this direction and an action taken report within one month."

MCDF has hailed this order as historic. "This is a historic order from the Supreme Court Food Commissioners as this goes beyond food security. MCDF is well aware that many Chakma families in Mizoram have been denied welfare schemes including PDS food grain, old age pension, maternity benefit scheme, nutrition etc. MCDF will monitor the implementation of the Supreme Court Commissioners' order by the Mizoram government very closely." – stated Mr Hemanta Larma, President of MCDF in a statement released to the media yesterday.

Larma further stated that his organization complained to the Supreme Court Commissioners on 28 December 2010 after no action was taken by the Mizoram authorities to prevent possible starvation deaths in the affected villages if the situation deteriorated further.

These affected villages are located in far flung areas near to the Indo-Myanmar border and they do not have access to food grain even in the open market. On December, 23, 2010 MCDF had submitted petitions to the Deputy Commissioner, Lawngtlai district and the Chief Secretary,

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Mizoram government but the plea fell on deaf hear, the statement added.