

LETTERS

AILA

Aila's ravages in 54 islands in the Sunderbans, inhabited by over 40 lakh people are unprecedented. According to unofficial sources Aila has claimed more than 300 human lives and there is huge loss of cattle and other domestic animals of Sunder-bans. West Bengal's two 24 parganas apart, parts of coastal Bangladesh too are worst affected. Influx of population from Sunderbans to the adjoining semi-towns of these districts has already reached its zenith. The outbreak of enteric diseases due to lack of pure drinking water, easily available medicines and food has pushed the people in a helpless situation. The LF government's callous and partisan attitude in relief distribution coupled with poor supervision beggars description. Angry over the government's lackadaisical efforts in delivery of relief assistance, people of cyclone Aila-affected areas of Gosaba vented their anger when the Chief Minister visited the block to take stock of relief operations just a few days after the devastation. Mr Bhattacharya had to face widespread resentment and flak during his visit. Even the block development officer of Gosaba, Mr Amiyo Bhushan Chakraborty, was manhandled by the affected villagers as soon as the CM left the place. The CM faced further humiliation when he visited Hingalgunge on 1st June 2009. The local CPI(M) MLA Mr Gopal Gayen was roughed up in a camp where Mr Bhattacharya was latter faced with uncomfortable questions one after another. In the first case the affected people were confined in school building who had assembled to vent their agonies before the CM.

CPI(M-L), AICCTU, People's Health, Revolutionary Youth Association (RYA) and other Democratic Organisations and clubs of North & South 24 Parganas, Kolkata, Howrah & Hooghly organised relief camps in the worst affected areas of both North & South 24 Parganas. CPI(M-L)'s Jadavpur–Dhakuria Area Committee first launched their ventures on 3rd & 4th June 2009 in distributing relief in the Sunderbans adjacent to Gosaba and Basanti of South 24 Parganas. On 10th June RYA and AICCTU alongwith the members of People's Health visited Sahebkhali of Sunderbans near Hasnabad, North 24 Parganas and distributed truckloads of dry food, water, clothes and medicines. A 25-member team with the help of motor boat halted at several points and distributed reliefs and the doctors opened camp to treat the affected villagers. East Kolkata medical camp in collaboration with People's Health jointly organised medical camps at Hingalgunge.

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"EQUAL OPPORTUNITY"

The issues raised by Sachar Committee report need to be addressed on urgent basis. Already over three years have passed since the report was made public, but still nothing concrete has been done in the direction. As the Muslim community is on the bottom of the rung of economic indices, it is imperative that reservations are brought in to lift the economic levels of the community. As most of the policy makers are scared that reservations for Muslims will bring in a backlash, there is a fear to take steps in that direction. The next best thing to alleviate their lot is to put in place the Equal Opportunity Commission, which can monitor the various schemes, recruitments and see as to how affirmative action can be implemented.

To supplement the Equal Opportunity Commission, lot of efforts—to start scholarships for Muslim students, reform in Madrassas, encouragement of Self employment schemes will have to be brought in at a rapid pace. One hopes the UPA government will do this with utmost sincerity and the social organizations will put their attention in this dition in a concerted fashion. Along with this an effort has also to be made io spread awareness amongst broader layers of society and quell the stereotypes and biases against Minorities prevalent amongst people, these stereotypes are a big obstacle in the free development of the community.

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