

No relief for Bengal flood victims in remote areas

Scores of villagers are stranded on roof-tops

Ananya Dutta

PURSHURA (HOOGHLY): "It took the authorities three days to drop mere bags of puffed rice for us, and I had to watch even that being swept away in the waters," said Sapan Kumar, a resident of Jungalpara, a remote village rendered inaccessible by the floods.

Mr. Kumar had to wade through knee-deep water along an eight kilometre stretch to reach the distribution centre set up by the local panchayat samiti for victims like him to collect relief material being supplied by the West Bengal government.

His wife and children have not eaten in three days, he said, but he can't even carry back some of the dry rations and pouches of drinking water to them as the distributing authorities will hand over relief only to the panchayat representatives, who often cannot be traced.

"Representatives from only three of the eight gram panchayats that constitute the Purshura Panchayat Samiti have come to collect the relief so far," said Snehashish Bhat-tacharya, an employee of the local block divisional officer.

Living on the banks of the Damodar river, the inhabitants of these parts are habituated to seasonal surges in water levels, but the floods this year — with the waters rising as high as 14 feet — caught them unawares.

"Six families had to take refuge on the terrace of my house as all the mud huts were washed away. There were heavy showers for two days, ruining whatever provisions we had hauled up there, but we had no shelter from the rain," said Sushanta Adhikari.

Scores of villagers are stranded on the roofs of houses waiting for relief, which on Thursday had taken three days to reach Purshura, one of the areas worst affected by floods after the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) released water in large quantities from its reservoirs on September 7, inundating several villages and causing devastation in five districts of southern West Bengal.

District authorities denied that there were problems of



AT LAST: Long-awaited relief finally being rushed to stranded villagers at Purshura in Hooghly district on Thursday, three days after the region was flooded. — PHOTO: SUSHANTA PATRONOBISH

"Country boats have been put into operation in those places where the speedboats cannot go, and airdropping of relief was also carried out today [Thursday]," said Neelam Meena, the district magistrate.

The villagers, however, claim that most of the bags dropped from the helicopter fall into the waters instead of reaching them.

Situation grim

Meanwhile, the flood situation continues to be serious with the death toll rising to six, even as discharge of wa-

ter was reduced, authorities of the State government said in Kolkata on Thursday.

Nearly 37,500 people have been rendered homeless and about 17 lakh affected, said State Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta. District authorities are running 236 relief camps for flood victims.

Mr. Dasgupta said relief material worth Rs. 15 crore had been dispatched to the affected areas including 18,000 tonnes of dry rations, 1.3 lakh tarpaulin sheets and 1.5 lakh pouches of drinking water.

On Thursday, Ministers of the State government who

rescue operations in the affected areas were heckled by victims who complained of inadequate action.

Helicopters deployed

Meanwhile, to aid the distribution of relief in certain inaccessible parts of Hooghly, one of the worst-affected districts, the Indian Air Force deployed two MI-17 helicopters during the day, according to a Defence Ministry press release.

One person was injured when he was hit by an airdropped bag, Mr. Dasgupta