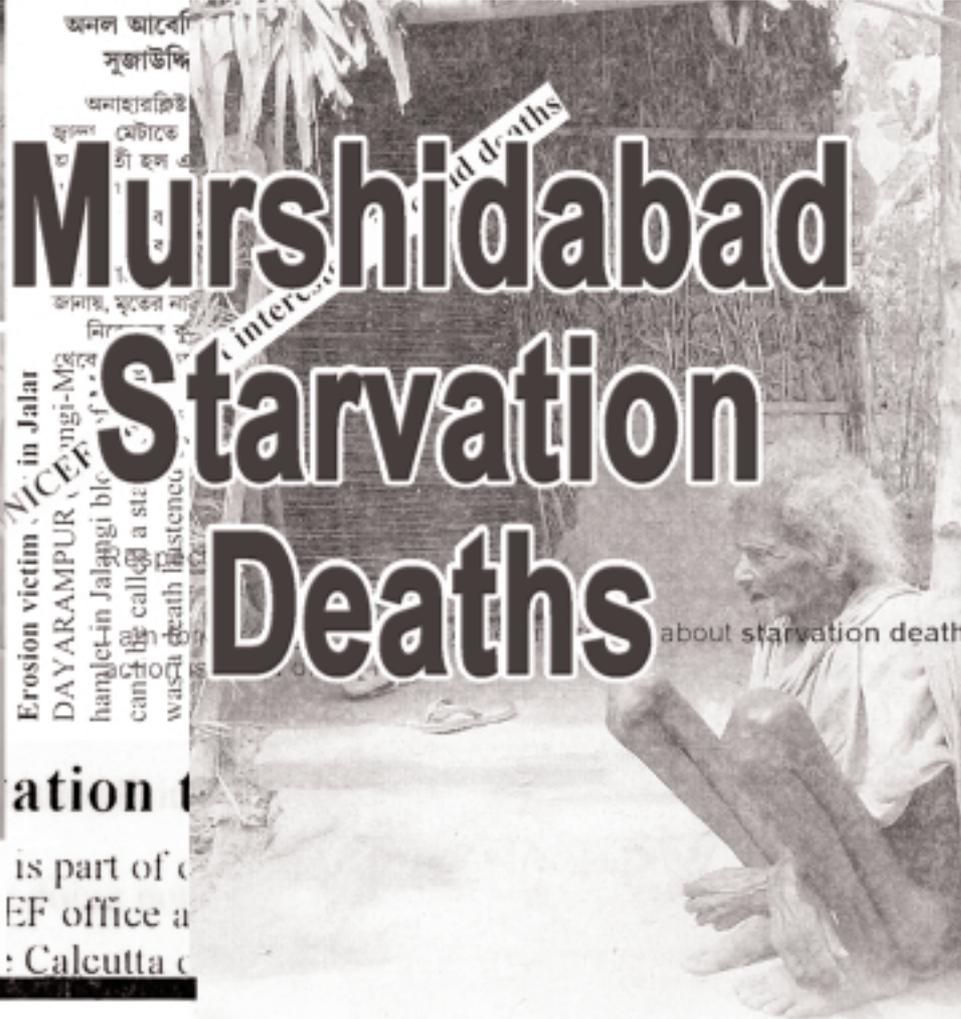


খিদের জ্বালায় গলায় ফাঁস দিয়ে  
কিশোরী আত্মঘাতী জলঙ্গিতে



# Murshidabad Starvation Deaths

Erosion victim in Jalari  
DAYARAMPUR, Jalangi-Ma  
hamlet in Jalangi bloc  
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## MG takes the initiative, PIL filed

The Central and state governments are to disre  
gard the ongoing starvation deaths in Jalangi area o  
Murshidabad district of West Bengal. Human rights  
outfits, NGOs and Muslim organisations failed to start  
any effective relief work. The state government's  
ing efforts. This led MG to take the initiative despite his  
limited resources. Our efforts are directed to two fronts:  
(a) provision of urgent food relief so that no more star-

Compiled by  
Zafarul-Islam Khan



Charity Alliance (Registered Trust)  
Email: info@CharityAlliance.in Web: CharityAlliance.in

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for The Milli Gazette / Charity Alliance*

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*For more information on Murshidabad starvation deaths visit the  
Murshidabad deaths section on [www.milligazette.com](http://www.milligazette.com) where the infor-  
mation contained in this booklet is also available online.*

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Murshidabad victims and other charitable work in India may con-  
tribute through "Charity Alliance" (a registered trust) at D-84 Abul  
Fazal Enclave-I, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi 110 025. The "Charity  
Alliance" is headed by The Milli Gazette editor Dr Zafarul-Islam  
Khan. Our team is in Murshidabad offering practical help and distrib-  
uting food to the severely affected victims.*

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May, 2005

# Murshidabad Starvation Deaths

*Compiled by*  
**Zafarul-Islam Khan**  
Editor, *The Milli Gazette*

**THE MILLI GAZETTE**  
*Indian Muslims' Leading English Newspaper*  
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## Murshidabad

Area: 5324 sq. kms (26 community development blocks,  
18 towns and 2290 villages)

Population (2001 census): 5,863,717  
(Male 30,04,385,  
Female 28,59,332)

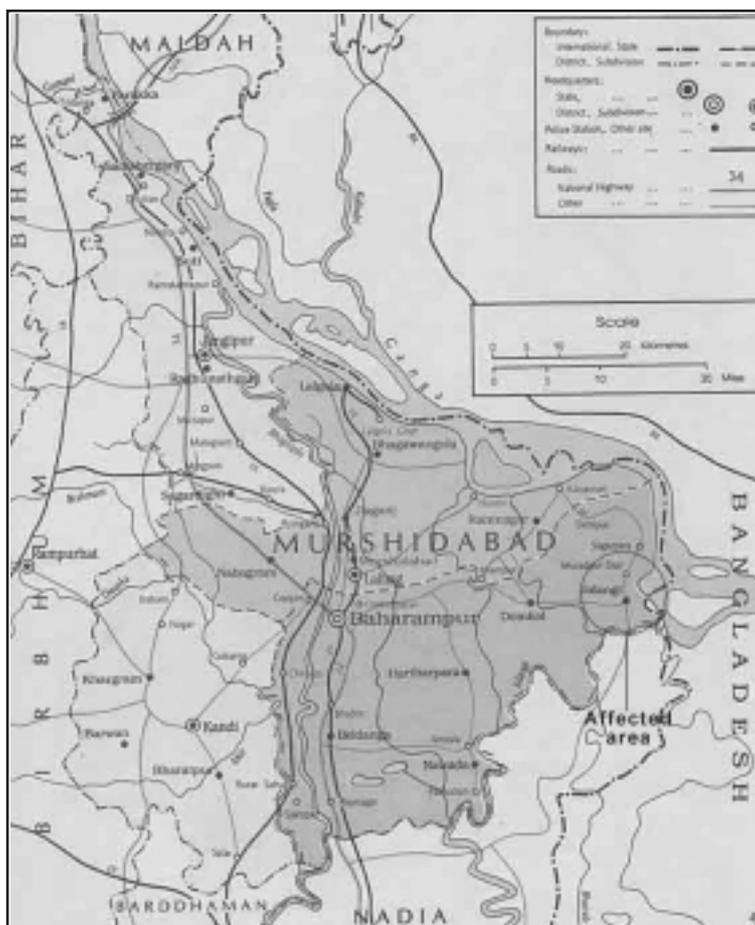
Non-working population: 65.86 %

Density (per sq. km.) 1,101

Literacy rate (%) 55.05

(male 61.40, female 48.33)

## Affected area



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## Introduction

It is matter of shame for our nation if even a single Indian dies of starvation while many today do not know how to spend their wealth and the government claims time and again that it has achieved self-sufficiency in food.

Yet people are dying at this very moment out of hunger in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal. The reason is two-fold: nature's fury and human apathy. River Padma has been slowly destroying farmlands and habitation in this area rendering thousands homeless and destitute while the apathetic local and state administrations are allowing food to rot in silos, a majority of the affected people are not even issued the below-poverty-line (BPL) ration cards, poverty eradication programmes are not implemented and even where food for work programme has been implemented, people remain unpaid for long periods despite the funds being released to the local authorities.

It is an alarming situation in which the local and state authorities should be made answerable and forced to pay the price of their apathy.

We came to know about these starvation deaths on 7 March 2005 from an email message received through the Hong-Kong-based Asian Human Rights Commission. As it was too alarming, I at once, on same day, sent out email messages enclosing the full report to:

1. Hon'ble President of India
2. Hon'ble Chief Minister of West Bengal
3. Hon'ble, Chairman, National Human Right Commission
4. Hon'ble Chairman, West Bengal Human Rights Commission
5. United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food
6. Country Director, World Food Programme
7. Hon'ble, Chairman, National Minorities Commission
8. Mr Syed Shahabuddin, President, All-India Muslim Majlis-e Mushawarat

But, I am sorry to say, there was no response whatsoever to these messages of distress though Mr Shahabuddin informed me in person that he raised this issue with West Bengal authorities during his tour of the state in April.

I published an article on the issue in the next issue of *The Milli*

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*Gazette* (16-31 March 2005) which I edit. This too failed to bring any action on part of the state or central governments to arrest the spiral of deaths or to work for the long-term rehabilitation of the people in the area.

Upon searching for news about starvation deaths in Murshidabad district, many news items were found, especially in the Kolkata edition of *The Statesman*, some of which are reproduced below. *The Statesman* also wrote two very strong editorials about these deaths, the first on 25-26 Feb 2005 and the second one in the issue of 20 March 2005 [*see below*]. It is evident from these reports and the editorials that the state authorities for their own political plans and the impending municipal elections later in May 2005 do not want to accept the reality which stares them in the face, and thereby they keep prolonging the tragedy.

Soon we sent our own representative to the area in order to get first-hand reports. He sent us reports (*see below*) as well as organised relief of urgent nature. We have appointed two full-time relief workers in the area with enough funds and rice supplies to cope with emergencies as well as offering food to most deserving families. Our representative also managed to get hold of some reports in the Bengali press, excerpts from some of which are reproduced below. I myself visited the area for four days during 12-15 April (*report below*). More information and photographs may be seen on our website ([www.milligazette.com](http://www.milligazette.com)) where a section of Murshidabad deaths has been created recently.

Since we or other civil society organisations are not equipped to redress the basic problem involved and only the state with its vast resources can work out a real and durable solution, we through a public interest litigation (PIL) have prayed to the hon'ble Supreme Court of India to intervene and direct both the state and central governments to take immediate relief as well as long-term rehabilitation measures to prevent the recurrence of this tragedy where people are dying due to lack of food. It is a shame for our nation which plans to emerge as a world power while victims of a natural calamity are not provided alternative means of livelihood.

Through publishing these facts on a wider scale we hope the Indian civil society and the authorities will wake up to the issue and solve it so that no one can claim that even six decades after independence Indians are dying out of hunger and official apathy.

30 April 2005

**Zafarul-Islam Khan**

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## 1.

### Murshidabad's starvation belt **Nature's fury, hunger, death, apathy**

By Zafarul-Islam Khan

Jalangi, Murshidabad: All the elements of a tragedy are present here along the western bank of River Padma which divides India and Bangladesh. Every inch of this Muslim majority area, which was earmarked for East Pakistan until the British changed the partition plan at the last minute in 1947, tells a tale of poverty, illiteracy, neglect, nature's fury and official India's apathy towards the downtrodden. The river in this area is slowly eating away lands of poor farmers for about a decade. Residents of the affected villages move to the lands along the river bank on the Indian side whenever life becomes intolerable under the onslaught of the river depriving the farmers of their only means of sustenance: agricultural lands. Not just villages here and there, the river has swallowed even the old town of Jalangi. The new town bearing the same name came up after the earlier one was eroded. Villagers in resettlement locations live under constant threat as the river keeps changing course which may be checked only if the western embankment is fortified.

During early days the authorities offered meagre grants and agricultural lands to the victims but started to look the other way as numbers of victims kept rising. According to victims, there are around 25,000 oustees who now live on private or government lands and are always threatened of eviction.

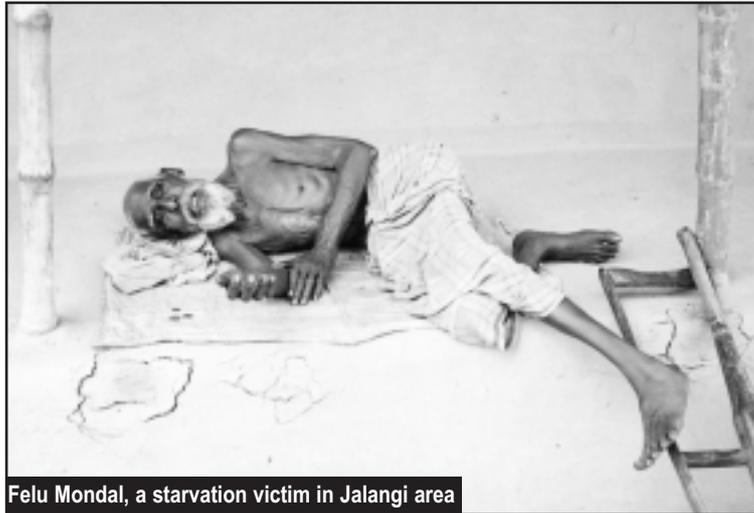
To reach this remote area we travelled to Kolkata, capital of West Bengal. The distance from Delhi to Kolkata was covered in 90 minutes by air but the onward 200-kms journey from Sealdah to Murshidabad took a whole day and we could reach Murshidabad only after sunset travelling in a slow passenger

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Felu Mondal, a starvation victim in Jalangi area

train. Sealdah's dirty and unkempt railway station in Kolkata will win the authorities a top prize any day.

Kolkata's broken roads, dirty pavements and old, gloomy buildings were a surprise for us, silently telling tales of neglect and slow destruction at the hands of CPIM which rules the state since June 1977. More surprises were in store when our train left Kolkata area. On both sides of the tracks you see greenery, farms, bamboo, palm, mango and banana groves amid ponds of all sizes. It appears that there is not an inch of barren land out there but the bamboo shanties on both sides of the tracks betray unbearable poverty. Cars and other modern amenities of life are conspicuously absent. There seems to be no industry in the area as we failed to see a single chimney all the way from Kolkata to Murshidabad, a journey which consumed over six hours. As a result, there are no jobs outside the agricultural sector. Even our passenger train seemed a novelty for villagers who stood and stared at the passing train. We saw "786" written on the fronts of many houses which meant the residents were Muslims as this figure equals the numeric value of the Arabic letters used in Bismillah.

More surprises were in store at Murshidabad, a historic city which for three centuries was the capital of about one third of India. Emerging out of the modest railway station we failed to

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see any car or taxi or even a three-wheeler. Only manual rickshaws lined up the road outside the station. We hired a rickshaw and told the puller to take us to a hotel. He took us from one "hotel" to another but we failed to be impressed by those stinking dormitories. Finally we found a slightly better option. We left our luggage there and went out to have a glimpse of the city at night. But there was hardly any attraction in the dimly lit streets of Murshidabad. Our rickshaw puller was a Muslim called Qutbuddin Shaikh who lives in the shanties near the railway station and earns around a hundred rupees at the end of the day. All his three sons are going to school as he does not want them to lead a similar life.

Murshidabad's narrow streets were almost empty. No cars were passing by. Most people were walking or using bicycles or rickshaws. A few were seen riding motorcycles. Next day we also saw a three-wheeler contraption running on Murshidabad roads. People's dresses, footwear, cheap bags all tell a story of neglect and deprivation. Mobile phone sets were conspicuously absent despite the availability of service, though erratic, while in a place like Delhi or Mumbai everyone will seem to be armed with this tiny electronic gadget. Faces too were sad, tense. You could even come across people, especially women, who were barefoot, half-naked. We came across young graduates who passed out years ago and still had no jobs. Whatever few jobs



Kusum Bala of Hogleir Dair received rice from MG team

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Amina Bewa of Dayarampur

exist go to CPIM cadres and to comparatively prosperous majority community. CPIM trademark, hammer and sickle, is displayed everywhere, on walls, home fronts, shops declaring allegiance to the muscle power CPIM enjoys and uses on the ground. Moreover, the area seems cut off from the rest of the country because of over-emphasis on Bengali language. People do not speak Hindi or even English which is the second language in schools of the state.

We visited Dr Raza Ali Khan, a scion of the erstwhile nawabs. His house was modest by any standard and the entrance was used as a sitting room. He informed us that Murshidabad suffered many exoduses in the wake of the British takeover in 1757 after the defeat of Sirajud Daulah at Plassey. When the East India Company transferred the capital to Calcutta in 1773, people moved to the new capital and other places. Even Murshidabad nawabs started residing in Calcutta. The second big exodus came in 1947 when it was rumoured that this area will go to Pakistan. People went to Dhaka and Karachi in search of better pastures. Again when a scion of the Murshidabad nawab family, Iskander Mirza, became the governor general of Pakistan in 1955, more people rushed to Pakistan in search of jobs and better openings. Even those who stayed behind lost their agricultural lands in Rajshahi and Dhaka districts which

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went to East Pakistan. Dr Ali Raza Khan also told us about the Nizamath Deposit Fund of the Murshidabad nawabs who had deposited Rs 20 million in 1835 with government of India, a princely sum at the time, with the instructions that the interest should be used to help scions of the nawabs families in distress. The deposit passed to the control of the government of India after independence, but New Delhi does not give any grant to nawabs family members. Applications are supposed to be made through the district magistrate but he does not perform his duties. The nawabs had even built Nizamath College in Murshidabad. The British, however, said that the city did not require a college and demoted it to a high school which still exists! A hundred years later the city, once the capital of one-third of India, has no college of its own. Lord Clive had written about Murshidabad in one of his reports to his superiors in the East India Company in London saying that Murshidabad is larger than London and boasts more rich people than London. This description would seem a sick joke today but if you visit the monuments which still stand in the ill-fated city you will confirm it entirely. One single monument, Hazarduari Palace (palace with a thousand doors) is enough to corroborate this. Katra Mosque, built by Murshid Quli Khan, is another great monument in the midst of dozens which still exist, in addition to many other palaces, mosques, graveyards, arches which are



Jaheda Bewa of Biswaspara

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ruins today but tell a sorrowful story about a glory lost and the neglect of the current rulers. We went about in Murshidabad and Behrampore bookshops looking for any book in English on Murshidabad but we failed. There were no books in English on the subject.

Official apathy is evident from the fact that the Murshidabad district headquarter is not located in Murshidabad itself but in the nearby city of Behrampore which boasts many colleges and even a modern university. Behrampore is a prosperous, rich Indian city while in comparison Murshidabad seems to be on the deathbed.

Plassey is a small town in the district of Murshidabad where the train stops for a few minutes. The Britishers had won a decisive battle here in 1757 due to the treachery of Sirajud Daulah's army commander, Mir Ja'afar. Ruins of his palace still exist in Murshidabad. Local people call it "Namak-haram deorhi," palace of the traitor. Plassey changed the course of Indian history. The British installed Mir Ja'afar as nawab for a few years. Victory at Plassey opened the gates of India for the British traders to become rulers.

Within half a century they marched into Delhi (1803) turning the Mughal emperor into a figurehead receiving his salary from the traders-turned-rulers. Murshidabad nawabs started copying

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the British in their life-style. This is evident from whatever is left in the palaces that still exist. Later nawabs even started wearing European clothes and headgear. Buildings built after the British domination betray European influence.

Next day we proceeded to Jalangi which has been witnessing starvation deaths. If the neglect and poverty of Murshidabad had surprised us, much more was in store on the way to Jalangi. The bus taking us to Jalangi seemed to be the only vehicle on the road which had almost no vehicular traffic except a few buses moving in both directions. Even motorcycles were rare. Thus we reached Jalangi on the Indo-Bangladesh borders. The present "Jalangi" is a resettlement town as the river had gulped the old Jalangi which now lies on the eastern bank of Padma. People told us that the old town had 900 houses, none of which stand today. It is rare here to come across a modern house built with steel and cement. Most houses are small shacks built with bamboo which cost around Rs 2000 and last for ten years on average. These light shacks which have no foundations or pillars are often swept away during floods and strong winds. We saw men, and sometimes women too, sitting under large bamboo canopies built outside shack clusters where people were taking rest or playing cards or simply chatting. We were told that these people have nothing else to do so they are just passing time. What are



Manjura Bib (left) with her starving husband

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the jobs available here?, I asked. None, came the answer, except occasional agricultural work or some digging or filling ordered by the authorities implementing programmes to create work for the poor. I was told the whole of Jalangi area has no industry except a bidi factory which employs around 100 persons.

You can see the river eroding lands, houses and graves along the coastline. We are told that the next season some of the houses on the edge of the coast will cease to exist. Jalangi's underground water is not potable as it contains dangerous levels of arsenic. The authorities have dug a few deep hand-pipes but these do not meet the demand.

The visible sign of state authority here is the string of the border security force (BSF) outposts along the river and an office of the Indian customs department. This office auctions smuggled goods intercepted by the BSF. Though Bangladesh land is on the other side of the river, even on this side we saw border demarcation signs. From the Indian side you could see Talpatti in Bangladesh's Kushtia district across the river.

We started moving along the coast where displaced people have built shacks in a number of clusters bearing the names of their lost villages. Everywhere we went people came out to tell us identical stories of how they lost their lands and homes, how their loved ones are dying due to lack of enough food, how the able-bodied are deserting the villages and going to Delhi, Mumbai, Gujarat and other areas of West Bengal in search of jobs leaving behind their women, parents and children. We came across a number of villages which had no pucca roads, like Ghoshpara, Farzipara, Raipara, Paraspur, Dayarampur, Ghauripur Bhangnpara, Schoolpara...The last two stand on government land given to the villagers when they moved here long ago but they are still to receive the Rs 5000 grant each family was promised as a help to build their houses.

People here have undergone similar experiences. The river changed course, devouring their houses and lands and they had no choice but to move to other areas. Some like Ayub Ali of Paraspur, say they changed their abodes three times during the last decade as a result of this problem. Their other problem is that the authorities are not issuing them below poverty line

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(BPL) ration cards which allow them to buy subsidised rice and entitle them to at least 100 days' work in a year. Even for those who are lucky enough to get BPL cards, rice is not always available in the ration shops and their wages are not paid in full. They are supposed to receive Rs 62 for each day's work but it is not paid to them in cash. They are supposed to receive five kgs of rice and Rs 32 in cash but this is not what they actually get days later. CPIM cadres deduct two rupees from each day's cash wage and 300 grams from the ration as donation to party fund. People here have agitated for long against this injustice. They went to the local government offices and even refused to receive the stinking rotten rice which was kept in the silos in the same area but the authorities preferred not to distribute it in time.

Others find casual work in private farms for which they are paid Rs 20 for a full day's work. Even at such low wages they manage to get work only for 10-15 days in a month. Every household here has gone through starvation-like situation during recent months. Since last February many homes have lost men, women and children as a result of the scarcity of food. English-language newspapers seldom publish these developments but Bengali newspapers, like Anand Bazar Patrika, have regularly published these tragic developments which are a sad commentary on a communist government which claims to serve the poor and defend their rights. This government has not even made good its promises of offering land to the uprooted villagers when the tragedy started to unfold about a decade ago.

These people are so poor and illiterate that they cannot raise their voice in the face of an apathetic administration or reach the media and courts. A majority of the victims are Muslims although some are Hindus as well and live in the same villages side by side Muslims. One of them, who identified himself as Degen Parawanik of Dayarampur village which is worst-affected, told us that there are 692 persons in his village on the verge of death due to starvation. We also met a woman here whose father-in-law, called Alimuddin, had died due to starvation only two months ago. His wife too died a week later. The woman told us that her neighbours now give them food from time to time in the wake of the death of her father-in-law.

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In Paraspur we came across a woman who was stitching a kind of quilt which she called 'katha-sila'. She told us that she was making it for a man in another village. How much it takes to complete the quilt and what she will get in return, we asked. She told us that it takes her three months to complete the quilt and she will get Rs 200 for her pains. In the same village we find an almost blind old man who introduced himself as Sariat Mondal. He told us that he has the BPL card which entitles him to get two kilos of rice each week at the subsidised rate of Rs 3 per kg but the rice is not always available in the ration shop. People told us that their children go to school which is free and they get mid-day meal on every school day.

These villagers squatting on others' lands pay rent twice a year. The rent is calculated according to the area used. The rent in this area is Rs 2000 per bigha (one third of an acre) per year. Some people have erected their houses on both sides along the main road.

There are a number of government schemes to help such people like BPL ration cards but most victims failed to get these cards. They told us that only around 20 percent people get these cards and they constitute the CPIM cadre, their friends and hangers-on. I asked them why they do not raise their voice against this injustice.. Who can oppose the party cadres, they replied, adding that these people are quick to take revenge by unleashing violence and stopping them from work.

In the meantime a PIL has been filed in the Supreme Court of India against the central ministry of food and the West Bengal government to force them to rehabilitate these victims and help them stand on their feet again. The PIL is expected to come up for hearing next week.

Source: *The Milli Gazette*, 1-15 May 2005, pp. 1,4.

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## 2. Text of the PIL

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA  
PUBLIC INTEREST JURISDICTION  
WRIT PETITION (CIVIL) No. 204 of 2005

IN THE MATTER OF:

Dr. Zafrul Islam Khan  
S/o Maulana Wahiduddin Khan  
R/o D-84, Abu Fazal Enclave  
Jamia Nagar, New Delhi-110025  
*Petitioner*

*Versus*

Union of India  
Ministry of Food & Agriculture  
Krishi Bhawan, New Delhi-1  
*(through its Secretary)*

State of West Bengal  
Writer's Building  
Kolkata, West Bengal  
*(through its Chief Secretary)*

*Respondents*

### PETITION UNDER ARTICLE 32 OF THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

To  
The Hon'ble Chief Justice of India  
And his companion justices of the  
Supreme Court of India.

The petitioner above named.  
MOST RESPECTFULLY SHOWETH:  
That this a petition filed in the public interest for enforcement of  
fundamental rights as guaranteed under Article 14 and 21 of the  
Constitution of India. The petitioner, editor of , an English fort-

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nightly called the *'Milli Gazette'*, is a public spirited person and is taking this cause pro bono publico on behalf of a determinate class of persons (people facing starvation deaths) who, because of their abject poverty and ignorance, are unable to approach this Hon'ble Court for ventilation of their fundamental rights as guaranteed under Article 14 and 21 of the Constitution of India.

That the petitioner states that he has not filed such or similar petition in this Hon'ble Court or in any other court for similar reliefs.

3. That the substantial questions of law of great public importance for elucidation and authoritative pronouncement by this Hon'ble Court are:

- (a) Whether living a life of destitute leading to starvation and starvation death amounts to violation of fundamental rights as guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India?

Whether the respondent no.2 can refuse to provide succour to the starving people of district Murshidabad and plead ignorance about it for fear of losing the ensuing elections as reported in the editorial of the "*Statesman*"?

Whether the respondent no.2 can be so apathetic as to ignore various representations made to it by various organizations inducing the petitioner to prevent ongoing starvation deaths?

Whether the state of West Bengal can escape its liability having regard to the human and fundamental rights problems involved in the matter?

That the facts of the case in brief are that people are dying of starvation in many villages of District Murshidabad in West Bengal. This, the petitioner came to know through the Hong Kong based Asian Human Rights Commission and Manabadhikar Suraksha Manch (MASUM) in West Bengal. The petitioner, shocked and appalled by this sad news, made e-mail representations to various authorities apart from highlighting the same in his widely circulated fortnightly newspaper magazine, *The Milli Gazette* but no action has been taken so far. The petitioner is highly aggrieved by the apathetic attitude of the authorities, particularly the respondent no.2 (state of West Bengal). He is so disturbed that his own fundamental right guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution is violated. Right to life, as interpreted by this Hon'ble Court in various judgments, does not

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mean a mere animal existence but right to live with peace and dignity.

That apart from the investigative reports by the Asian Human Rights Commission and Benglar Manabdhikar Suraksha Manch the petitioner had sent his team with some immediate succour to the starving people. The petitioner has also collected latest informations through his team.

That the affected areas are Jalangi Dayarampur village and surrounding areas, including Udaynagar, Suryanagar colony and Paraspur, District Murshidabad, West Bengal (India). According to Neimuddin his brother Azizul Haq died of hunger because of no work to earn a livelihood. According to Neimuddin before his brother died, he had not witnessed cooking for days together. Azizul Haq's wife and son are starving and may also die from hunger soon. Alimuddin Saik (67 and his wife Jahida Beoa (60), Sattar Seik (50) also died of hunger. The Government as well as private doctors have confirmed about the starvation deaths.

The hunger in Murshidabad district has affected the villagers so badly that a large number have been displaced to other areas looking for means to survive. Large numbers of student are dropping out of the schools, as it is almost impossible to carry on studies with an empty stomach and they are being sent by their families to work elsewhere. People say that so many meetings have been held with the local Block Development Officer and other Officers attached with the local civil administration, and also the village council, but all have been in vain.

“Apart from this, fertile agricultural land . house, cattle and everything are being ruined, and the environment conditions are worsening. These villages are situated along the river Padma, the bank of which has been eroding for the last ten years. As a result, fertile land is being lost. Since 2002 the erosion has rapidly increased. Almost all able-bodied male members of Dayarampur village have left in search of work elsewhere, leaving their elderly, female members and children at home, who are falling prey to starvation. Last year too, two children breathed their last due to starvation.

The government is making mockery of basic human rights. According to the authorities, India is now self sufficient in food grains. Our country is also sending so many shiploads of grain to different countries affected by natural calamities like the tsunami, while our own people are dying for want of food. The warehouses of the Food Corporation of India are full, but the people

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in such circumstances have nothing. The West Bengal government is letting its people starve in violation of its constitutional obligations, and those under international law. A true copy of the report dated 20.2.2005 prepared by the MASUM is filed as **Annexure P-1**.

That, as per another report, some villages in the south Dinajpur District are also affected. One such village is Anahar village where some of the affected persons are:

Achhiya Bibi and her sons  
Nurul Kaviray  
Dukhu Lohar  
Krishna Lohar  
Siddique Lohar  
Jamira Bewa  
Tuli Bewa  
and Khaatun Bewa

MASUM has received reports that for many years, villagers in Anahar have been subjected to extreme conditions of poverty and starvation, leading to many deaths. The village has already been reduced to 28 families and 15 more residents are dangerously close to death. Local and state authorities have thus far taken no action in providing assistance, programmes or funding in alleviating the situation.

Residents of Anahar are Muslim and considered to be a part of marginalized society. They are poor and with the shortage of food, have had to sell their few possessions and mortgage their property to buy sustenance for their families. At present, many villagers have been reduced to eating leaves and roots, with little or no nutritious value, from trees in order to fill their stomachs. As a result, those who are not starving are riddled with dysentery, parasites and liver related illness.

Children have also been heavily affected by the lack of food. In recent weeks, three children have been reported dead because of starvation. More than thirty children are suffering from diarrhoea, worm infestations, beriberi, rickets and tuberculosis, while several others are nearing death. It is not uncommon for parents to have lost at least one child to starvation or related illnesses.

Residents Achhiya Bibi and her husband Setu Molla both labourers by profession, have already lost one child due to starvation. As jobs are unavailable, the family has been unemployed since May 2004 and cannot even remember the last time they

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could afford to eat rice. Bibi and her husband scrounge for whatever food they can manage but fear that their son may be following in his sibling's footsteps. Bibi's son is sick with stomach ailments brought on by severe hungers and malnourishment. Another villager, Khatan Bewu, also witnessed one child die from eating inedible objects.

It has also been reported that alongwith food, electricity and water are also lacking in the village. To provide drinking water for families a 3-acre pond was dug out by residents in the locality. However, access to this pond has been denied by local police and authorities, led by the Communist party of India, citing Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr.P.C.) Section 144 of the Cr.P.C. allows the district magistrate to mandate that any person abstain from a district for up to sixty days if the official believes this action will prevent injury, harm or danger to the health and well being of residents at large. Here it is believed that locals were prevented from using the pond as it could also be a fish source.

Government negligence is regarded as primarily responsible for the current situation in Anahar. Upon investigating the matter, it is apparent that villagers in Anahar are living in abject poverty. Food, water, electricity and sanitation systems are non-existent. The residents are malnourished, unhygienic, and stricken with disease. Even with these appalling conditions however the villagers are not enrolled in the Below Poverty Line Scheme. Further, they have not been included in the Government of India's Arnapurna & Amtyodaya Yogana Scheme for poverty alleviation and village development.

Mr. Romit Mootsuddi, the District Magistrate of South Dinajpur, agreed to investigate the situation in Anahar. He stated that some money would be provided to the Harsura Gram Panchayat in order to improve standards in the village. He also instructed the Block Development Officer responsible for village development in the area to submit a detailed report on this matter. As of now, Mr. Pijush Kanti Das, the BO in charge of the report is unavailable for comment.

Ms. Subala Barman, the Pradhan (head of village council) of Harsura Gram Panchayat stated that the district and local administration appear to have collapsed: both are not willing to take responsibility for these inhuman conditions. She also alleged that the money meant for developing the village has neither been allocated nor spent.

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MASUM has further contacted Mr. Anisur Rahaman, President of the communist led Tapan Panchayet Samity (the second tier of local government) Mr. Rahaman has denied the news of starvation deaths in Anahar; although he did admit that the poverty level was extraordinarily high. He said that while the government was doing its best at addressing the poverty levels, funding was insufficient to issue more Below Poverty Level Cards (PBL) to the villagers. He also acknowledged that a health crisis does exist in Anahar where only one primary health center with 12 beds, exists. According to Rahaman, sometimes more than 150 patients end up lying on floors stairs or in corners of the hospital. However, despite his insights, no progress has been reported to ameliorate the conditions in Anahar. Another report dated 21.2.05 MASUM has further prepared is annexed as Annexure P-2.

The daily newspaper Statesman has published a report highlighting the miserable and deplorable conditions of the people of some villages of district Murshidabad affected by erosion due to the Padma embankments in Jalangi. True copies of the clippings of the statesman dated 22.2.05, 25-26/2/05, 28.2.2005 are filed as Annexure P-3 (colly). True copies of the clippings of the Statesman dated 3.3.05, 6.3.2005 and are filed as Annexure P-4 (colly).

That in this connection the petitioner made representations to the President of India, Chief Minister of West Bengal, Chairman National Human Rights Commission, Chairman West Bengal Human Rights Commission, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, country Director World Food programme, Chairman, National Minorities Commission, etc. Since the contents of all the representations are the same, a true copy of the e-mail of the representation to the President of India is filed herewith and marked as Annexure P-5

That the Asian Human Rights Commission, Hong Kong, has published a report highlighting the abject poverty faced by the people of district Murshidabad. It has reported the death of a five year old girl, named Lakchhmi. It has highlighted the plight of Lachhmi, Parvati Durga, and the AHRC has lamented that the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) office in India did not take any initiative to prevent such tragedy despite repeated appeals. A true copy of the report of the AHRC dated 16.3.2005 is annexed as Annexure P-6. An editorial of the Statesman dated 20.3.2005 highlights the apathetic attitude of the West Bengal

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Government so much so that it is not issuing Below Poverty line cards (BPL Cards) to the starving people. A true copy of the report dated 16.3.05 and the editorial of the statesman dated 20.3.2005 are filed as Annexure P-7 (colly).

That the petitioner, the editor of the fortnightly the Milli Gazette, published a detailed report in its issue of 16-31 March, 2005 and 1-15 April 2005. The petitioner said in the reports that the west Bengal Government is letting its people starve in violation of constitutional obligations and those under the international law . True copies of these reports dated 16-31 March 2005 and 1-4 April are 2005 filed herewith and marked as Annexure P-8.

That the petitioner sent a fact finding team to the Murshidabad district of West Bengal . A preliminary report dated 28.3.05 sent by Mr.Nadim Ahmad is filed herewith and marked as Annexure P-9.

That, it is a pity that despite highlighting the starvation and starvation deaths by the statesman and the Milli Gazette and despite timely representations to various constitutional and other authorities no action has been taken so far and people of the affected areas are dying of starvation. The petitioner, a humanist is very much aggrieved and hurt by the apathetic attitude the authorities. Finding no other efficacious remedy, he is preferring the instant Writ Petition on the following amongst other.

### GROUNDS

Because the people of some villages in District Murshidabad of West Bengal are dying of hunger because of abject poverty caused by the erosion of embankment of river Padma.

Because the people of the affected area are also facing clothing and housing problem particularly the position of women and children is very miserable.

Because the respondent no.2 in its bid to hide the truth is falsely attributing all the starvation deaths in the State to old age besides chronic and incurable disease because that is the only alibi that can save them from mounting criticism of misgovernance and insensitivity to the distress of the people in the countryside.

Because the respondent no.2 is too scared to show its real selves before the crucial municipal elections because that could demolish their political *raison d'etre* and mar their image of a party of the poor.

Because despite the fact that India has achieved sufficiency in

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food grains, a section of the population is facing starvation and starvation deaths.

Because the State is under a constitutional obligation to provide immediate succour to the starving people and prevent hunger deaths.

Because there is violation of the fundamental rights of the petitioner as well as a determinate class of poor and illiterate people as guaranteed under Article 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India.

Because the petitioner has e-mailed representations to the President of India Dr.APJ Abdul Kalam, Chief Minister of West Bengal, Shri Budhadeep Bhattacharya Chairman,NHRC, Dr. A.S.Anand , Chairman, West Bengal Human Rights Commission Justice Shyamal Kumar Sen, UN Special Repporteur on the Right to Food , Mr.Jean Ziegler, and country Director, World Food Programme. Mr.Pedro Medrana Royas, but no action has been taken to prevent the ongoing starvation deaths.

Because a special package is required to rehabilitate the people of the affected areas so that they do not face starvation deaths.

Because a welfare state like India can hardly brook delay in such urgent matters which strike at the very roots of the human and fundamental rights .

Because the Annapurna Yogna launched by the respondent no.1 is not reaching the affected people.

#### **PRAYER**

It is therefore, most respectfully prayed that this Hon'ble Court may be graciously pleased:

To issue appropriate Writ directions or order directing the respondents to take immediate steps and actions to prevent starvation deaths in district Murshidabad of West Bengal.

To direct the respondent to prepare a special package providing for houses, lands medicines rehabilitation and issuance of Below Poverty Line cards. (BPL)

To pass such further orders as deemed fit and proper in the peculiar and urgent fact situations of our case.

AND FOR THIS ACT OF KINDNESS THE PETITIONER SHALL AS IN DUTY BOUND EVERY PRAY.

Drawn on: 5.4.2005  
Filed on. 11.4.2005

Drawn & filed by  
MUSHTAQ AHMAD  
ADVOCATE ON RECORD

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**LIST OF DATES & EVENTS**

The Manab Adhikar Suraksha Manch (MASUM) and the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) reported starvation deaths in Jalangi, Dayarampur, Udaynagar, Suryanagar, Paraspur in district Murshidabad and 2000 untouchables in Belilious Park evicted by the Government of West Bengal and the Howrah Municipal Corporation two years back.

9/11.2.2005                      The AHRC and the MASUM met officials of the West Bengal Government and apprised them of the starvation deaths and requested them to take immediate steps to prevent the same.

22.2.2005  
25/26-2.05                      *The Statesman* published reports about the starvation deaths.

3.3.2005                      *The Statesman* published further reports.

6.3.2005                      The petitioner made e-mail representations to the President of India, Chairman, NHRC, Chief Minister of West Bengal Chairman W.Bengal Human Rights Commission, UN Special Rapporteur, on the Right to Food, country director, World Food Programmes, to take immediate measures to check the ongoing hunger deaths.  
*Statesman* published a report and on 20.3.05 an editorial regarding starvation deaths and the governments apathy.

16-31 March 05              The fortnightly *Milli Gazette*, of which the petitioner is the editor,  
1-14. April 05              published a report about the ongoing starvation deaths.

The fact finding team sent by the petitioner to West Bengal submitted a preliminary report.

Starvation deaths are going on unabated in Murshidabad district of West Bengal. Similar is the case with 7000 untouchables evicted from Belilious Park by the West Bengal Government and

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the Howrah Municipal Corporation without providing them compensation or alternate accommodation. They are facing starvation.

According to MASUM reports, “every day some or the other dies of hunger in the village of Dayarampur or among other adjacent villages. They have not even heard of “Annapurna Yojna a Central Government Scheme intended to give them food grains when in need. One handicapped man Amir Shah complained that their names have not even been included in the Below Poverty Line (BPL) list which would allow them to apply for assistance.”

The respondent no.2 and its officials are ignoring and denying the starvation deaths due to political reasons i.e.ensuing municipal elections. The benefit of the Annapurna Yojna, launched by the respondent no.1 are not percolating to the affected areas. There is gross violation of human and fundamental rights as guaranteed under the Constitution of India. The affected people are unable to approach this Hon’ble Court because of their alarming poverty and illiteracy and ignorance.

7.04.2005

Hence this Writ Petition in the Public interest.

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA  
(PUBLIC INTEREST JURISDICTION)  
I.A.NO. OF 2005  
IN WRIT PETITION (C) NO. OF 2005

IN THE MATTER OF:  
Dr.ZAFRUL Islam Khan  
*Petitioner*

*Versus*

Union of India & Anr.  
*Respondents*

#### **APPLICATION FOR INTERIM RELIEF**

To  
The Hon’ble Chief Justice of India  
And his companion justices of the  
Supreme Court of India.

The petitioner above named.

**MOST RESPECTFULLY SHOWETH:**

That the petitioner has filed the accompanying Writ Petition for

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enforcement of fundamental rights of a determinate class of people who, by reason of poverty and ignorance, are unable to approach this Hon'ble Court and who are facing starvation deaths in district Murshidabad of West Bengal. The averments of the Writ Petition may be treated as part and parcel of this application as the same are not being reproduced for the sake of brevity.

That the petitioner has a good prima facie case in the public interest, balance of convenience is in his favour and he and a determinate class of people will suffer irreparable loss if interim reliefs are not granted to the starving people.

That this application is made bonafide and in the interest of justice.

#### **PRAYER**

It is therefore, most respectfully prayed that this Hon'ble Court may be graciously pleased:

To direct the respondents to immediately provide food and shelters/houses to the affected.

To direct the respondents to issue ration cards for the Below Poverty Line (BPL) people immediately.

To direct the respondents to provide sustenance job to the affected people.

To direct the respondents to provide substitute lands to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) people.

To direct the respondents to provide immediate medical relief to prevent further starvation deaths, and

To pass such further orders as deemed fit and proper in the interest of the poor and illiterate affected people of district Murshidabad of West Bengal.

AND FOR THIS ACT OF KINDNESS THE PETITIONER SHALL AS IN DUTY BOUND EVERY PRAY.

Drawn on: 5.04.2005  
Filed on: 11.04.2005

Drawn & filed by  
MUSHTAQ AHMAD  
ADVOCATE-ON-RECORD  
FOR THE PETITIONER

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### 3.

## AHRC reports

HUNGER ALERT HUNGER ALERT HUNGER ALERT  
HUNGER ALERT HUNGER ALERT  
ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION - URGENT APPEALS  
PROGRAM  
7 March 2005

HA-02-2005: INDIA: Starvation deaths occurring in Murshidabad district, West Bengal

**INDIA: Starvation death; government inaction and neglect**

Dear friends,

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has received information from Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha (Masum) in West Bengal, India, that people in Murshidabad district are dying of starvation while the government authorities have not taken any effective action to stop the deaths. One five-year-old boy is reported to have been eating dirt before he died. According to a local doctor, "The entire area is under threat of insufficient nutritious food."

Masum reports that no government programmes to address starvation are properly functioning in the area, despite the fact that the local authorities are well aware of what is going on.

The AHRC urges you to write to the concerned authorities, including the Chief Minister of West Bengal, and call on them to take necessary emergency action to stop any further deaths from occurring in Murshidabad district, and longer-term steps to address the food crisis there.

Urgent Appeals Desk -- Hunger Alert  
Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)

**DETAILED INFORMATION:**

Location: Dayarampur village and surrounding areas, including Udayanagar, Suryanagar Colony and Paraspur, Murshidabad district, West Bengal, India.

Persons affected:

Numerous, including

1. Azizul Haque

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2. Alimuddin Seik, aged about 67, husband of Jahida Beoa
3. Jahida Beoa, aged 60, wife of Alimuddin Seik
4. Sattar Seik, aged 50

Date of last reported death: 25 February 2005 (deaths ongoing)

On a recent visit to the Murshidabad district of West Bengal, colleagues of Masum were shocked to hear reports of numerous recent starvation deaths among villagers there, about which the authorities appear to be doing nothing. Some of the reports that Masum has received are as follows:

1. Neimuddin stated that his brother Azizul Haque died of hunger because of no work to earn a livelihood. Neimuddin said that before his brother died he had not witnessed any cooking at his home for days. His brother finally died of starvation. Up to today Azizul's wife and son are starving, and may also die from hunger soon.

2. Sukuda Bibi, a relative of Alimuddin Seik and his wife Jahida Beoa, says that both of them died recently after their bodies swelled up from malnutrition. Sukuda Bibi told the Rural Health Centre of Sadikhanrdeyar that there was no food at home. Whatever they had, no matter how unhygienic or lacking in nutrition, they ate up in a desperate and ultimately failed attempt to survive. Dr Ashish Kumar Ghosh, the Medical Officer attached with the Rural Health Centre, said that, "The cause of death in Jahida's case was associated with old age problems. However, malnutrition was one of the major causes of her suffering. I visited the victims' village and found that the entire area is under threat of insufficient nutritious food."

3. Sattar Seik died of hunger at the Behrampur District Sadar Hospital. He was referred there from the Rural Health Centre of Sadikhanrdeyar. On this case Dr Ashish Kumar Ghosh said, "We don't have proper and sufficient medical equipment and so we have to refer our patients to the district hospital." Dr Matiur Rahman, a doctor attached to the Behrampur District Hospital said, "The patients who have been referred to here are not in condition even to utter a word. They have been kept on oxygen but nothing can be said regarding their improvement."

4. Shyamali Halder said, "Another five-year-old boy also died suffering from the same cause. Five days ago his stomach was swelled up. It was found out that he had been living by eating dirt. For many days there had been no cooking in his house."

According to Masum, "Every day someone or the other dies of hunger in the village of Dayarampur or among other adjacent villages. They have not even heard of Annapurna Yojana, a central government scheme intended to give them food grains when in need. One handicapped man named Amir Shah complained that their

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names have not even been included in the Below Poverty Line list, which would allow them to apply for assistance."

When the Sub-divisional Officer of Murshidabad, Mr Rabindranath Sarkar, was approached he admitted that there is an acute problem and shortage of food grains in different villages of this district. He said that he is trying to make his best possible effort from a limited capacity. He also said that he has informed the District Magistrate about these incidents.

Mr Kanchan Chowdhury, the Block Development Officer of Jalangi, in Murshidabad district, said, "Women of this locality are fleeing to other places to get work. We are looking for options to address this economic crisis. Hopefully it will work out soon."

Mr Yunush Sarkar, a Member of the Legislative Assembly, West Bengal, said that like other countries, people in Murshidabad too are below the poverty level, but he denied that they are dying of hunger.

#### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

Masum has also written the following:

"The hunger in Murshidabad district has affected the villagers so badly that a large number have been displaced to other areas looking for means to survive. Large numbers of students are dropping out of the schools, as it is almost impossible to carry on studies with an empty stomach, and they are being sent by their families to work elsewhere. People say that so many meetings have been held with the local Block Development Officer and other officers attached with the local civil administration, and also the village council, but all have been in vain.

"Apart from this, fertile agricultural land, houses, cattle and everything are being ruined, and the environmental conditions are worsening. These villages are situated along the river Padma, the bank of which has been eroding for the last ten years. As a result, fertile land is being lost. Since 2002 the erosion has rapidly increased. Almost all able-bodied male members of Dayarampur village have left in search of work elsewhere, leaving their elderly, female members and children at home, who are falling prey to starvation. Last year too, two children breathed their last due to starvation.

"The government is making mockery of basic human rights. According to the authorities, India is now self-sufficient in food grains. Our country is also sending so many shiploads of grain to different countries affected by natural calamities like the tsunami, while our own people are dying for want of food. The warehouses of the Food Corporation of India are full, but the people in such circumstances have nothing. The West Bengal government is letting its peo-

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ple starve in violation of its constitutional obligations, and those under international law."

### **Demonstration against Starvation to Death in West Bengal**

About 500 demonstrators are expected to protest on Wednesday March 23, 2005, against the lack of action being taken by the government and U.N. agencies, including UNICEF, to starvation in West Bengal. The day-long demonstration organised by Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM) will begin at 10:00 a.m. at the UNICEF office in Kolkata.

The participants will gather at the Sealdah railway station and march to the UNICEF office in Beck Bagan to submit their grievances to the U.N. agency. From there, the march will proceed to Governor House to submit a memorandum to the governor as well as to the Legislative Assembly. Afterwards, the participants will gather at the Esplanade for a sit-in demonstration from noon to 8 p.m.

This protest marks the beginning of a new fight against the continuing negligence, ignorance and conscious ineptitude of the government and UNICEF to preventable deaths in the state, including those of women and children. During the demonstration, the victims will speak about their grievances.

UNICEF, the primary U.N. body constituted to mitigate children's suffering, particularly those caused by poverty and malnutrition, has so far ignored the deaths of children taking place right outside their door. In spite of continuous representations by concerned groups, UNICEF has taken no action whatsoever to intervene. Had UNICEF or the government taken steps to prevent these deaths in the last few weeks, at least one life could have been saved in the Belagacchia dumping ground in the community of Howrah, for Mrs. E. M. Parvathi, a private scavenger residing at the Belagacchia dumping ground, and her family are the most recent victims of this neglect as her five-year-old daughter Lachhmi died from starvation several weeks ago. When Mrs. Parvathi's three-year-old son E. M. Shiva died of starvation on Dec. 18, 2003, the matter was immediately brought to the notice of the state government as well as various U.N. agencies in India, including UNICEF. However, none of these bodies did anything. If they had acted, they could have prevented Lachhmi's death this month.

Sadly, these deaths from starvation are not isolated incidents in West Bengal. The living conditions of all those who were evicted from Belilious Park, who are currently living in and around Kolkata and Howrah, are much the same. Likewise, people living in Dayarampur, Taltali, Paraspur, Chuanpara and those under Jalangi

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Block of Murshidabad District face similar conditions. In spite of several attempts by local, regional and international human rights organisations, the government and U.N. agencies have done nothing for these people except watch people die. This inaction has sparked the March 23 demonstration.

The schedule for the programme is:

Date: March 23, 2005

10 a.m. to 11 a.m.: Demonstration at the UNICEF office at Beckbagan in Kolkata

11 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.: March to Governor House and the Legislative Assembly of West Bengal

12:00 p.m. to 8 p.m.: Sit-in demonstration at the Esplanade (in front of the Metro Cinema Hall) in Kolkata

For further details, please contact:

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Asian Human Rights Commission

19/F, Go-Up Commercial Building,

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Tel: +(852) - 2698-6339 Fax: +(852) - 2698-6367

*received from AHRC <listadmin@ahrchk.net> on 22-3-05*

*[Email message received from AHRC on 22-3-05]*

*From: AHRC*

*To: edit@milligazette.com*

*Sent: Tuesday, March 22, 2005 1:38 PM*

*Subject: [Invitation to the Press]*

**Demonstration against Starvation to Death in West Bengal**

We have been informed that an organization that is part of our network, Manabdhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM), is holding a demonstration in Calcutta at the UNICEF office at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday March 23. UNICEF is being targeted as part of this demonstration because the Calcutta office refused to show any concern for the death of starving children at a meeting at their office in February with representatives of MASUM and the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (see the press release below issued last month). More details about their demonstration on March 23 are included below. If you have a correspondent or stringer in Calcutta,

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I'd appreciate if you'd forward this e-mail to them or another appropriate bureau.

I'm also including part of a hunger alert below that we issued on March 7 about the death of a five-year-old boy in West Bengal due to starvation. Other recent hunger alerts, most of which are from India, are also available at <http://www.foodjustice.net/ha>.

Bruce Van Voorhis  
Communications Officer  
Asian Human Rights Commission  
Hong Kong

### **Demonstration against Starvation to Death in West Bengal**

About 500 demonstrators are expected to protest on Wednesday March 23, 2005, against the lack of action being taken by the government and U.N. agencies, including UNICEF, to starvation in West Bengal. The day-long demonstration organised by Banglar Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM) will begin at 10:00 a.m. at the UNICEF office in Kolkata.

The participants will gather at the Sealdah railway station and march to the UNICEF office in Beck Bagan to submit their grievances to the U.N. agency. From there, the march will proceed to Governor House to submit a memorandum to the governor as well as to the Legislative Assembly. Afterwards, the participants will gather at the Esplanade for a sit-in demonstration from noon to 8 p.m.

This protest marks the beginning of a new fight against the continuing negligence, ignorance and conscious ineptitude of the government and UNICEF to preventable deaths in the state, including those of women and children. During the demonstration, the victims will speak about their grievances.

UNICEF, the primary U.N. body constituted to mitigate children's suffering, particularly those caused by poverty and malnutrition, has so far ignored the deaths of children taking place right outside their door. In spite of continuous representations by concerned groups, UNICEF has taken no action whatsoever to intervene. Had UNICEF or the government taken steps to prevent these deaths in the last few weeks, at least one life could have been saved in the Belagacchia dumping ground in the community of Howrah, for Mrs. E. M. Parvathi, a private scavenger residing at the Belagacchia dumping ground, and her family are the most recent victims of this neglect as her five-year-old daughter Lachhmi died from starvation several weeks ago. When Mrs. Parvathi's three-year-old son E. M.

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Shiva died of starvation on Dec. 18, 2003, the matter was immediately brought to the notice of the state government as well as various U.N. agencies in India, including UNICEF. However, none of these bodies did anything. If they had acted, they could have prevented Lachhmi's death this month.

Sadly, these deaths from starvation are not isolated incidents in West Bengal. The living conditions of all those who were evicted from Belilious Park, who are currently living in and around Kolkata and Howrah, are much the same. Likewise, people living in Dayarampur, Taltali, Paraspur, Chuanpara and those under Jalangi Block of Murshidabad District face similar conditions. In spite of several attempts by local, regional and international human rights organisations, the government and U.N. agencies have done nothing for these people except watch people die. This inaction has sparked the March 23 demonstration.

The schedule for the programme is:

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## 4.

**Some press reports****Alimuddin's street: Starving to death by the river, a village of beggars to mourn his passing**

Statesman News Service

Dayarampur (Murshidabad), Feb. 21. — Alimuddin Sheikh lost his homestead to the erosion caused by the Padma river and became a beggar last year. On Saturday, he died of hunger.

His wife, Zaheda, has been praying for a morsel of food. She too is on her deathbed. Her body developed friction-induced bruises caused by writhing in hunger on the earthen verandah of her hut on the Padma embankment.

Local authorities are yet to pay the Rs 20 and seven kg rice due to the daughter-in-law of the Sheikh family, who on 30 January joined the male labourers employed by Ghoshpara Panchayat of Jalangi block for the construction of a mud-road running through Dayarampur. The head of the Ghoshpara Gram Panchayat conceded that none of the villagers of Dayarampur had been paid for their labour due to problems with the "pay-master" who deals with the government payments at panchayat level.

Golenur Bibi, Alimuddin's daughter-in-law, cries out in helplessness: "I accompanied the males to carry earth for road-construction. I thought my labour would help my in-laws survive. But 'government men' held up my payment and my father-in-law died. My mother-in-law is now dying. How long can we fight poverty and hunger?"

The Sheikh family is not the only one in these parts engaged in a desperate battle for survival. Rendered penniless by a rampant Padma that's gobbled up farm-land and houses along the embankments, more than one hundred families have taken up begging as profession. Though who will give them alms is an open question. "I have not eaten for three days. People here have nothing to give," says Fatejan Bewa of Dayarampur.

Alimuddin's neighbours in this hunger-hit settlement along the Padma near the Indo-Bangla border say they had been pro-

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viding potatoes and rice to the Sheikh family for last few months but they couldn't afford to continue doing so — cooking is a once-in-24-hours luxury for residents of Dayarampur.

Moslem Mondal and his wife, Suraton Bibi, the blind Saira Banu, able-bodied Diyanuj Biswas and Manoranjan Mondal, and innumerable young men such as Bablu Mondal and Sajan Kumar Mondal — are all self-proclaimed members of the 1,000-strong army of beggars from Paraspur, Toltoli and Dayarampur villages in Jalangi. With the BSF allegedly preventing villagers from cultivating fallow land on the Indo-Bangla border, daily-wage earners have no other way of keeping starvation at bay.

The CPI-M panchayat pradhan of Ghoshpara, Mr Santosh Roy told *The Statesman*: "Those who worked on the construction of the road are likely to be paid very soon. I am not aware of any starvation deaths. But it's a fact that the erosion-struck villages on the embankments are having to battle for."

Alimuddin's is the fifth reported starvation death over the past month from a cluster of three villages, points out Monirul Mondal, a local resident. How many more will die is anybody's guess.

*The Statesman*, 22 Feb. 2005

<http://www.thestatesman.net/page.arcview.php?clid=6&id=97641&usrss=1>

### Three days of care comes too late

BEHRAMPUR, Feb. 25. — Jaheda Bewa spent the last three days of her life in government care.

The Statesman on last Tuesday had carried a report that Jaheda Bewa of Dayarampur, Jalangi was dying of starvation.

She died this morning. But this time, the state government did its best to save the widow whose husband, Alimuddin Sheikh, died of hunger five days ago. Within 24 hours of

## খিদের জ্বালায় গলায় ফাঁস দিয়ে কিশোরী আত্মঘাতী জলঙ্গিতে

অনল আবেদিন ● বহরমপুর  
সুজাউদ্দিন ● জালাঙ্গি

এই কিশোরীর আত্মঘাতী হওয়ার সঙ্গে  
অন্যত্রয়ের কোনও সম্পর্ক নেই।"

অবশ্য দিন পঁচেক মজুর পেটে তৈরিক  
১০ কেজি চাল ও মাস দু'টাকার কলসে

"Rumpa committed suicide because of hunger.."

*Anand Bazar Patrika*, Kolkata, 4 April 2005

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"One Sattar Shekh died last night due to malnutrition...Altogether five persons of Dayarampur, Paraspur and nearby areas had died before this..."

*Anand Bazar Patrika, Kolkata, 3 March 2005*

Sheikh's death report carried by *The Statesman*, the district administration took the initiative to get his dying wife to the hospital at Jalangi where she was given adequate food and medicine. But the efforts came a bit too late.

Like Alimuddin, she was buried this afternoon in a land not her own. The eroding Padma had devoured their land last year.

According to medical reports, Jaheda suffered liver malfunction leading to her death. Jaheda like her husband was underfed for the last few months and she developed bed-sores due to writhing in starvation on the clay-veranda of her hut by the eroding Padma embankment. The couple had resorted to begging and on 30 January 2005 their daughter-in-law, Golenur Bibi, joined the male-brigade of labourers carrying earth for the construction of a village road, a project under Swarnajayanti Gram Rojgar Yojana (SGRY) carried out by Ghoshpara Gram Panchayat in Jalangi. She earned Rs 20 and 7 kg of rice but could not clear her dues because of panchayat negligence.

However, her dues were cleared immediately after the death was reported by *The Statesman*. The Rs 20 and 7 kg of rice deserved by Golenur Bibi, went to her family on 23 February.

The DM, Murshidabad, Mr N Manjunatha Prasad, denied that the deaths were caused by starvation.

He said: "Elderly folks at erosion-affected areas such as Dayarampur, Paraspur, Taltoli in Jalangi remain a neglected lot. Their children do not take care of them. Able-bodied men there could not attend to cultivation at char-lands of the Padma river along the Indo-Bangla border owing to border problems. Around a month back I took up the matter with DIG, BSF, Lalbagh and the new order facilitating public movement across the char-lands had it that the border peasants would have to pro-

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## পদ্মার গ্রাসে ভিটে, পেটের টানে ভিন্ রাজ্যে

পদ্মা নদীর তীরে পদ্মা নদীর তীরে

Bitten by the Padma erosion, Jalangi's women are migrating to other areas. A large number of womenfolk of Dayarampur, Udinagar, Suryanagar, Paraspur and adjacent areas have migrated out of the district...as they are unable to find work and food...The administration and politicians are doing nothing. The BDO Kanchan Chowdhury accepted that the migration is taking place...Uttara Vishwas, BJP panchayat member said, "Why will they not go out for jobs? They are unable to earn food here"... Abdul Quddus, education executive of CPIM, himself a teacher, said many students left school due to poverty as they have to earn small amounts of money for their families...Santosh Roy, CPIM panchayat pradhan of Ghoshpara, said, "...The condition of Paraspur is worse than Dayarampur... 100 families of Paraspur are living in shanties and 200 boys of this clustre have gone to other states in search of jobs. Sunnat Bewa said our boys have gone to Gujarat in search of work.

*Anand Bazar Patrika, Kolkata, 15 April 2005*

duce and submit their identity cards at the Border Outpost and collect the cards while coming back from farming. The order did not percolate down to the lower levels in time."

"We have found 20 aged people for old-age pension and introduced the National Food for Work programme in those areas. We have also directed youths not to neglect their parents. We made it clear that they would be absorbed in Food for Work scheme if they take care of their parents," he said.

The Bannya O Bhangon Pratirodh Committee (flood and erosion prevention committee), Murshidabad, held a protest rally with the poster campaign led by the photograph of Jaheda's a hungry face.

*The Statesman, 26 Feb. 2005*

<http://www.thestatesman.net/page.arcview.php?clid=6&id=98016&usrsess=1>

### Three days of care... but death comes as the end

Statesman News Service

BEHRAMPURE, Feb. 25. — Jaheda Bewa spent the last three days of her life in government care.

The Statesman on last Tuesday had carried a report that Jaheda Bewa of Dayarampur, Jalangi was dying of starvation.

She died early this morning. But this time, the state government did its best to save the widow whose husband, Alimuddin Sheikh died of hunger just five days ago.

Within 24 hours of Sheikh's starvation death report carried

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Fulam Sardar, a tribal girl, committed suicide last Saturday in Karimpur. Her grandfather Mongal Sardar said there is no work in the village. We spend most of the time starving...Being unable to tolerate pain of starvation, she committed suicide. Among a tribal community of 400, there are only four ration cards..

*Anand Bazar Patrika, Kolkata, 15 March 2005*

by The Statesman, the district administration took the initiative to get his dying wife to the hospital at Jalangi where she was given adequate food and medicine. But the efforts came a bit too late.

Like Alimuddin, she was buried this afternoon in a land not her own. The eroding Padma had devoured their land last year.

According to medical reports, Jaheda suffered liver malfunction leading to her death. Jaheda like her husband was underfed for the last few months and she developed bed-sores due to writhing in starvation on the clay-veranda of her hut by the eroding Padma embankment.

The couple had resorted to begging and on 30 January 2005 their daughter-in-law, Golenur Bibi joined the male-brigade of labourers carrying earth for the construction of a village road, a project under Swarnajayanti Gram Rojgar Yojana (SGRY) carried out by Ghoshpara Gram Panchayat in Jalangi. She earned Rs.20 and 7 kg of rice but could not clear her dues because of negligence on part of the panchayat called the local self-government.

This government, however, cleared her dues immediately after the hunger death was reported by The Statesman. The palty sum of Rs.20 and 7 kg of rice deserved by Golenur Bibi, went to her family on 23 February.

The DM, Murshidabad, Mr N Manjunatha Prasad denied that the consecutive deaths of the Sheikh family were caused by starvation.

He said: "Elderly folks at erosion-affected areas such as Dayarampur, Paraspur, Taltoli in Jalangi remained a neglected

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"We have found 20 aged people for old-age pension and introduced the National Food for Work programme in those areas. We have also directed youths not to neglect their parents. We made it clear that they would be absorbed in Food for Work scheme if they take care of their parents," Mr Prasad said.

Meanwhile, the Bannya O Bhangam Pratirodh Committee (flood and erosion prevention committee), Murshidabad, made Jaheda Bewa a living symbol of hunger, enlarged her photograph published in The Statesman and held a protest rally with the poster campaign led by the photograph of Jaheda's hungry face making an appeal for food yesterday.

Mrs Khadija Banu, an activist of the committee said: "We have demanded compensation for the Sheikh family. The starved souls all across the district also put up their demands to the district administration."

<http://www.thestatesman.net/page.arcview.php?clid=23&id=98120&usr-ess=1>

[Editorial]

### Obscene Bengal!

#### Starving to death, begging for life

Obscenity is not on television, it's in rural Bengal. Where the Padma has reduced hundreds to penury and the Party has ensured that hell is a recognisable place in this proletarian para-



"Starving people in Dayarampur returned the rotten rice....Maluk Chand...said, "we cannot consume this rice even if we are starving."

*Anand Bazar Patrika*, Kolkata, 15 April 2005

dise. In a cluster of villages near the Indo-Bangla border in the district of Murshidabad, at least five starvation deaths have been reported over the past month because lands and livelihoods have been washed away by the river

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and residents don't have the money to buy food. A food-for-work programme is in place, but whilst the work is complete, the promised food — seven kg of rice — is nowhere to be seen. Those who still live, now beg to survive. Whole villages of beggars dot this corner of Murshidabad, but there is a paucity of alms-givers in this land riven by hunger and want. And who might the paymaster, blamed by the panchayat chief for the delay in payment to half-starved women who have been working their emaciated frames to try and forage food for the still weaker members of their family, be? The state administration official who deals with payments at the panchayat level! Where there's poverty, there will be politics. Congress leader and Union water resources minister Priyaranjan Das Munshi has apparently offered Central help to check the erosion along the embankments in the Padma-Ganga basin in Murshidabad and Malda. That large parts of Mr Das Munshi's Lok Sabha seat — Raigunj — fall in this area is neither here nor there. The fact is there's an offer on the table and the chief minister of West Bengal, showing commendable common sense, has accepted it.



Starvation death in Domkal, after Jalangi...The starving villagers wait for death, yet there is no government relief. Jogesh Chandra of Congress said, "Most of the villagers are suffering from starvation...the condition is going from worse to worse..It is feared that many may die."

Anand Bazar Patrika, Kolkata, 19 March 2005

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# অভাব-অপুষ্টি, ফের মৃত্যু জলঙ্গিতে

শিব মল্লিকের প্রতিবেদন: কলকাতা: মুরশিদাবাদ জেলার জলঙ্গি গ্রামে পুনঃ পুনঃ মৃত্যু হচ্ছে। এখানে অভাব-অপুষ্টি এবং পানির অভাবের কারণে মৃত্যু হচ্ছে। স্থানীয় বাসিন্দারা অভিযোগ করেছেন যে, সরকারি কর্মকর্তারা এখানে আসছেন না এবং তারা কোনো ব্যবস্থা নেই।

স্থানীয় বাসিন্দারা অভিযোগ করেছেন যে, সরকারি কর্মকর্তারা এখানে আসছেন না এবং তারা কোনো ব্যবস্থা নেই।

Demanding the chief minister's statement about starvation cases in the state, TMC and Congress staged a walk-out from the assembly... Accordindg to both parties, the instances of death by starvation are increasing rapidly but the state government is not taking any step to arrest the situation...Trinamul reported that a person called Panchu Sheikh, a resident of Biswaspara village in Jalangi, died of same fate after similar instances in Dayarampur, Paraspur and Talteliya villages in Murshidabad district.

Anand Bazar Patrika, Kolkata, 16 March 2005

But Budhahadeb Bhattacharjee's irrigation department, apparently taking the cue from the CPI-M central leadership, is far too busy trying to protect its turf and turn the screws on the Congress. The state irrigation minister has ignored the agreement between his notional boss, the chief minister, and the Union minister, and gone ahead with floating a tender for the anti-erosion work the Centre has promised to undertake. But then tenders help win elections. And so what if they don't help fill the stomachs of the starving!

The Statesman, 25-26 February 2005 (editorial)

<http://www.thestatesman.net/page.arcview.php?clid=3&id=97897&usrsess=1>

অন্যদিকের খবর: কলকাতা বুধবার ১৬ মার্চ ২০০৫ | এগারো

## অনাহারে মৃত্যু নিয়ে কক্ষত্যাগ

শিক্ষা বিপোর্টার: বাহো অনাহারে মৃত্যু নিয়ে মুরশিদাবাদের বিবৃতির বিরুদ্ধে রাজ্যসভায় তৃণমূল ও কংগ্রেস বাহিনীতে পৃথক পৃথক ভাবে কিছু মিনিটের জন্য কক্ষত্যাগ করে। দু'দলেরই সন্ত্রাস বাহিনীর তৃণমূলের তরফে জনসভা হয়, মুরশিদাবাদের দয়ারণ, কাঞ্চনশাহা, পালশপুর তালভেদিয়ার পরে আবার অসহযোগিতা আন্দোলনের বিক্ষোভে মুরশিদাবাদ থেকে না-পেয়ে পিছু শেষ নামে যাবে।

Lacking nutrition and vomiting, Panchu Shaikh, a resident of Biswaspara, starved to death. Local BDO Kanchan Chowdhury refused to visit the victim's residence after hearing the news...Wife of the victim, Ramela Bewa, said, "My husband could not work due to illness and had to die due to inadequate food...Local pardhan Iqbal Ahmad said, there is no means of cultivation as the river has eroded the fertile agricultural lands here while the BSF tortures people if they catch fish in the river.."Anand Bazar Patrika, Kolkata, 16 March 2005

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[LETTERS TO THE EDITOR]

**Left should think of poor**

Sir, — The editorial "Obscene Bengal" (25-26 February) rightly lambasts the Left Front government for its failure to stem starvation deaths yet again, this time in the remote villages of Murshidabad district.

Though the Left religiously speaks in favour of the "proletariat", practically it has gone all out to woo the "bourgeois". The welfare of the millions toiling against the vagaries of nature seem to be the last thing on the minds of the entrepreneur-friendly West Bengal government obsessed with IT cities and software parks. The yearning for technological advancement has suppressed the government's desire to rescue the masses from the vicious cycle of malnutrition, poverty and illiteracy. The Left government in its newest avatar is blindly imitating the Hyderabad and Bangalores. It no longer needs the people at the bottom of the social hierarchy. In the eyes of the Left, the consumerist urban class have emerged as those who will pave the way for Bengal's "modernisation", never mind if poor people starve to death in Amlasol or Murshidabad.

It is high time the chief minister concentrates on improving the lives of the poor, rather than project the conditions of a fraction of Kolkata's population as the general picture of West Bengal. He should first devote himself to the eradication of poverty, illiteracy and ensure that the standard of living of the common people is raised. Technological advance can come



Betel-leaf farmers in Karimpur block are dying of starvation.. Krishna Chatterjee, CPIM pradhan of Shikarpur gram panchayat, said peasants are spending their days starving. Bulbuli Pal died in the rural hospital due to same reason. Her father-in-law Kashinath had died earlier due to same reason.

Anand Bazar Patrika, Kolkata, 11 March 2005

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debt, poverty owing to the loss of his homestead in the Padma erosion and the burden of a marriageable girl landed him in bed. The Behrampore hospital referred him to Kolkata. But how could we afford his treatment in Kolkata? He was left with no other alternative but to face the stark reality — death." — SNS

*The Statesman*, 3 March 2005

<http://www.thestatesman.net/page.arcview.php?clid=6&id=98462&usrss=1>

### **Hunger takes toll on West Bengal villagers**

Dayarampur (West Bengal), Mar 6 : Hunger gnaws at the residents of Dayarampur village West Bengal's Murshidabad district, where at least five people have died due to starvation.

With no food, no money and no land to support them, naked children, penury-stricken, malnourished locals can be spotted everywhere in the village.

Coupled with that the continuous river erosion for more than a decade is a curse for the locals, sweeping away their land, leaving no cultivation area to fend for themselves.

"I have 25 bighas of land. I have proper papers for that but the irony of the whole thing is that the land does not exist anymore. Because of the river erosion, all my land is gone. I have no land to cultivate and hence there is no alternative to earn livelihood. The only option is to starve," said Nema Mondal, a villager.

Locals say the situation is so grim that many a times they can grab a morsel only once in three to four days and that their children have no option but to starve and cry for food.

"Because of the river erosion, all our lands have gone. Every year after monsoon we have to shift from one place to the other. We have no land to cultivate and our children eat once in three or four days. Rice comes to the village head office but we never get the share from it. Our children suffer from various diseases and we do not know what to do," said Shanali Halder. Though the villagers blame the authorities for not providing a remedy to their problem, local village representatives too acknowledge the misery.

"There is extreme poverty and starvation due to which people have died. Though some people are working as labourers but the situation is bad," said Gobinda Sarkar, member of the village council.

Following numerous reports of starvation deaths from several states in 2002, the Supreme Court had said that it would hold district authorities responsible for any deaths due to starvation.

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Even though India sits on millions of tonnes of food grains, it's proper distribution to the needy people remain an area of concern, with nearly one-third of the people living in poverty and two-thirds of the children aged 0-4 years remaining malnourished) (ANI)

<http://www.newkerala.com/news-daily/news/features.php?action=fullnews&id=81053>

### Tokens can't take care of hungry mouths here

Asim Pramanik in Behrampore

March 11. — After reading newspaper reports of starvation deaths in villages affected by erosion due to the Padma embankments in Jalangi, a stranger from Kolkata visited the areas and handed one quintal of rice, purchased with his own money, to the villagers.

The kind man returned last week to Kolkata, leaving his relief material in a local resident's custody. The visitor would be very disappointed when he comes to know that the rice could not be distributed among the hungry villagers.

Boys and girls, their parents and grandparents, all rushed with empty bowls to take their share of rice donated by the unknown visitor from Kolkata. Sensing possible pandemonium, the custodian of that rice-bag, Rashida Bibi of Dayarampur, stopped giving away the rice. The villagers' bowls remained empty and they returned frustrated.

"Only 3.5 kg was given to a mendicant-widow. The distribution was stopped because of the rush of hungry people. Just a quintal of rice and a few hundred people vying for their stake in desperation. Further distribution would have led to a riot. Now I can't make out what to do with the rice," said Rashida from Dayarampur, the village which has become a graveyard of several starvation victims, including Alimuddin Sheikh and his wife, Jaheda who died in the third week of February, this year. Considering the gravity of the situation, the district administration has already introduced the National Food for Work Programme (NFFWP), covering work like re-excavation of canals, construction of earthen roads and re-digging of water-bodies, in the hunger-hit areas of Dayarampur, Paraspur and Taltoli in Jalangi panchayat samiti.

The DM, Murshidabad, Mr N Manjunatha Prasad, said: "From the old and poor people of the erosion-affected villages of Jalangi, several widows and infirm farm labourers have been

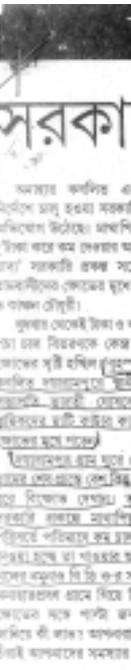
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enlisted as beneficiaries under the Annapurna Yojana. A sound implementation of NFFWP and SGRY projects would provide effective help to villagers."

Though political parties like Congress, SUCI and Trinamul Congress came to the aid of starving families, many are under the impression that the situation will worsen unless the panchayats make the most of Centrally-sponsored schemes meant for development in the fields of health, education and rural development.

Just three days ago, Pradesh Congress President Mr Pranab Mukherjee had said that the panchayats were largely responsible for the hunger deaths. "The district or block administrations have very little to do when it comes to fighting poverty of the villagers. There are huge funds and multiple projects covering beneficiaries from their birth to death. All the money is exclusively spent by the panchayat. Funds are found to be under-utilised because the panchayat functionaries can't prepare project proposals intended to create work-days for the villagers. Construction of village roads or digging a pond might not get as much media attention as starvation deaths. We have allotted huge funds for rural development but there are doubts whether funds get used to the hilt."

It is alleged that there are many still not provided temporary employment. Locals said that the health department has taken the initiative to treat patients suffering from malnutrition and hunger-induced ailments. But many are facing premature death due to lack of government intervention to ensure minimum workdays for every able-bodied person of the starvation-hit areas and care for the ailing and aged.

*The Statesman, 12 March 2005*

<http://www.thestatesman.net/page.arcview.php?clid=23&id=99417&usrsess=1>

### **Congress, Trinamul walk out of Assembly**

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, March 15 [2005]. — The Congress and Trinamul Congress legislators today staged a walk-out in the Assembly separately in protest against the state government's "failure to stop starvation deaths in the districts".

Moving an adjournment motion, Mrs Sonali Guha of the Trinamul referred to the starvation death of Panchu Sheikh, a resident of Jalangi in Murshidabad, yesterday. She said another 25 people were teetering on the brink, accusing the state of look-

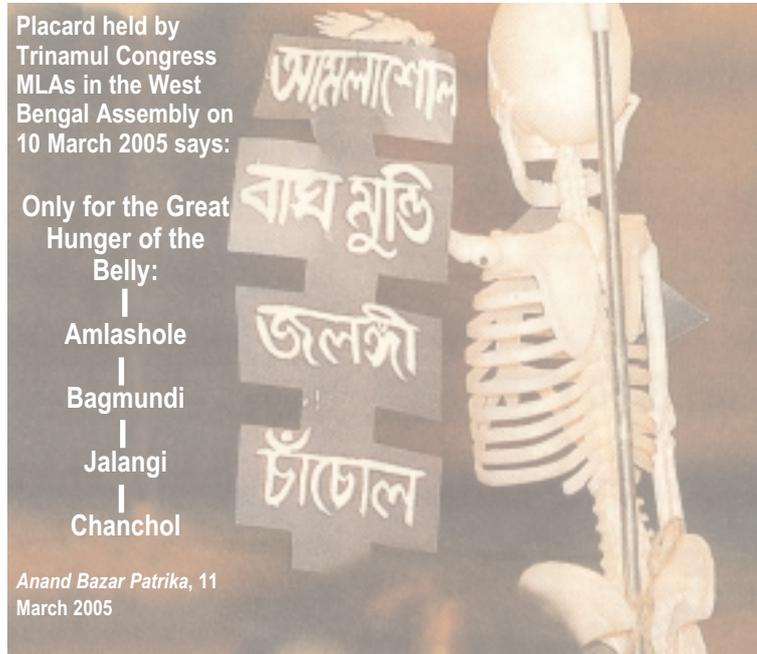
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ing the other way. Ms Guha also said that the rationing system had virtually collapsed. She demanded a statement by chief minister Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee on the preventive steps taken so far. Mr Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay, Opposition chief whip said that the state did not learn any lesson from the starvation deaths at Chanchole and Amlasole and failed to improve the PDS in the affected areas.

The Congress separately moved an adjournment motion on the same matter. Mr Asit Mitra said that the state did not send food and medical help to the affected areas and that it was trying to hush up the matter.

**Social security construction workers:** The government will soon bring the five lakh construction workers of the state under the social security net. For a provident fund scheme to be introduced soon, the workers will have to pay Rs 20 per month and the state Rs 20. They will also be given accident benefit of Rs 10,000 and pension. Women labourers will get maternity leave. Announcing this, state labour minister Mr Mohammad Amin said the matter will be placed in the Assembly soon.

**Council for vocation education:** The standing committee of the Assembly on Education, Information and Cultural Affairs and Sport Services has recommended formulation of a Bill to set

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up an autonomous state council or vocational education and training in the state, the chairman of the committee Mr Padmanidhi Dhar said in the Assembly today.

*The Statesman, 16 March 2005*

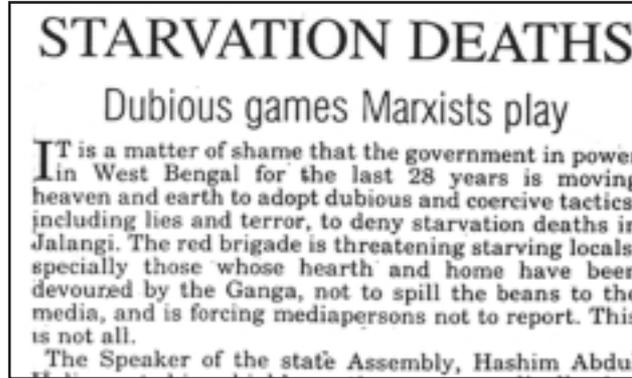
<http://www.thestatesman.net/page.arcview.php?clid=6&id=99767&usrss=1>



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The  
States-  
man  
editorial  
(20  
March  
2005)

### Another hunger death at Jalangi

Statesman News Service

BEHRAMPURE, March 16. — Yet another person died of starvation at Jalangi in Murshidabad last night. A widow, Jhaatumon Bewa (75), from Ghoshpara village in Ghoshpara gram panchayat area was buried this morning.

The widow was suffering from malnutrition for the last few months.

She had four daughters and two sons. Her husband died years ago. When the Padma washed away their farmland and their homes, her son left the village to look for job elsewhere. Her daughters also left the village after getting married.

One of her daughters, also a widow, stayed with her and looked after her. Begging was the only means of earning for them, villagers said. During the harvest season, she was seen gleaning paddy and wheat in the fields beside the eroding banks of the Padma.

Brother of the deceased, Anirul Mondal, said: "The family was going through acute poverty. I often gave her some food but how long could I do that? I have my own family to look after and even I am going through difficult time. She fell sick owing to being starved for such a long time. She could not recover from the effect of malnutrition. I could not do anything but watch her die."

The local CPI-M leaders and workers, however, claimed that the widow had enough food to eat and she died of some disease and old age.

Jhaatumon lived near the residence of Ghoshpara gram panchayat pradhan. She ran from pillar to post for government help

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but her appeal was ignored by the panchayat, her daughter alleged.

In last four weeks, Jalangi witnessed five starvation deaths. The victims included Alimuddin Sheikh and his wife, Jaheda and their neighbour Sattar Sheikh from Dayarampur, Panchu Sheikh from Biswaspara and this Jhaatumon Bewa of Ghoshpara in Jalangi block.

*The Statesman, 17 March 2005*

<http://www.thestatesman.net/page.arcview.php?clid=23&id=99835&usr-ess=1>

### [Editorial]

### STARVATION DEATHS

#### Dubious games Marxists play

IT is a matter of shame that the government in power in West Bengal for the last 28 years is moving heaven and earth to adopt dubious and coercive tactics, including lies and terror, to deny starvation deaths in Jalangi. The red brigade is threatening starving locals, specially those whose hearth and home have been devoured by the Ganga, not to spill the beans to the media, and is forcing mediapersons not to report. This is not all.

The Speaker of the state assembly, Hashim Abdul Halim, acted in a highly partisan manner, disallowing the Opposition demand that the chief minister make a statement in the House on starvation deaths. What the Marxists did with starvation deaths in Amlasol and the Doars, was repeated when the Opposition raised it in the House.

The irony is that the same Marxists waged a bloody food movement in the state in 1966, when the Congress was in power. The rise in price of rice from Rs 4 to Rs 6 a kg, was enough reason for them to launch a movement, but they failed to cite a single starvation death in the state. They brought out "bhukha michhil", justified killing and dismembering policemen and resorted to arson on a large scale with the objective of seizing power.

The Marxists then bitterly opposed the then chief minister, Prafulla Sen's policy of imposing a production levy on rich, rice-growing jotedars. They instigated these the "class enemies" to break with the Congress and embrace them as an ally by floating the Bangla Congress.

The Marxists, in their bid to hide the truth, are attributing all the starvation deaths in the state to old age besides chronic and

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incurable disease, because that is the only alibi that can save them from mounting criticism of misgovernance and insensitivity to the distress of the poor in the countryside. They are too scared to show their real selves before the crucial municipal elections because that could demolish their political *raison d'être* and mar their image of a party of the poor.

That the party is gradually losing touch with the downtrodden people is proved by the fact that the CPI-M legislator of Jalangi and the local panchayat pradhans refused to issue BPL cards to starving victims, despite knowing that they lost everything in the Ganga and were in no position to sustain themselves.

Even the march undertaken by the starving to a local BDO office failed to evoke the expected response underlining heartlessness and hypocrisy. But, they did not forget to collect party levies, running into thousands.

*The Statesman*, 20 March 2005 (Editorial)

<http://www.thestatesman.net/page.archive.php?clid=3&id=100006&usrss=1>

#### **Another starvation death in Jalangi**

JALANGI (Murshidabad), April 16 [2005]. — Forty year-old Neksad Sheikh from Ghoshpara area of Jalangi today died after a prolonged battle with starvation. He had been bedridden for the past three months. His eleven year-old daughter, Runa Khatun, had taken up employment as a domestic help to provide for the family. Sheikh's wife had started begging to sustain the family comprising five members, including two daughters and a son. Though government relief reached the family after the hunger deaths in Jalangi were reported by *The Statesman*, it was too late.

Sheikh's wife, Nujera Bibi, told *The Statesman*: "I could not provide him with food and medicine. I begged from door to door. I received 10 kg wheat and 5 kg rice by way of relief. But how long you can survive just on relief only?"

Sheikh was buried today at Ghoshpara graveyard where a local widow, Jhatumon Bewa, was given a community burial when died after sustained starvation a few weeks ago. — SNS

<http://www.thestatesman.net/page.news.php?clid=6&theme=&usrss=1&id=74354>

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## 5. The Milli Gazette reports

*1st report from Jalangi*

### **Murshidabad starvation deaths They come and take our photos only, victims say**

By Nadim Ahmad, The Milli Gazette

Jalangi, Murshidabad, 28 March 2005: People of this area are fighting to save their lives from death by starvation and there seems no light of hope for them in the near future. No help reached them until today when we offered some food packets to some of the worst affected people here. So far the area has witnessed only a few visits by the local Block Development Officer (BDO) and some mediapersons in addition to local political leaders.

Ramola Bewa, wife of late Panchu Mondal who died of starvation a fortnight ago, told me that she has not seen any help so far. All they did was "fotok tullo" - took my photographs.

Most affected areas here seem to be the villages of Biswaspara, Direpara, Hogladire, Jaikrishnapur and parts of the Jalangi town itself. All these areas consist of poor Muslims with the exception of Hogladire inhabited by the Hindu community which is comparatively well off because they control the business here and manage to garner all available jobs too.

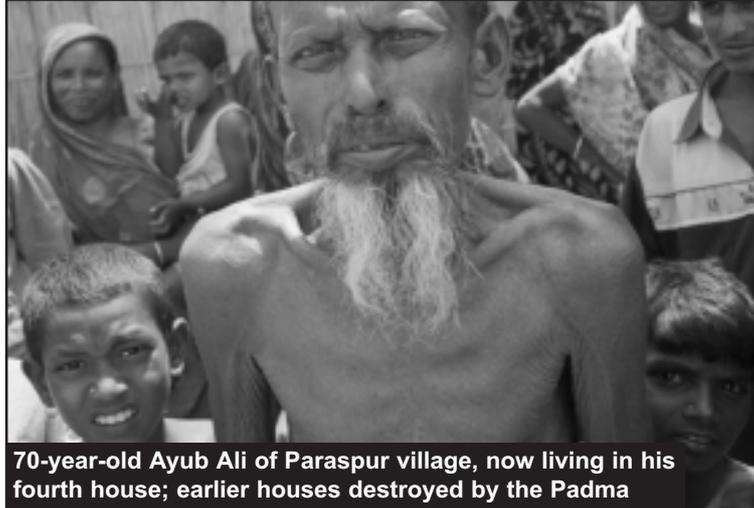
Local people tell us that this situation has been persisting here since around 10 years but the stark effects have been felt only recently. It all started in a big way in 1994 when river Padma started to change its course by cutting into its western banks here and gradually swept away all the agricultural lands of the inhabitants of the villages of Biswaspara and Hogladire as well as Jalangi town. The river even cut into the inhabited areas of Jalangi town. Now almost the whole of the historical town of Jalangi has been swept away and whatever is left of the old town of Jalangi is marooned in the middle of river Padma.

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**70-year-old Ayub Ali of Paraspur village, now living in his fourth house; earlier houses destroyed by the Padma**

People informed me that during the last 10 years river, Padma has changed its course by 8 to 10 kms westwards. Whole of Jalangi population has migrated to Biswaspara, Jaikrishnapur Schoolpara and Gauripur "Bhanganpara" (*i.e.*, swept away locality, in Bengali language). In this way, almost whole of the proper Jalangi population has now migrated to Choapara Panchayat. Literally speaking, the historical town of Jalangi proper does not exist today, while in Choapara Panchayat there exists "another" Panchayat called "Jalangi Choapara" at Jaikrishnapur. Those who had land settled at Biswaspara. At Jaikrishnapur Schoolpara and Gauripur "Bhanganpara", the administration has allocated land for resettlement. Even here some of the relocated areas get submerged in water during the monsoon season. Moreover, they have not been allotted any financial help for rebuilding their collapsed houses. People have built shanties on their own. Financial assistance from governmental agencies is rare or even denied. Because of no bandh or barrage, river Padma is most active near this small town of forty thousand people.

Those affected by this calamity are living in a dire situation of slowly starving to death. Their main source of income was agriculture or related activities. Now they do not have any source of income left in the area. People of working age are seen biding their time loitering around. A very few of them get to work occasionally and for this they get paid around rupees 30 for females and rupees 40 for males, after a full-day's work.

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**This is how the river is encroaching and destroying**

They mostly engage themselves in either household work, rickshaw-pulling, agricultural labour or menial jobs at shops and stores which are few and far between. Some of them also do bidi-making and the like.

The total affected population here is around 25,000 and the most affected are the elderly and children below the age of five. All of them are suffering from malnutrition. Most of them have not been allotted even the below poverty line (BPL) ration cards. At the minimum, one kg of ration on a daily basis is required urgently for at least fifty families tottering at present on the line of death in Jalangi, i.e., Biswaspara, Schoolpara and Gouripur Bhangnpara. There are other needs such as clothing specially for women some of whom could be seen half-naked because they simply do not have clothes. Shelter is also urgently required for some. Wherever this correspondent went, people took him as a representative of some aid agency and asked him to register their names in his notebook, hoping to get some help. They stare curiously at every newcomer. The area needs a long-term concerted rehabilitation programme.

*The Milli Gazette, 16-31 April 2005, p. 4*  
[www.milligazette.com/dailyupdate/2005/20050329.htm](http://www.milligazette.com/dailyupdate/2005/20050329.htm)

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*2nd report from Jalangi***Another starvation death**

Jalangi, Murshidabad, 6 March: Local authorities here are sitting on at least 1652 quintals of rice of the National Food for Work Project (NFFWP) while they have allowed another 843 quintals of rice to rot along with Rs 240,000 under Sampurna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (Full Village Employment Scheme - SGRY) which was allotted for 12,000 working days for Jalangi Panchayat Samity and lies unutilised. In the current year 1652 quintals of rice have been made available to them by the previous month which is also in danger of being left to rot. District Magistrate Mr. N.M Prasad accepted that he has no information regarding this. As regards starvation deaths in the area Mr Prasad accepted that the administration has been slow to move. Had they moved efficiently and in time they could have saved a few lives, he said. On 19 March Mr. Prasad had a meeting with the local authorities at Berhampore Zilla Parishad regarding the poverty eradication programme there. He reprimanded the concerned officials for not taking or being up to the required level of functioning.

As for the local Block Development Officer (BDO) Mr Kanchan Chaudhary, he has the information because he was informed officially by the authorities concerned of the NFFWP. The area chairperson Bharti Ghosh inspected the stock some 15 days earlier at the Jalangi godown and found that the condition of the stock is not good. Zilla Parishad President Ms Aisha Siddika Begum has assured that she would look into the matter herself as reported in the local news paper (A.B. Bangla, Kolkata) of 4 April 2005.

Today I met some local people, Rupjan Bewa, Nirupma Mondol and Sinltu Mandol at Dayarampur in the Ghoshpara panchayat. They informed me that at least 200 women and 600 men had worked two months back under the NFFWP project but they are still waiting for their payments.

There was one more victim on 2 April 05 of the on-going rage of starvation deaths as reported in the local newspaper here (A.B. Bangla, Kolkata) dated 4 April 05. I personally met the family members of the victim Rumpa Sharma, a girl aged 16. Her mother told me that on the fateful day Rumpa had asked for some food two or three hours before taking her life, and also had a scuffle with her younger brothers on the food left in the house, which she

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could not eat because her younger brothers did not share it with her. Mother went out to find some food for her. On returning home, she did not find her daughter. When she (mother) asked about Rumpa's whereabouts, she was told by her elder daughter that Rumpa was in her room weeping. The mother started cooking food, and having done that she called out Rumpa. When she did not get any reply, she went to Rumpa's room. She found the door closed from inside. After a few calls, she peeped into the closed room from the adjacent room which shared a window with the other room.

She could not believe her eyes. Her beloved hungry Rumpa was hanging from the roof-bamboo. Later on the dead body of the victim was brought to the local police station and sent for post-mortem report to Berhampore. At the Jalangi police station, ASI Mr. Sarkar told me that the postmortem report had not been received till now. He also claimed that the case is not of starvation but that the girl had some differences with her father and mother. During the last two and a half months at least 9 persons have died of starvation in Dayarampur village alone. They are: 1. Alimuddin Sheikh, 60 years, 2. Janera Bewa, 50 years, w/o Alimuddin Sheikh, died eight days after her husband, 3. Afijan Bewa, 60 years, 4. Sattar Sheikh, 50 years, 5. Jamera Bewa, 50 years, 6. Ajijul Mondal (originally of Paraspur now living at Dayarampur), 60 years, and 7. Ajijul Mulla s/o Muljan Mulla. Family members say he died a few months back, 8. Gadal Mondal, 16 years, s/o Sasticharan Mondal. Reportedly

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**Sariat Mondal, a victim of starvation, in village Paraspur**

he consumed Caoh (*chune ka pani*) by mistake during night stealthily due to acute hunger assuming it to be toddy, 9. Rumpa Sharma d/o Somendra Sharma, 16 years, who committed suicide on 2 April 05.

There is information about starvation deaths from other areas such as one casualty in Paraspur village. Victims names are Gohar Mondal, 50 years, who was suffering from anemia and Dhiren Mondal, 55 years, of Taltoli. These deaths have occurred in the Ghoshpara Panchayat area. The Ghoshpara Panchayat Pradhan Santosh Ray denied to provide any information regarding starvation deaths. He claimed that most of the deaths had occurred due to old age. He reused to offer information about the number of below poverty line (BPL) ration cards issued to people below poverty line in his area. He also refused to divulge any information regarding the APL or AAPL ration cards.

The local MLA, who belongs to the CPIM, also denied any starvation deaths. However, he confirmed that there are 25% people below poverty line out of which 20% have been allotted BPL ration cards.

There are many other families at Dayarampur village who are suffering from the starvation and anyone of them could die any day. Out of these I have seen four persons identified as Supria Bewa, 60 years, mother of Ajijul Mondal the deceased, Amina Bewa, 65 years (paralysed) and Manjura Bibi. Another family which is in acute poverty is Janara Bibi's of which one casualty Afijan Bewa has already been reported.

Most of the starvation deaths have been reported from

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Dayarampur, in Ghoshpara Panchayat area, which I have not touched in terms of relief work because there Mr. Salim and Mr Jahangir Sheikh of Murshidabad Gram Unnayan Samity are doing relief work and have done some distributions of rice (8 or 7 kg per head).

People who have their land are allowed to go to the other side of the Padma river when they submit their voters identity cards. I was not allowed to cross the river to take photographs and was asked to take permission from the area headquarters at Roushanbagh in Lalbagh, Murshidabad.

A local active person, Gopal Sharma of Dayarampur, has started an agitation against the dire situation prevailing in the area, but the police have arrested his mother Sewa Sharma, 72 years, as well as his son Parimal Sharma at 8 pm in the evening of 30 March 05, and have threatened to arrest Gopal Sharma himself if he does not stop his activities. Now the arrested persons are languishing in jail at Berhampore. The Police has accused them of harassing Parimal Sharma's wife. A case was lodged against them on 04 February 05 under No. 25/05 Jalangi P.S. They have been sent to jail under G.R. 173 / 05 u/s 498 A, 307/34 IPC.

*The Milli Gazette, 16-31 April 2005, p. 4*

*3rd report from Jalangi*

### **Comrades loot starving poor's wages**

By Nadim Ahmad, Jalangi, 18 April: Local influential leaders,



**Sufia Bewa of Paraspur - MG is helping her medical treatment**

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read comrades, have evolved a novel way of earning subscriptions for the party. On the face of it, they appear as helping the poor by supporting the Panchayat Beneficiary Committee but actually the force the poor and starving workers to cough up two rupees for every working day wage. They also compel the starving workers to take home 300 grams of rice less than is actually due to each worker for a day's wage. Those who do not pay this donation to the party are either made to wait for two to three weeks to collect their wages or are denied further work under the Food for Work (FFW) project which has been recently started in the Jalangi area after the Murshidabad District Magistrate Mr N.M. Prasad surveyed the area of the displaced poor people who are starving.

On the one hand, the poor homeless are dying of starvation and on the other, the so-called social workers, rather CPIM cadres, are enriching party coffers out of the sweat of workers who are on the verge of death.

Social activist Mr. Gopen Sharma who has protested against the malpractice is already facing the wrath of both the CPIM and Police. He was implicated in a criminal case and a few days earlier was attacked by a gang of armed criminals who raided his home, beat up and injured his family members and decamped with valuables and cash.

The modus operandi, as a villager disclosed, on the condition that he is not named for fear of losing his wages and chance to work in future, is to pay the wages through coupons which are exchanged at the ration dealer for rice. This has to be done by the workers themselves. But the ruling comrades due to their influence collect the rice on behalf of the contractors and workers and later distribute the same as they wish. In the process they keep 300 grams out of the rice payable to each of the worker for each day's wage. Moreover they also take a cut of two rupees from each day's cash wage, which is fixed at 7 kg of rice and Rs 32 for each working day.

Local Grampanchayat member of the Congress Party alleged that the CPIM members are extorting money out of the wages of the poor and starving workers. "But the Panchayat member belonging to the CPIM, Husna Ara Begum, forcefully denied the allegation.

A young worker of Dayarampur, Biswajeet, complained that he was paid only Rs. 60 and 13.4 kg of rice for two days of work instead of Rupees 64 and 14 kg rice which is due to him

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officially. Idris Ali, a CPIM cadre, accepted the allegation and said that he was doing it at the instruction of the ration shop dealer in order to make up the cost of the cartage and the weight of the rice bags. As of the Rs 2 cut, he said that we are going to hold 'Padyatra' against the soil erosion of the Padma and to welcome the dignitaries of the party we are collecting a meager amount of Rs 2 and even that from willing person only. The ration dealer refused to comment.

The same was the allegation of people of the locality of Jaykrishnapur near Jalangi. Babu Sheik, a resident of Muradpur, said that he had worked for two days during the last three months under the project and he had to give two rupees into the party fund. When asked whether he had complained about this to the authorities, he expressed his fear that if he protested he would not get even two days in future. Kazak Sheik, Rehjan Mondal and Chanchal Sheik also alleged the same. Another person, Amjad Ali Sheik of Biswaspara, said that he is being lured to illegal activities because of non-availability of work.

When this was reported to the local BDO (block development officer) Mr Kanchan Chaudhary, he told the crowd at Dayarampur while he was inspecting the area, to give a written complaint to him. But none dared to complain for fear of reprisals by the party cadres.

Babu Shiekh, Rahejan Sheikh, Kazak Sheikh, Tabsher Sheikh & Chanchal Hoque of Muradpur, Jaykrishnapur, who had lost their houses five years ago to Padma river said that at the time the then local BDO had promised each victim family 5000 rupees as compensation and 6 months work in each year but they did not see the cash or the work. Kazak Sheikh said that her daughter has not been issued her ration card for the last five years. Officials at the local block every time ask her to come next day. Chanchal Hoque, 19, said that his family is settled at other's land and the landlord had filed an eviction suit in the Kolkata High Court so his family has to move out of the land, but does not know where to go. These persons also said that Rs 2 is deducted for the party fund from their wages. They also said that they have got only two days work in a month.

Hazrat Biswas, Jamal Biswas, Ahiruddin, Saiful Mondal, Alauddin Bissau, Harajul Sheikh and several other persons who were digging a pond at Daksin Gosper said that they would get Rs 30 and five kg of rice for a day's work. There were 41 of them in all. The pond is being dug in the private land of Sajidul

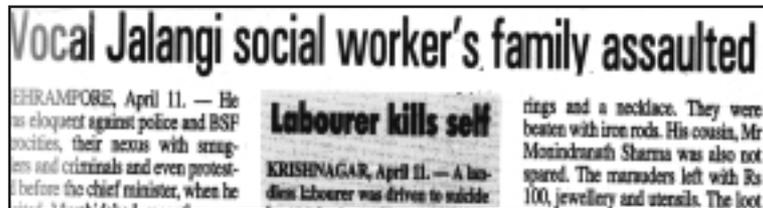
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*The Statesman, Kolkata, 12 April 2005*

Rahman, Panchayat member belonging to the CPIM. This was taking place on the pretext of non-availability of suitable government land to dig a pond. When I visited the place today, a local Congress cadre, Hakim Sheikh told me, "There is a project to dig ponds at every booth of the Gosper Panchayat and for every pond four to four and a half lakh rupees is estimated to be spent. For this pond, a CPIM member had offered his land and would draw the whole amount himself and then will pay the workers as he likes."

Today I also met Abdul Salam, Nobir Ali Mondal and Shehedul Mondal, all residents of Muradpur Jaikrishnapur, who told me that 10 to 12 days earlier we had gone to find work at Jaikrishnapur East where a pond was being dug under the FFW project. When we reached there and wanted to enlist ourselves as workers, the supporter of the CPIM told us that you cannot work here because you are from opposite party. So we were denied work, they said. They further said that they failed to get work under the project.

This attitude of the officials and the self-interest of local politicians are compelling the local people to migrate out of the district. A few of them who could not afford to move out have settled on government land wherever they could find it. Such group of persons from the Bhagwangola held a protest today before the West Bengal agriculture minister when he visited the area.

The day before yesterday a medical camp was organised at the instructions of the Murshidabad DM at Dayarampur in Gosper panchayat. Around 14 doctors from Kolkata and Murshidabad took part and checked patients and also distributed medicines. One Majeda Bibi and her daughter were given fifteen days of medicine and vitamin supplements.

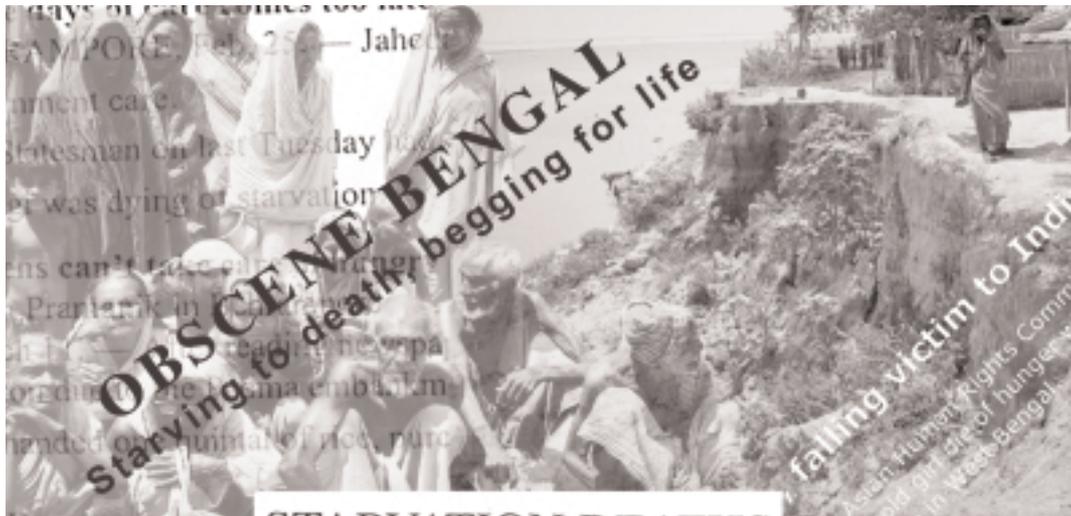
*The Milli Gazette, 1-15 May 2005, p. 4*

**To know more about the developments in the Murshidabad starvation belt and how to help victims, visit: [www.milligazette.com](http://www.milligazette.com)**

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Hunger takes to  
Dayarampur (We  
village West Ben  
to starvation.

## STARVATION DEATHS

Dubious games Marxists play

With no food

IT is a matter of shame that the government in power in West Bengal for the last 28 years is moving heaven and earth to adopt dubious and coercive tactics, including lies and terror, to deny starvation deaths in Jalangi. The red brigade is threatening starving locals, specially those whose hearth and home have been devoured by the Ganga, not to spill the beans to the media, and is forcing mediapersons not to report. This is not all.

gress, Trinamul  
esman News Serv  
LKATA, March 1  
ed a walk-out in t

The Speaker of the state Assembly, Hashim Abdul Halim, acted in a highly partisan manner, disallowing the Opposition demand that the chief minister make a statement in the House on starvation deaths. What the Marxists did with starvation deaths in Amlasol and the Doars, was repeated when the Opposition raised it in the House.

The irony is that the same Marxists would a bloody



## Demonst

We have been holding a demo targeted as part

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