

Centre pulls up Bengal for tribal neglect

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, June 13: Minister of state for tribal affairs, Fagga S. Kulaste has sent a strong note to West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu, alleging that the Left Front government was grossly neglecting tribal interests and leaving a huge volume of funds meant for tribal development unspent for years.

The junior minister has sent a

rather strong note, saying: "I am shocked to know that the West Bengal government has failed to utilise allocated funds for tribal welfare for the financial year 1998-99. Only Rs 8 crore, 37 lakh has been spent out of the allocated amount of Rs 22 crore. It indicates the state government's failure to gear up welfare measures particularly meant for tribals."

Kulaste also passed on a copy of the letter to Mamata Banerjee, the main opponent of the Left Front. She had the letter photocopied and distributed among reporters today. Obviously, Mamata wants to raise the issue later. Kulaste reminded Basu that West Bengal has 40 lakh tribals spread over districts located in drought-prone areas. He wrote: "The tribals are constantly deprived of benefits of Central allocation due to the lukewarm attitude towards tribal welfare by the state administration."

He has even advised Basu to

probe the "reasons behind this alarming lapse, specially in implementation of welfare measures and sub-plans to improve the quality of living of tribals of West Bengal". He has demanded that a probe report be handed over to the Centre so that an "in-depth analysis could be made of the state's failure".

Kulaste has pointed out in his letter to Basu that the Trinamul Congress chief had brought the problems faced by tribals to his

notice.

"She has expressed her deep concern over the miserable state of affairs related to implementation of tribal welfare schemes in the state. She has also desired Central government intervention in the state."

Kulaste had more counsel for Basu. He has said: "In my opinion, a comprehensive time-bound plan should be prepared."

He has suggested that the local panchayat bodies be involved in

the implementation of the tribal schemes. A task force could be constituted to oversee the progress of implementation of various schemes.

The minister has warned Basu that "prolonged negligence may result in extreme disappointment among tribals".

He ended his letter saying: "I am planning to visit tribal areas of West Bengal in the mid-week of July 2000 to have an on-the-spot knowledge of affairs."

THE TELIGRAPH

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