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**THE CYCLONE 'FANI' AFFECTED PEOPLE OF ODISHA**

An extremely severe cyclonic storm 'Fani' hit the coastal areas of Odisha in the early hours of May 3. It has left behind a trail of destruction. The cyclone made landfall near the coastal pilgrimage centre of Puri and brought heavy winds (at the rate of almost 200 kms per hour) and rainfall to Puri, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and the adjoining areas. Odisha faces cyclones almost every year; we have heard of the recent cyclones Hudhud, Titli, Phailin and Super Cyclone of 1999. But this time, cyclone Fani was one of the rarest of rare cyclones – the first of its kind in last 43 years and third in last 150 years.

It is estimated that 1.65 crore people have been affected in 14 districts of Odisha, with the number of affected villages put at over 18,000. According to rough estimates, more than five lakh houses have been damaged. Till now, 65 deaths have been confirmed. But the figure is bound to go up once the debris is cleared and a clear assessment is made. According to estimates of the State Disaster Management Authority, at least 45,000 kms of power lines and 11,000 distribution transformers have been destroyed. Electric poles, trees, boundary walls, overhead water tanks, window panes have fallen flat everywhere. The city of Bhubaneswar has been badly battered. Bhubaneswar, otherwise known as a green city with coconut trees dotting the entire landscape, has literally become treeless. The famous Nandankanan zoological park has been completely devastated. But the city that has borne the brunt of the cyclone is the pilgrimage centre Puri. Puri has been damaged beyond recognition. The city has been literally flattened. The cyclone made landfall at Puri with windspeeds of 200kmph and then increasing up to 240 kmph. The severity was such that the famed Lord Jagannath Temple of Puri has not been spared either.

Our own employees have also suffered badly. There was no electricity and water for days on end. Power outage continues in many parts even today. ATMs had run dry. People were without cash. There were long queues before banks. The situation became so critical that many of our employees had no choice but to leave Bhubaneswar with their family members to some safe places. Many children of insurance employees from across India studying in different colleges/universities in Bhubaneswar were stranded in their hostels without food, water, electricity, money. With more than 200 trains cancelled and air traffic disrupted, they had a really harrowing experience. The complete disruption of mobile telephone network made matters all the more difficult. We convey our red salute to our Bhubaneswar comrades who

toiled very hard to locate such children, rescue them from their hostels, put them in some safe places and send them off to their respective places by giving some money. And all this, while they themselves had a tough time with their families.

All this however pales into insignificance when compared to the sufferings of the common man, the poor and down trodden. The corporate media, busy as it is singing praise for the ruling classes in the midst of the ongoing electoral battle, gave little or no coverage to the plight of the poor. Lakhs of poor families with hungry children are languishing in the government run relief centres. People living in slums in Bhubaneswar and Puri are without food and water even today. Their houses with thatched roofs have been completely blown off. With home and hearth both gone, life has become miserable for millions of people. They need immediate help.

How can we remain mute spectators in this time of crisis? It has been our tradition to help the needy. Lets all join hands to help the cyclone affected people of Odisha. Cuttack Divisional Unit of AIIEA has already started the relief operations. Employees are contributing generously. We have requested Cuttack and Bhubaneswar units to jointly undertake the relief operations. We request all our members, employees and friends to contribute generously to the relief efforts and help the cyclone victims of Odisha.

With Greetings,

Comradely Yours

*Shreekanth Mishra*

General Secretary