

Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India

On

Flood in Assam

Dr. Manmohan Singh
Prime Minister of India
PMO, South Block, Raisina Hill,
New Delhi – 110011.

(Through the High Commissioner of India, London)

Dated, London, the 23rd of July 2012

Honourable Prime Minister,

The Assamese community in the United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the current flood situation in Assam. As you will have seen for yourself from your aerial visit to the flood affected areas, there has been widespread devastation leading to 124 deaths. Flood in Kaziranga National park has killed 534 animals including 13 Rhinos. Flood in Assam has affected 27 districts covering about 2800 villages, leading to large-scale losses of property and crops, and also causing serious damages to the fragile rural infrastructure. This has devastating consequences on the rural population, and some 250,000 people in 21 districts have been made homeless.

We are encouraged that you have announced a sum of Rs.500 crores for immediate relief. **On humanitarian grounds, we request that emergency accommodation and supply of rations be provided to the homeless people, and adequate compensation be paid immediately to the families who have lost their loved ones, under proper accountability and transparency.** Press reports suggest that some people made homeless by floods in the past had to wait for more than a year for proper rehabilitation. We also request that damaged infrastructure be repaired and resources for this purpose be made available as soon as possible. Compensation should be paid to the poor farmers whose cropland has been ruined by layers of sand deposited by flood.

The current flood has been made worse by 44 breaches of the old embankments (and some reports suggest about 100 breaches) which were built in the 1950's as temporary structures. These worn out embankments have been inadequately maintained by the Assam Water Resources Department as revealed by the perpetual recurrence of breaches. The main reason, as has been alleged in the Press, is the egregious leakage of funds, leading to shoddily built embankments. The Assam Human Rights Commission has taken the brave decision to take suo moto cognizance of the alleged leakage of funds which has led to untold human suffering of thousands of people. There should be a CBI inquiry into these allegations to establish the truth. **It is a tragic state of affair that crores of rupees spent in repairing dykes is an annual waste, as the repaired dykes are swept away by flood during the following year.**

We urge you to pay serious attention to the fact that the rural poor in Assam suffer this scourge of flood year after year. When the flood comes, the Government of Assam takes up short-term fire-fighting measures to ameliorate the situation. It is high time that we consider long-term solutions for a permanent resolution of this problem. We are of the opinion that pouring money into the repair of embankments will not solve the flood problem in Assam. **The Central government should declare Assam's perennial flood problem as a national problem, and take charge to find a permanent solution.** On this, we support the resolution passed unanimously by the Assam State Assembly last week. We request you to persuade the neighbouring States to accept the creation of the North East Water Regulatory Authority. We support Mr. Tarun Gogoi's proposal for establishing a full-fledged Central Water Commission office in Guwahati. The Central Water Commission in conjunction with the Brahmaputra Board and the Assam Water Resources Department, must find long-term solutions to this perennial problem by investing in serious scientific studies and by seeking help from the internationally reputed experts in flood control. **There should be a feasible 15-year plan to execute the agreed solutions which may range from dredging to building redesigned stronger and higher embankments replacing the 50-year old dilapidated embankments.**

The solutions to the flood problems must also address the closely related problem of erosion. The current annual loss of land due to erosion is estimated to be 80 sq km. The river island Majuli is threatened by rapid erosion which has become an international concern. At the heart of the problem is the fact that the riverbed of the Brahmaputra, which is the second

greatest sediment carrier after the Yellow River in China, has risen by several feet during the last 60 years (since the 1950 earthquake). **Therefore, the 15-year plan must have a holistic approach to the flood and erosion problems in Assam.** Such a plan will require a vast amount of resources, perhaps in the region of Rs.25,000 crores over 15 years, and the this fund should come from the Central Government.

During your recent visit to Assam, you have announced that the Calamity Relief Fund would henceforth be utilised for combating erosion by Brahmaputra. We are delighted the Central Government has recognised the seriousness of the erosion problem. We do believe that your deep realisation of the seriousness of the problems of flood and erosion in Assam will lead to a permanent solution. We appeal to you, Honourable Prime Minister, to push matters forward towards finding long-term solutions so that the future generations in Assam do not suffer miseries heaped annually by flood.

Correspondence may be addressed to the first signatory.

Yours faithfully,

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