

/

Report on the NHRC's team visit to
Thiruvannamalai District, Tamil Nadu.

1. The National Human Rights Commission has identified Thiruvannamalai District of Tamil Nadu as one of the 28 backwards districts in the country to be monitored, as part of its Human Rights Awareness Programme. A team consisting of Shri P.C. Sharma, Member, NHRC, Shri K.S. Money, Secretary-General, Dr. Y.L. Tekhre, Director (Research) and Shri Viplav Kumar, SSP, visited the district from 25th to 29th October, 2010.

2. The overall objective of the visit of the NHRC team was to evaluate and to take stock of the implementation of the various developmental programmes which have a bearing on the human rights of the people of the district e.g. Right to Food, Right to Education, Right to Health and Right to Custodial Justice as also the rights of the vulnerable sections of the society such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Minorities. Women and children.

3. NHRC team visited the following places in the district:

1. District Hospital, Thiruvannamalai
2. Police Station, Kalasapakkam, Tiruvannmalai,
3. Sub Jail, Arni and Sub Jail, Thiruvannamalai.
4. Anganwadi Centre, at Kuruvimalai.

5. Elementary School at Inamkariyanthal.
6. Middle School at Puliur.
7. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Residential School at Puliur in Jawadhu Hills Area.
8. Girls Higher Secondary School Polur.
9. PDS Shops at Kuruvimalai and Polur.
10. Farmers' Shandy in Thiruvannamalai.
11. Sri Lankan Refugee Camp at Thenpallipattu Village.
12. Seelapanthal and Kukampadi vilages for houses under construction under Right to Shelter.
13. Jawadhu Hills, a predominantly tribal area;

4. During these field visits the team interacted and discussed human rights related issues with a range of stakeholders, programme managers, the civil society and NGOs.

5. Workshop on Human Rights

5.1 On the initiative of Shri P.C. Sharma, Hon. Member a workshop was organized by the District Collector to discuss human rights related issues with all the State Government functionaries at the District Collectorate.

5.2 The workshop was attended by over 150 State functionaries which included the Deputy Secretary, Govt. of Tamil Nadu Public Deptt; Commissioner, Social Welfare, Govt. of Tamil Nadu, District Officers from the departments of Revenue, Education, Health, Welfare, Agriculture, Police, Prison and Public Works Departments. Public representatives such as local MLA, Members

of the Municipalities, District Panchayat and representatives of local NGOs also attended the workshop.

5.3 Shri P.C. Sharma, Hon. Member addressed the participants of the Workshop and explained to them the purpose of the visit of the NHRC to the District. He sensitised them to the various aspects of human rights and how best they can apply them in their day to day functions to safeguard the human rights of the people and ensure that human rights of the public are not violated by any of their acts by omission or commission while performing their duties.

5.4 The participants were later divided into four groups and each group deliberated on human rights related themes – Right to Food, Right to Custodial Justice, Right to Education and Right to Health.

6. Right to Health:

6.1 The health profile of the district indicated that death rate per 1000 population was 6.4, infant mortality rate 24.5, birth rate 17.5 and couple protection rate (%) 58. The District Collector informed that besides the District Hospital in Tiruvannamalai 5 Community Health Centres, 20 Primary Health Centres and 410 Health sub-centres were functioning in the District. On an average 5-6 villages are covered under a Health sub-centre and 25-30 villages under a PHC. Average radial distance covered by a health sub-centre was approximately 3 kms, 8 kms by a PHC and 15 kms by

a CHC. A number of private hospitals were also functioning in the district. Except for a few specialized services almost all the health facilities were provided in the district. National Rural Health Mission has also been introduced since the year 2006. In the district 28 Integrated Counselling and Testing Centres (ICTC) are also functioning and 1777 HIV cases (825 male and 812 female) had been registered.

6.2 The NHRC team visited the District Hospital located in Thiruvannamalai. The hospital, functioning since 1950, had a capacity of 362 beds. It was informed by the Hospital Superintendent that over 2000 patients attend the OPD of the hospital every day. Lab facilities including x-ray and other specialized services were provided to the patients in the hospital. There was no shortage of life saving drugs and essential drugs for the patients. However, as informed by the Chief Medical Officer, ten posts of medical officers, 30 posts of female health workers, 40 posts of laboratory technicians and six posts of nurse mid-wife were lying vacant in the district hospital.

6.3 Noticeably, in the district of Thiruvannamalai under the Kalaignar Kappetu Thittam scheme, insurance cover for free medical treatment up to Rs. 1 lakh for 51 identified diseases has been made available to the general public by the State government. The Joint Director Health Services of the District informed that 4400 patients were given financial support under the scheme in the year 2010 and 10 crores rupees had been spent on it.

7. Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) centres: It was informed that 1381 Anganwadi centres are functioning in the district. In these ICDS centres children in the age group of 0-6 years, adult girls, pregnant women, lactating mothers and old age pensioners are given assistance. The NHRC team visited Anganwadi centre at Kuruvimalai. 27 children were present in this centre. The centre was found to be well managed, with adequate provision for food, water, education and immunization facilities for the children enrolled in the centre. Information, education and communication aspects of health besides nutrition and life style related approaches were adopted in the ICDS centre for adolescent and old age persons. One-day workshop at the block level was periodically organized in the ICDS centre for the newly married couples in which information and comprehensive counselling was provided to them regarding pregnancy, use of contraceptive, child care, ANC care and other health and nutritional aspects relevant in day-to-day life.

8. Right to Education:

8.1 The team visited Panchayat union elementary school at Inamkariyanthal. This was a co-education school in which 140 students were enrolled. The overall infrastructure and condition of the school was quite good. All teachers were qualified and trained. This school was covered under the Mid-day meal programme. The children were given eggs, 5 days in a week. For vegetarian children, banana was given in place of eggs. For cooking the mid-day meal firewood was being used which emitted smoke in the premises of the school. However, during discussion the District

Collector informed that soon these would be replaced with LPG stoves.

8.2 The team visited a middle school at Puliur, which was managed by the Forest department. This was a co-education residential school. During interaction with the students it was found that qualitatively the students were getting proper education. Parent-teachers meeting was organized every month. Moreover, annual results of the students indicated good quality of education provided in the school.

8.3 The team visited another school named Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Residential School at Puliur in Jawadhu Hills area. This school was functioning as part of the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan scheme under which the dropouts in the area were identified and enrolled in the school. Eight teachers were posted and about hundred girls were studying in the school. The students were having adequate recreations and sports activities in the school. Health check up of the students was also periodically done by the qualified doctors, once in a month.

8.4 The team also visited Girls Higher Secondary School, Polur in which nearly 2100 girls were enrolled. 49 trained teachers were posted in the school and the teachers – students' ratio was about 1: 40. Education from class 1 to 12 was provided in this school. Mid-day meal was provided to the students up to the 10th class. During interaction with the NHRC team the students expressed satisfaction regarding the quality and quantity of the food given under the mid-day meal scheme. The overall

impression of the school in terms of academic environment, cleanliness, space in the classrooms, computer facilities and teaching aids was found quite satisfactory.

8.5 It was informed that since implementation of the mid-day meal scheme, number of school dropouts has come down in the district. While interacting with the NHRC team the local people also expressed satisfaction with the scheme. The District Collector also informed that need based supplementary food in terms of curry leaf and drumstick leaf powder was introduced in two blocks where iron deficiency in school going children was reported. It was also informed that construction of the compound walls for all the educational institutions in the district was in the pipeline. Hostels have been especially provided to the students belonging to the backward classes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes where the students were getting free food.

9. Policing of Custodial Justice:

9.1 The sub-jails: The District Collector informed that there are six sub-jails in the district, one in each Taluq, where only male under trial prisoners are kept while the convict prisoners are kept in the Central Prison Vellore.

9.2 The NHRC team visited two sub-jails, namely, sub-jail Thiruvannamalai and sub-jail Arni, which have a sanctioned capacity of 45 and 17 respectively. However, on the day of visit the sub-jail Thiruvannamalai had only 7 male under trial prisoners whereas Arni sub-jail had only 4 male under trial prisoners. The

jail buildings are quite old, over hundred years, but both the jail buildings were well maintained, very neat and clean.

9.3 Interaction with the prison inmates revealed that they were in the jail for durations less than a month, arrested in petty offences, mostly related to illicit liquor (Arrack). The prisoners appeared satisfied with the facilities provided in the jails. They also mentioned that there was no problem related to their production in the courts due to non-availability of police escorts or otherwise. The NHRC team also found that the rights of the prisoner related to food, water, sanitation and hygiene are being observed satisfactorily. Though a permanent medical officer is not posted in these sub-jails, a doctor from the government hospital visits the jails on daily basis and sick prisoners are sent to the nearby government hospital. The NHRC team noticed that though the initial health screening of the prisoners at the time of their admission in jail is being done, the health screening is done only by visual examination.

9.4 The Police Stations: The NHRC team visited police stations namely Kalasapakkam police station and Thiruvannamalai East police station. The police stations had good infrastructure in respect to building, conveyance and communication facilities. The police officials informed that there was no dearth of stationery items which was provided by the District Police Office on regular basis. The directions of the Supreme Court regarding rights of the arrested persons had been properly displayed on a notice board in both these police stations. The Station House Officers of these police stations mentioned that the arrested persons are not

provided blankets in the police lock up as they are sent to judicial custody soon after their arrest. The District SP was asked to provide adequate beddings to the arrested persons if they are kept in the lock up for longer duration.

9.5 The Supdt. Of Police intimated that there has not been any case of encounter killing or death in police custody in the district for a long time. From the law and order point of view also the district has remained relatively calm. During the interaction of the NHRC team with the members of civil society in the district nobody complained against the police and it appears that the public is by and large satisfied with the working of the police in the district.

9.6 The Supdt. Of Police intimated that majority of the policemen posted in the district, in the headquarters as well as in rural police units, have been provided residential quarters. During interaction with the policemen by the NHRC team the policemen did not complain about their living conditions. However, statistics provided by the District Collector shows that there is a shortage of 445 policemen in the district, mostly in the ranks of Head Constable and Constable. This has increased workload on the police personnel, on an average a policeman performing duty for about 11 hours a day. The State Government should take measures to fill up the vacancies at the earliest so as to ease the workload.

10. RIGHT TO FOOD, LIVELIHOOD & SHELTER:

10.1 Public Distribution System: The district of Thiruvannamalai is having a good public distribution system. The Collector informed

that there were 1028 full time and 372 part time fare price shops. It was also informed that these shops were available even in the remote and far flung areas, at not more than 3 km of distance from a village. The NHRC team visited PDS shops at Kuruvimalai and Polur in the district and observed that monthly targets have been fixed individually for Tehsildars, Deputy Tehsildars and Special Revenue Inspectors for inspection of these fare price shops. Electronic weighing machines were being used and almost all the household grocery items – wheat, rice, palm oil, atta, urad dal, toor dal, kerosene oil and other spices – were available in these shops.

10.2 The State Government has initiated a number of measures to ensure food security to the citizens and for this a number of programmes are being implemented in the district, notable among which are Rs. 1 per kg rice to all, special ration card for Below Poverty Line (BPL) families and to police & forest personnel, 4 kg rice to Old age pensioners free of cost, providing masala items at subsidized rates besides providing other food grain items, sugar and kerosene oil through the Public Distribution System. LPG connection is given to the ration card holders and one gas cylinder is provided free of cost.

10.3 The District Collector, informed that towards implementation of the Antyodaya Anna Yojana and Annapurna Scheme the list of beneficiaries is prepared by the municipal and town authorities in urban areas and by the village panchayats in the rural areas. The zonal officers the Food Supply Department then crosscheck this list of eligible persons. During the discussion it was highlighted by the Food Supply Department officials that nearly 50,000 bogus

ration cards were found last year and cancelled in a special drive carried out by them.

10.4 Farmer's Shandy: In Thiruvannamalai the NHRC team visited farmers' shandy, which is unique initiative for betterment of farmers. Nearly 100 small and marginal farmers had been given earmarked places in the shandy. Transportation charges were exempted for these farmers and electronic weighing machine was also provided to them by the district administration free of cost. The farmers sell their products directly to the consumers in the shandy every day and on an average earn a profit of Rs.600/- a day. The farmers were quite satisfied with the system and according to the beneficiaries this was one of the most important source of income for them.

10.5 Sri Lankan Refugee Camps: The District Collector informed that about 4000 Sri Lankan refugee have been living in 13 camps in the district of Thiruvannamalai. The refugees have been staying in these camps for the last about 20 years. A few of them returned to their native places in Sri Lanka but most of them are not interested to go back at all as their property has been reportedly illegally occupied, and they are unsure about their resettlement.

10.6 The NHRC Team visited one such refugee camp located at Thenpallipattu village. The Government of Tamil Nadu was extending a number of welfare measures to these refugees, which included financial support to the tune of Rs.400/- to the head of the family every month, providing 12 kg of rice every month for each of the family members above 8 years of age at the subsidized rate of

Rs. 0.57 per kg, 10 ltrs. Of kerosene oil and 2 kgs. Of sugar every month to each family at PDS rate and free electricity. Since the year 2008 the State government has also been providing clothing materials to these refugees every year. Recently free colour televisions have been distributed to the refugees in the district.

10.7 While interacting with the refugees in the camp it was found that they were satisfied with regard to the means of their livelihood. They were allowed to work outside the refugee's camp and they were living in a highly integrated and harmonial relationship with the local community. The team observed that these refugees were assimilated in the society in a positive manner, without any discrimination.

11. Right to Shelter: A mass campaign is being carried out in the district to convert all the thatched houses into pakka concrete houses at a cost of Rs. 75,000/- each, under the Kalaingar housing scheme. The Government through cooperative societies provides doors, windows and other essential items to the beneficiaries for construction of concrete houses. The Team visited such under construction houses at Seelapanthal and Kukampadi villages.

12. Overall assessment and Recommendations:

The NHRC team has been pleasantly surprised to see that most of the welfare schemes being run by the district administration are well taken care of under the dynamic leadership of its young District Collector, who has been able to personally monitor most of these schemes on periodic basis.

The recommendations of the NHRC team are as below:

12.1 It was observed that the Public Distribution System was functioning very well in the Thiruvannamalai district. There was no starvation death reported at all in the district. In addressing the issues related to the 'Right to Food' to the citizens through the PDS scheme, Tamil Nadu State seems to be a role model for all the States in the country.

12.2 The NHRC team was told that as part of welfare measures for the people belonging to the weaker sections of the society, the State Govt is running SC and backward class hostels. The Commission recommends that naming of these institutions should not be class indicative, as it is suggestive of discriminatory practices.

12.3 The State Govt. has initiated a number of welfare measures for the people. The Commission recommends that the district authorities should make the people in remote areas aware about these welfare and developmental programmes so that they can also take advantage of these programmes.

12.4 The district has a sizeable portion of uncultivable land (21,039 hectare). The Commission recommends that efforts should be made to make it cultivable and distribute it to the poorer section of the society so as to augment their incomes.