

## Centre using tool with political excuse to hammer state: Sircar

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Kolkata: In her reply in Rajya Sabha, Union minister of state for rural development Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti did not explain what the “non-compliances” she cited as the reason for Bengal not receiving a single paisa in NREGS payout were, nor did she go into any other specifics.

“Funds release to the states is a continuous process, and the Centre is committed to making funds available to the states for the implementation of the scheme,” she said. “The ministry releases funds in two tranches, with each tranche consisting of one or more instalments, keeping in view the ‘agreed to’ labour budget, demand for work, opening balance, pace of utilization of funds, pending liabilities, overall performance and subject to compliance of guidelines of the scheme and submission of relevant documents by the states.”

Trinamool MP Jawahar Sircar, who had posed the question, accused the Centre of “using a tool with a political excuse to hammer a state, nailing the poor people involved in 100 days’ work”, adding, “I had mentioned in Parliament about frauds involving crores in PM Kisan Yojana, but have you stopped funding those states where there is misuse of PM Kisan funds? I find this measure to be politically motivated.”

Bengal panchayat minister Pradip Majumdar said CM Mamata Banerjee had been trying her best to convince the PM to get the Centre to release the funds. “It is a dichotomy. The Centre, on one hand, releases funds for BJP-run states, but on the other it has no funds for Bengal. It is anti-poor. This policy by BJP will harm the poor,” he said.

Banerjee, in her meeting with the PM, had pointed out that Bengal was a “frontrunner” in executing central schemes, but often funds were released towards the end of the financial year, leading to difficulties in utilization and timely implementation. She had also mentioned that the huge amount of money the state was owed made it difficult to run day-to-day affairs.

Opposition leader Suwendu Adhikari, in a letter to the PM, had alleged “misuse” of central schemes meant for rural Bengal. TMC had questioned whether his “real motive” was to stall funding for the poor in Bengal.

Senior lawyer Subroto Mookherjee said Section 27 of MGNREGA mentioned that the Centre may issue directions as it may find necessary to states for proper utilization of NREGS. “If necessary, the Centre can stop release of funds to the scheme and institute appropriate remedial measures for its proper implementation within a reasonable time,” Mookherjee said.