

Ensure that no migrant worker goes hungry, SC instructs govt.

Court sets July 31 deadline, tells States to implement One Nation One Ration Card

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NEW DELHI

A government cannot “abdicate” its duties to feed migrant workers, especially during a pandemic, merely because they did not have ration cards, the Supreme Court said in a judgment on Tuesday.

“There is a large number of such migrants who do not possess any card. Their above disability is due to their poverty and lack of education. The State cannot abdicate its duty towards such persons, especially in the wake of the pandemic where large numbers of migrant workers are not able to get jobs which may satisfy their basic needs,” a Bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and M.R. Shah observed in an 80-page judgment.

The court set July 31 as the deadline for the Centre and the States to ensure their “bounden duty” that none among the estimated 38 crore migrant workers, who form one-fourth of the country’s population, goes hungry during the pandemic. These workers too have made “considerable contributions” to the country’s growth and economic development.

The court ordered the State governments to frame schemes to distribute dry ra-

Fighting hunger



Helping hands: Members of an NGO distributing food to migrant labourers and the homeless in Vijayawada on Sunday. ■ K.V.S. GIRI

The [Labour] Ministry is not alive to the concerns of the migrant workers. The non-action of the Ministry is strongly disapproved

JUSTICE ASHOK BHUSHAN Supreme Court judge

tions to migrant workers by July 31. “The States/Union Territories have to make extra efforts to reach migrant labourers so that no migrant labourer is denied two meals a day,” Justice Bhushan, who wrote the judgment, said.

The Centre has to supply whatever additional quantity of food grains a State demanded. The allocation of additional food grains and running of community kitchens in prominent places to feed workers should continue throughout the pandemic, the court directed.

Right to food, one of the

“bare necessities of life”, was an intrinsic part of the right to live with dignity, the court told the government.

It ordered all the States to fully implement the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme by July 31. The scheme allows migrant labourers covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) to access food at any fair price shop with his or her ration card in any part of the country.

‘Unpardonable apathy’

The court slammed the Labour Ministry for its “unpar-

Both, in the first and the second wave of the pandemic, migrant workers had been exposed to financial and other forms of hardships due to their limited access and claim to the welfare resources offered by the States/Union Territories. Migrant labourers are particularly vulnerable to the economic regression

SUPREME COURT

donable apathy” in not completing the work of the ₹45.39 crore National Database for Unorganised Workers (NDUW) portal to register and identify migrant workers and unorganised labourers to ensure their rights, welfare and food security.

The court had ordered the Ministry to finalise the NDUW module way back in 2018. The Centre has blamed the delay in implementation on “software” problems.

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