



Jharkhand

# Hunger death cry in Ramgarh, finger at lockdown

My mother last ate three days ago when food was last cooked at home: Son of the deceased

By Vishvendu Jaipuria in Hazaribagh

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Ramgarh MLA Mamta Devi in Gola village on Thursday.

Picture by Vishvendu Jaipuria

**A** 72-year-old woman died on Thursday in a village in Ramgarh district, her son calling it a starvation death and blaming his joblessness during the lockdown for it.

Deceased Upasi Devi's son Jogan Nayak, 48, said: "My mother last ate three days ago when food was last cooked at home."

He added that they had no ration card and he had no money as work at construction sites had stopped due to the lockdown.

"I am a daily wage labourer with no (other) income. Besides my mother, I have a wife and four children," said Jogan, a resident of village Sangrampur of Gola, some 20km from the district headquarters and 51km from Ranchi. It is very close to chief minister Hemant Soren's ancestral village, Nemra.

Officials, including Ramgarh's deputy commissioner (DC), rejected the hunger death claim, saying food grains were found at the woman's home.

Jogan said that the food grains were brought by neighbours after they heard of Upasi's death. "They also gave us some tea," he said.

Congress Ramgarh MLA Mamta Devi, who spoke to the family, asked officials to keep "an open mind", pointing out the family did not have a ration card and Jogan was jobless since the lockdown.

Ramgarh DC Sandeep Kumar Singh, however, rejected the claim of hunger death and said Upasi was old and ill.



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“My team (block development officer Kuldeep Kumar, block supply officer Raj Shekhar and Gola police station officer in-charge Sanjay Gupta) found food grains at the house as well as food cooked in the morning at the house. It is enough to reject this as a hunger death,” Singh said.

He said ration card was not a hurdle as below poverty line families such as Upasi’s were getting 10kg ration and 1kg salt from the block office.

“We had also sanctioned Rs 10,000 to each mukhiya who were asked to keep watch on families facing any kind of trouble and to immediately give them food grains through the emergency fund,” he said.

**The Telegraph** found out that the mukhiya who looks after Sangrampur village, Seema Devi, lives in the Gola block headquarters, over 10km away.

The visiting team claimed Upasi received Rs 1,000 as widow pension. Gola police station OC Gupta said post-mortem would reveal the real cause of death.

Ramgarh MLA Mamta, who reached Sangrampur with Congress Rajya Sabha candidate Shahzada Anwar, said it was a matter of investigation as to how Upasi’s ration card got rejected after May 2017.

“Let’s not be hasty in reaching any conclusion right now,” the MLA said, adding all the facts needed to emerge.

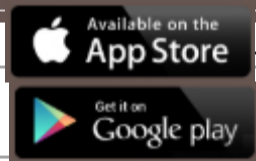
Anwar added that it would be very unfortunate if the woman died of hunger despite so many government schemes for food to the poor.

At least 25 persons — including Upasi Devi — are suspected to have died of hunger in Jharkhand since September 2017, food activists have said. No government has, however, confirmed a single case as caused by starvation.

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