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'The country was under attack and they were worried about money'

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Unusually for the Maharashtra government, relief for the victims of the 26/11 attacks arrived swiftly. Archan Masih meets Mumbai Collector Idzes Angmo Kundan who supervised that operation.

Of the 175 people who died in the Mumbai terrorist attack on November 26, compensation has been disbursed to 141 deceased.

"Those who have not received the compensation include two unidentified bodies and few foreign nationals whose consulates have not accepted the compensation due to some legal paperwork," says Idzes Angmo Kundan, the district collector and district magistrate of Mumbai.

The list of the 175 dead include the 9 terrorists. Ajmal Kasab, the lone terrorist to be captured alive, currently faces trial in Mumbai.

The total amount of compensation disbursed is around Rs 14 crores (Rs 140 million).

However, compensation from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund has still not been disbursed to some victims. The delay, according to Kundan, is because some verification about legal heirs/bank accounts is pending due to lack of information etc. This verified information has been sent to the PMO for disbursement of relief.

According to a statement issued by former city MP Kirit Somaiya, in a status report filed with the state govt with the National Human Rights Commission, 43 deceased and 36 injured have yet not received compensation from the PMO.

Rs 25 lakh (Rs 2.5 million) each has been given to the 22 police officers and men who died in the operation by the state government, while the other deceased received Rs 5 lakh (Rs 500,000) plus funeral expenses which was Rs 25,000 for those who lived outside Mumbai and Rs 15,000 for local residents.



"Forty-five of the dead were from my district, the remaining were from outside. We had to coordinate with the district collectors of the districts from where the deceased hailed from to get information about their legal beneficiaries before sending the cheque to them. We had a team of tehsildars, naib tehsildars and revenue collectors who spent the next two months disbursing compensation," says the first woman IAS officer hailing from Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir.

Kundan visited the deceased's families in the city to give them the cheques and also as a gesture of solidarity. "The collector's duty is to reinforce confidence in the people," she says, sitting at her desk on the first floor in Mumbai's Old Custom House.

The 243 injured, who were admitted to hospitals, received a compensation of Rs 50,000 plus Rs 5,000 for travel expense. "In most of the cases we disbursed the money to them while they were still undergoing treatment. We even opened bank accounts for some people because they did not have any."

To ensure that no time was lost in the paperwork -- something she had learnt after her experience in the aftermath of the Mumbai blasts -- Kundan made sure that the list of victims at the respective hospitals matched the government's list so that there was no discrepancy.

"I told my staff that the list should be attested by the hospital so that there was no dispute when it came to compensation payment etc," she explains.

On the night of the tragedy, Kundan, her two little daughters and her husband Deputy Commissioner of Police Niket Kaushi then the DCP of Mumbai Zone IX, were at home. On hearing the news her husband rushed out to help the operation.

Kundan was on the phone till 3 am making alternative hotel arrangements for those who would be rescued and was horrified when one of the hotels she contacted first wanted to know how much it would be paid.

"The country was under attack and they were worried about money. It was shocking," she says, still angry a year after the incident.

She also made arrangements for food and water arrangements for the security personnel, National Security Guard commandos and firemen at the site. The district collector's duties include relief, rehabilitation and compensation during mishaps and disasters.

Looking back, Kundan, who is in her first stint as collector after serving in the municipal corporations of Nagpur, Amravati and Raigad, says one of the lessons learnt is that there should be clear coordination and communication. "The channels should be very clear -- about who is in charge and who should report to whom."

A member of the Indian Administrative Service's 1996 batch, Kundan, 40, was educated in Delhi and holds an MPI in international relations from the Jawaharlal Nehru University. An officer of the Maharashtra cadre, her father A Kundan was an IAS officer from the Manipur and Tripura cadre.

Archana Masih in Mumbai

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