

Prevention of blindness by medical care

4388. SHRI HARINATHA MISRA: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether speakers at a seminar on 'Prevention of blindness among childrens' organised by the Dr. A. V. Baliga Foundation, pointed out that of the 9 million blind in the country, at least 80 per cent could be cured or prevented from becoming blind if proper medical care was made available in time;

(b) whether a survey conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research had revealed that 7 to 8 per cent of the children in the 1—5 years of age group comprising 10 per cent in the school-going age group develop ocular signs of vitamin 'A' deficiency if left untreated and malnourished for too long;

(c) whether the speakers emphasised that prevention of blindness among children in almost all cases, except a few with congenital defects, was possible with timely treatment; and

(d) if so, what preventive and curative measures taken or propose to take to save school-going children, in particular, from blindness?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI NIHAR RANJAN LASKAR): (a) Yes.

(b) Yes.

(c) Yes.

(d) To combat blindness due to Vitamin 'A' deficiency, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has launched prophylaxis Programme under which two lakhs international units of Vit. 'A' in oil are administered twice a year to the children of age group of one to five years. Government of India has launched National Programme for Control of Blindness to provide comprehensive Eye Care Services from peripheral to

Apex level. As a temporary measures, under the Crash Programme, immediate comprehensive Eye Care Services are provided through mobile units. Screening of School children is one of the activities of the mobile unit. Permanent infrastructure for eye care is being developed in three tier system of general Health Services at peripheral, Intermediate and Central levels.

Return of castaway Indians

4389. SHRI HARINATHA MISRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has drawn to the news-item under the caption 'Harrowing tale of Indian castaways', as published in the Indian Express dated 12 November, 1981 regarding return of castaway Indians;

(b) whether six men were cast ashore from a Timorese fishing boat at Irvine island, an uninhabited island off West Australia's North-west coast on November 6, 1981;

(c) whether these men wanted to return to India and have been waiting for travel documents and financial assistance from the Indian High-Commission in Australia to fly home; and

(d) if so, the latest report with regard to these castaway Indians?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI P. V. NARASIMHA RAO): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) and (d). Immediately on receipt of information by our High Commission from the Australian Government, an official was deputed to meet these persons. After verifying their national status and after completion of due formalities, necessary arrangements were made for their return to India at Government cost. All the six persons were given travel documents for their return journey. They arrived in India on 18th November, 1981.