

- (iv) Market intervention operations should be undertaken by the State Governments and Union Territories as last resort in a transparent manner so as to ensure that the maximum benefits are available to the vulnerable and weaker sections of the society. Where necessary, the Central Government would be prepared to consider grant of financial assistance for this purpose on matching basis to the State Governments.
- (v) In addition to the above immediate measures, the meeting felt that action should be taken to improve the crop forecasting system so that crop production estimates are as accurate as possible. In this connection, the State Governments and Union Territories have an important role to play by way of inputs for the crop forecasts. It is essential therefore that they take urgent action in this regard. A joint monitoring mechanism will be set up between the Central and State Governments to make real time assessment of surpluses and deficits and to plan in respect thereof. Towards this, the Government will set up a National Forecasting Centre for Agricultural products.
- (vi) Decisions on imports to cover the anticipated gap between demand and supply should be taken at the stage of forecasts prepared on the basis of area sown. That is to say such decisions should be taken 3-4 months in advance of harvest. It was also felt that such imports should be undertaken on a centralised basis by Central Government agencies and not separately by individual State agencies.
- (vii) Storage facilities at present are inadequate and are not evenly distributed throughout the country. Building up of storage capacity in different parts of the country is, therefore, absolutely essential and an action plan should be immediately drawn up to augment capacities in this regard. States maintaining control on cold storages should repeal their cold storage orders. In order to improve country's storage technology for agricultural products, Ministry of Agriculture will set up a high level expert group to identify the necessary policy measures.
- (viii) Food processing facilities also need to be strengthened in a big way. This will not only ensure that the loss presently due to wastage of vegetables etc. is avoided but also that such commodities are available in processed form in times of shortage.
- (ix) The distribution machinery in the States and Union Territories need to be tightened so as to minimise the scope for any kind of diversion of stocks. Alongwith this the price monitoring mechanism in the States and Union Territories need to be strengthened on a priority basis to cover the rural areas also.
- (x) Additional allocations of rice, wheat and palmolein requested by some of the State Governments were agreed to.
- (xi) State Governments have been given flexibility to exempt any edible oil from the provisions of the Compulsory Packaging Order so that no undue hardship is caused to consumers.
- (xii) A special study group will be set up to identify measures required to meet the needs of north-east States and Island territories regarding the supply of essential commodities.

Supply of Food Items under PDS

1582. SHRI N.K. PREMCHANDRAN:
SHRI H.P. SINGH:

Will the Minister of FOOD AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the quality of food items supplied under the PDS is the same which is supplied by the FCI during the current year;

(b) if not, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether complaints have been received from various States particularly from Kerala in this regard;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) the action plan to stop this malpractice?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FOOD AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS (SHRI SATYA PAL SINGH YADAV): (a) Good quality foodgrains, free from insect infestation and strictly conforming to PFA standards are supplied by FCI under PDS and the quality is same during the current year also.

- (b) Does not arise.
- (c) No specific complaint has been received from any State and particularly from Kerala in this regard.
- (d) Does not arise.
- (e) The following action plan has been formulated by the Government to check the quality of foodgrains distributed under PDS:
- (i) The representatives of the State Governments are allowed to check the quality of foodgrains before lifting stocks from the godowns for distribution under TPDS.
 - (ii) Type, sealed samples of foodgrains from the issuing lots are displayed at fair price shops for the benefit of consumers.
 - (iii) Surprise checks by the Government agencies are carried out at fair price shops to check the quality of foodgrains.

[Translation]

Selling of Stolen Passports

1583. SHRI PANKAJ CHOWDHRY: Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government have busted a gang engaged in the selling of the stolen passports;
- (b) if so, the details thereof; and
- (c) the number of persons arrested and the action taken against them?

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI L.K. ADVANI): (a) to (c) 'Public Order' and 'Police' being State subjects as per the Constitution of India, the registration, investigation, detection and prevention of crime is primarily the responsibility of the State Governments. Information relating to busting of gangs, crime-wise, is not maintained at the Central level.

Availability of Pulses

1584. PROF. RITA VERMA: Will the Minister of FOOD AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether per capita availability of pulses has declined during 1997-98, and current year;
- (b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor;
- (c) the quantity of pulses imported under the open general licence during the said period;
- (d) the reasons for import of pulses;
- (e) whether the import of pulses has any impact on the market prices of pulses;
- (f) if so, the details thereof; and
- (g) the steps taken by the Government to meet the situation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FOOD AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS (SHRI SATYA PAL SINGH YADAV): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The per capita net availability of pulses has declined during the year 1998. The per capita net availability of pulses during 1996, 1997 and 1998 is given below:

Year	Per capita net availability of pulses (Kg. per year)
1996 (Prov.)	12.0
1997 (Prov.)	14.0
1998 (Prov.)	12.1

The decline in per capita availability of pulses during the year 1998 may be attributed to fall in the production of pulses from 14.46 million tonnes in 1996-97 to 13.35 million tonnes in 1997-98.

(c) The quantity of pulses imported during 1996-97 to 1998-99 (upto September, 1998) is as under:—

1996-97	5.32 lakh tonnes
1997-98	6.59 lakh tonnes
1998-99 (Upto September, 1998)	1.46 lakh tonnes