

Hike in Prices

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*2. SHRI RAMPAL SINGH :
SHRI NARESH PUGLIA :

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

(a) whether the Government have recently increased the prices of wheat, rice and sugar under PDS/TPDS;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the justifications therefor;

(c) the amount of subsidy provided by the Government during each of the last three years indicating the subsidy likely to come down after this decision;

(d) the number of times alongwith the extent of price hike effected during the last three years;

(e) the date from which this hike is proposed to be made effective;

(f) whether this decision is likely to affect the PDS beneficiaries particularly weaker sections of the society;

(g) whether representations have been received in this regard;

(h) if so, the details thereof and the reaction of the Government thereto; and

(i) the steps taken by the Government to review this decision for the benefit of poor people?

THE MINISTER OF CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS AND MINISTER OF FOOD AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS (SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA) : (a) to (i) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) and (b) (i) With a view to neutralising the financial burden consequent upon the hike in MSP of wheat and paddy and grant of bonus over and above the MSP of wheat, and also to containing the food subsidy to a manageable level, the Central Issue Prices of wheat and rice have been revised for APL families only w.e.f. 29.1.1999 as under :-

(Rs. Per quintal)

Commodity	CIP for APL
Wheat	650
Rice	700 - Applicable only to J & K, himachal Pradesh and Hilly areas of N.E. States Including Sikkim and Uttar Pradesh.
Grade 'A'	905

(ii) The Retail Issue Price of Sugar has been raised from Rs. 11.40 per kg. to Rs. 12.00 per kg. with effect from 15.2.1999.

(c) Subsidy provided by the Government during the last three years is as under :-

Year	Amount of Subsidy on Foodgrains	Sugar
1995-96	4960	422
1996-97	5166	900
1997-98	7500	400 (Prov.)
1998-99 (RE) Upto Feb., 99	7959	

The subsidy outgo on foodgrains would reduce by about Rs. 300 crores during the current financial years and by about Rs. 2200 crores during the financial year 1999-2000. The savings in sugar subsidy would be Rs. 34.8 crores in 1998-99, and Rs. 278 crores in 1999-2000.

(d) and (e) The CIP of wheat and rice under PDS during the last three years were as under :-

(Rs. per quintal)

Wheat	Effective from	CIP
	1.2.1994	402
	1.6.1997	250 - For BPL families 450 - For APL families
	29.1.1999	250 - For BPL families 650 - For APL families

Rice Effective From	Common	Fine	Superfine
1.2.1994	537	617	648
1.6.1997	350	350	- For BPL
	-	650	750 For APL
1.12.1997	Common	Grade 'A'	
	350	350	For BPL
	550*	700	APL
	*For APL families applicable only to J & K, Himachal Pradesh and hilly areas of N.E. States, Sikkim and Uttar Pradesh.		
29.1.1999	350	350	For BPL families
	-	905	For APL families

(ii) The Retail Issue Price of Sugar during the last three years is as follows :-

(Rs. per kg.)			
Financial Year	From	To	With effect from
1996-97	9.05	10.5	10.2.97
1997-98	10.5	11.4	1.10.97
1998-99	11.4	12	15.2.99

(f) Since the CIP for the BPL families have been reverted to the earlier prices existing prior to 29.1.1999, it will not affect the weaker sections of the society.

(g) to (i) A number of representations against the increase in CIP of wheat and rice from different State Governments, etc. demanding withdrawal of hike have been received.

The recent increase was effected to neutralise the financial burden consequent upon the increase in MSP and grant of bonus over and above the MSP of wheat. The MSP of wheat and paddy have been raised on several occasions during the past four years, and bonus was granted twice over and above the MSP of wheat without a simultaneous increase in the CIP of wheat and rice, resulting in a huge subsidy burden on the Government.

Considering the widespread objections, the Government has decided to roll back the CIP of wheat and rice for the BPL families only to the level these existed before 29.1.1999.

[Translation]

SHRI RAMPAL SINGH : Hon'ble Mr. Speaker, Sir, whether government has made any optional scheme for those consumers who are living above the poverty line and are affected by rise in prices due to cut in subsidies to provide relief to them so that they do not face too much impact of price rise?

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : Sir, price for those people who are living B.P.L. is the same as was being charged earlier but for those who are living above B.P.L. we have increased a bit because minimum support price has been continuously increasing for the last four years, whereas issue price has not increased. For people living B.P.L. we have not increased the price.

SHRI RAMPAL SINGH : Government of India is withdrawing subsidy to make up the losses, due to which prices are increasing and shortage of foodgrains is taking place. Whether Government has formulated any scheme to deal with this situation?

[English]

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : Sir, the food items particularly rice and wheat are freely available. There is no shortage of food items.

[Translation]

Sir, we have not received any information about any shortage or increase of prices from anywhere and there is no scope of prices of foodgrains increasing.

SHRI RAMPAL SINGH : Whether Government of India before increasing the prices has tried to know the reaction of State governments or has invited their reaction so that the impact they are going to face is known to different state Governments?

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : Prices of foodgrains for people living below poverty line were also increased, but when objections came from State Governments, status quo was restored. Therefore, this was done due to their objections only.

SHRI MUFTI MOHAMMED SAYEED : Hon'ble Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to know from the hon'ble Minister whether you are committed to provide ration at subsidised rates to people living below poverty line especially for people living in far flung areas. If yes, then why ration is not available in ration depots due to which people are not getting ration? If assurance is given by the Government that ration will be provided to people living below poverty line at subsidised rates and ration is not available in ration depots then what is the use of giving assurance? I want to know that if Government of India's assurance is there and foodgrain stocks are also available, then why ration is not available in far flung areas?

If you go to ration depots you will find that foodgrains are not available there. Middlemen manipulate as a result of which the genuine people do not get foodgrains. People, particularly people who are living below povertyline, are feeling the shortage most.

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : The far flung areas which you have mentioned especially areas like Kashmir, for them we have made special arrangements there. During the period when communication was in place 150 trucks loaded with foodgrains had been going there. Foodgrains used to be sent in the valley as well as other far flung areas which you have mentioned. We have stocked foodgrains there and we have been monitoring that stock. We have been getting regular reports from the State Food Minister. He has given satisfactory report to the effect that the quantity of foodgrains which was needed has reached them and arrangements for its distribution in far flung areas have been made.

SHRI MUFTI MOHAMMED SAYEED : I can say with confidence that...*(Interruptions)*

[English]

It is very important question.

[Translation]

I am saying with confidence that people living below poverty line do not get foodgrains according to their needs.

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : As far as demand for foodgrains is concerned we have been trying to meet the demand of far-flung areas especially Kashmir, North-East and Sikkim. We have been receiving satisfactory report that foodgrains have reached them. The State Government has to make arrangement for sending foodgrains where needed. We have been receiving reports that foodgrains have reached there...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI KANTILAL BHURIA : Ration is not available to the tribals living below poverty line...*(Interruptions)* You do something for them...*(Interruptions)*

[English]

DR. SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY : The hon. Minister has just now in answer to a supplementary said that the monitoring of the working of the PDS is done by asking for reports from the State Government Food Ministers. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he has any idea or proposal or machinery to have an independent assessment of the PDS in various States because in the State of Tamil Nadu, the PDS has collapsed. One MLA has recently been caught by public taking away the rice belonging to ration shops. In view of the utter collapse of the rationing system in Tamil Nadu, I would like to know whether the hon. Minister is prepared to order a probe or have some method by which the procurement actually reaches the people.

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : The system of PDS is that the State Governments ask for a certain quantity of foodgrains, whether rice or wheat, and we supply that quantity. We release that quantity to the State Governments and thereafter it is the responsibility of the State Governments to run the PDS. There might be some difficulties. If any difficulty is pointed out specifically to me, I will make an inquiry into that also. It is the responsibility of the State Governments to run the PDS.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : The State of Kerala, as we all know, is a consumer State. Recently the Government of Kerala as well as the Legislative Assembly of Kerala have adopted a resolution expressing concern over the rise in prices of wheat and sugar and other essential articles. Is

the Government aware of this fact? Has the Government received a unanimous resolution from the Kerala State Assembly asking the Central Government to reduce the prices as they were existing before. Will the Government take action on that basis because there is already a covenant when the State was formed in 1956 that there will be statutory rationing which has collapsed because of the action of the Central Government? Will the Government take action on that?

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : So far as sugar is concerned, sugar prices have in fact gone down in the country by Rs.100 a tonne. So, in Kerala also, I expect that sugar prices have gone down slightly.

So far as wheat and rice are concerned, we have supplied wheat and rice to Kerala also...*(Interruptions)* Whatever quantity was demanded by the Government of Kerala, we have supplied the same quantity...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : Let him complete.

(Interruptions)

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : About the supply of foodgrains also, there is no shortage in the supply of foodgrains to Kerala. But so far as the question of prices is concerned, we did receive a representation regarding reduction of prices. The Government considered it and the prices for those below the poverty line were reduced...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : It is a wrong statement.

SHRI P.C. THOMAS : This is a very important question...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ D. CHAVAN : My question specifically deals with sugar. Our Government has increased the retail issue price by 60 paise. Therefore the price of PDS sugar has gone up. On the other hand, the free market prices are being depressed by allowing Pakistan's sugar to be dumped in India because of the low rate of customs duties and also because of lesser sugar production. My specific query to the Government is whether the Government plans to take sugar out of the public distribution system in the near future.

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : For the time being, there is no proposal for withdrawing sugar from the public distribution system. Sugar prices for the PDS have been raised by only 60 paise because, as was mentioned by the hon. member, the production in the country is saturated right now and the prices had gone down slightly. I have already mentioned this. It is only for the PDS that the prices

are raised by 60 paise so that there is a stability in the supply of sugar in the country.

SHRI BIKRAM DEO KESHARI : Orissa has been inflicted by severe drought conditions. I would like to know whether the Government would consider relaxing the recent hike in prices in the drought hit pockets of Orissa.

[Translation]

SHRI CHANDRASHEKHAR SAHU : My question is the same. In Chhattisgarh also, similar situation is prevalent...*(Interruptions)*

[English]

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : We had been receiving requests for additional supply of food grains, both wheat and rice, from Orissa and we had been supplying to Orissa whatever quantity was asked for. So, there have been no complaints regarding non-supply of wheat and rice from the drought hit areas.

SHRI BIKRAM DEO KESHARI : But what about the hike in prices?

[Translation]

SHRI RAGHUVANSH PRASAD SINGH (Vaishali) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the Government's reply, I find that they have increased the price of wheat and rice under P.D.S. by about rupee one for those living below poverty line and rupees two per kg. for those living above poverty line. Right now the price of wheat is Rs. 6.50 per kg., rice Rs. 7.00 per kg. and Rice grade = I Rs. 9.05 per kg. Due to the stiff opposition by the allied parties, they had to roll back the price increase effected in P.D.S. for those living above poverty line and for grade = I rupees nine and five paise per kg. is sold. There are about six crore families living below poverty line in the country and ten crores families are those who are living above poverty line. For them the increase was rupees two per kg.

The Government seems to be adamant not to roll back this price increase. We want to know from the Government whether it is justified that increase in prices for the people living B.P.L. can be taken back, but the Government is not in a position to roll back the increased prices in the case of those living A.P.L. The reason that is being given is that the Government wants to cut subsidy. In such a situation, will the Government reconsider bringing down the price increase to at least help?...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : You can ask only one supplementary question.

SHRI RAGHUVANSH PRASAD SINGH : Recommendation of the committee was that the quantity of foodgrains for BPL should be increased from ten kgs to 15 kgs. Besides there was a demand throughout the country that the quantity of foodgrain under PDS should be raised from 10 kgs. to 15 kgs. per month.

I would like to know the reply from the Government on these two points.

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : You have demanded 15 kg instead of 10 kg under B.P.L. Quantity of 10 kg was fixed by you only, this is from your time only.

SHRI RAGHUVANSH PRASAD SINGH : We were thinking to increase this to 15 kg. On this we had reached a consensus.

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : You were thinking, but you could not put it in practice. You took much time in thinking only. This 10 kg was fixed by you only, which we have continued. We have kept the same for people living below poverty line which has been in operation since long and for A.P.L. increase in prices was necessary because this has not increased for the last four years. Minimum support price has gone on increasing. It increases every year, but there is no increase in central issue price. Therefore it was necessary to increase this, otherwise subsidy would have increased. This would have resulted in financial imbalance. Therefore this had become necessary and we are not considering to reduce it.

[English]

SHRI K. KARUNAKARAN : Sir, Kerala is one State where statutory ration is needed. There are reasons for that.

Our State is a State which is producing cash crops and so, we do not have sufficient foodgrains. On that basis, we had an understanding with the Government of India. Years back, the Government of India assured the State that they will supply the required quantity of rice, wheat or foodgrains at a particular rate for all concerned. Today, when we are discriminating the people in the name of poverty line and other lines, we, the people of Kerala, are denied certain privileges. Foodgrains should be made available at a particular rate to all concerned. If at all you have to pay something extra or as subsidy for States, my request is that it should be done. Moreover, we are producing cash crops. Sir, on that account, we are the losers as we are not in a position to produce foodgrains. So, under these particular circumstances, when the Government of India assured the States that they will be able to give a

certain quantity of rice at a particular price, it should be continued and subsidy should be given for whatever quantity of rice that is supplied to the States.

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : Sir, the hon. Member has rightly said that Kerala produces cash crops. So, they get all the cash for that...*(Interruptions)*

PROF. P.J. KURIEN : No. We are not getting price for rubber and coconut which we are producing. Sir, his statement amounts to ridiculing us. He should not make such a statement. It is not fair for him to make this statement. The Government of India asked the people of Kerala to produce rubber. It is only at the instance of the Government of India that we are producing rubber...*(Interruptions)*

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : The hon. Member said that they produce only cash crops. Then I said that since only cash crops are produced by them, they have to naturally get foodgrains and the Central Government is committed to supply the entire commodity of foodgrains that they require. There will be no shortage of foodgrains. We supply the same quality of rice that you need whether it is parmal or raw rice or whatever quality of rice. We supply the quantity of rice that you require. Now, universal price has been fixed for providing the foodgrains. There also we have the BPL and APL.

DR. S. VENUGOPALACHARY : Sir, the scheme for providing rice at Rs. 2 per kilogram is getting implemented in Andhra Pradesh since many years. Recently, the Central Government has increased the price after the implementation of the Report of the Lakdawala Committee. After imposing the recommendations of the Report of the Lakdawala Committee and due to the implementation of the scheme of providing rice at Rs. 2 per kilogram since ten years, the ceiling limit of poverty line has been increased. Now, I would like to know whether there is any proposal before the Government to review the recommendations of the Lakdawala Committee in Andhra Pradesh. Our Chief Minister has represented to the Government many times in this regard as also the Members of Parliament of our State.

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : So far, there is no proposal for reviewing the Lakdawala Committee Report that is continuing for all the States in the country.

SHRI CHANDRA SHEKHAR : Is the Government aware that according to the World Watch Report, the *per capita* production of foodgrains in this country is just two hundred kilograms which is the lowest not only in the developed countries but even in the

developing countries? The recent trend is that while population is growing, foodgrain production is static. Are you not going to face a situation where famine conditions are going to prevail in this country where you cannot provide whatever food you are giving to the poorer sections of the society?

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : Maximum efforts are being made for increasing the production and also the productivity in the country. Productivity is also increasing. We are, for the first time, expecting to cross the 200 million tonnes mark this year. I hope that we will be able to cross it. So, a serious effort is being made to increase the production because we know that we have an ever-increasing population and we need more foodgrains.

[Translation]

SHRI RAJVEER SINGH : Under P.D.S., the Central Government provides thousands of crores of rupees for implementing the scheme by the State Governments to make available food grains at cheaper rates to the people. Central Government bears the losses whereas State Governments make distribution under the scheme. It has been observed that corruption is rampant in this field. The poor do not get the commodities at the prices, on which they should get. The middlemen, whether they are the officials of the State, or the State Government itself, or the local traders, get the benefit of it. We pay billions of rupees in the form of taxes for the welfare of the poor, but they do not get benefit of it. I would like to ask the hon'ble Minister whether a review of the scheme will be undertaken to ensure that the poor get foodgrains at cheaper rates?

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : PDS is run by the State Governments. This is a very old scheme and has been running on the same lines since its beginning. Sometimes, complaints do come but we talk to the concerned State Governments and also write to them. Also, if at some place, the distribution is not being done properly, we get that matter probed to rectify the situation. We can take this action only and that also we have been taking.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : Prof. P.J. Kurien. You have to put only a pointed supplementary question because there is no time.

(Interruptions)

PROF. P.J. KURIEN : Since the hon. Minister has said that if Kerala grows cash crops, it will get money, I take strong exception to that statement. However, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether

he is aware of the fact that the Government of India had given an assurance to the people of Kerala that the statutory ration would be maintained and rice and wheat, adequately required for maintaining the statutory ration meant for the entire people, would be supplied by the Government of India. It is on that assurance that Kerala switched over to cash crops. It is the Government of India which wanted us to switch over to rubber and other cash crops in order to save foreign exchange. Mr. Minister, are you aware of this assurance? If so, will you ensure that adequate rice and wheat is supplied to the State Government to maintain the PDS in full measure in order to take care of the entire people of Kerala?

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : Earlier, there was a legislation in Kerala that any land that came under food crops, particularly rice, should not be diverted to cash crops. There was a legislation...*(Interruptions)*

PROF. P.J. KURIEN : No. I am talking of the assurance. You have not understood my question...*(Interruptions)*

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : Let me answer.

MR. SPEAKER : Prof. Kurien, let him complete first.

PROF. P.J. KURIEN : There was an assurance from the Government of India.

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : That is what I am saying...*(Interruptions)*

PROF. P.J. KURIEN : There was an assurance from the Government of India that PDS would be maintained in the State of Kerala and rice would be supplied by the Government of India. Mr. Minister, are you aware of that assurance?

SARDAR SURJIT SINGH BARNALA : It is not only a question of being aware of it but I was a part of it. As I said earlier, there was a legislation that any land that came under food crop should not be diverted. So, I was a part of it. I asked them: "Why do you not grow food crops?" When I was the Agriculture Minister earlier, I had gone to Kerala discussed the matter with them and had assured them that any foodgrain that was required would be supplied by the Central Government.

I was a part of it. So, that assurance has always been complied with. Whenever there is a requirement from the Government of Kerala, we supply whatever type of food they need. They sometimes need rice from Andhra Pradesh and we try to supply it from Andhra Pradesh. Earlier they were asking only part-boiled rice and we supplied that. Similarly, as regards

wheat, whenever they need and whatever quantity they need, we are in a position to supply.

Conversion of Tribals to Christianity

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*3. **SHRI MOINUL HASSAN AHAMED :**
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY :

Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) the number of tribals and other people converted to Christianity in various States, during the last one year, State-wise;

(b) the number of tribal Christians and other members of Christian community reconverted from Christianity into Hindus recently, State-wise;

(c) whether the Government are aware that there are some instances in which conversions or reconversions were done forcibly;

(d) whether in view of the attacks on Christians, the Government propose to make changes in the law to prevent forcible conversions in the country; and

(e) the steps taken by the Government to check the instances of such conversions?

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI L.K. ADVANI) : (a) to (e) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) and (b) The Central Government does not maintain any data in this regard.

(c) to (e) Some States have enacted legislation providing for prohibition of conversion from one religion to another by use of force or allurement/inducement or by fraudulent means. No proposal to enact a Central legislation in this regard is under consideration.

SHRI MOINUL HASSAN AHAMED : Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have seen from the reply that the Government of India does not maintain any data in this regard. I would like to know specifically from the hon. Minister as to how many people have changed their religion from Hindu to Christianity at Manoharpur in Orissa.

SHRI L.K. ADVANI : Mr. Speaker, Sir, as has been answered in the principal text given to the Member, the Government or the country comes to know of the religion-wise population in various areas on the occasion of a Census, not otherwise. During that period if anyone converts from one religion to