

LOK SABHA

Thursday, August 1, 1996/Śravana 10, 1918 (Saka)

(The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of the Clock)

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

[Translation]

Supply of Foodgrains

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*301. SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT 'BACHDA' :

SHRI RADHA MOHAN SINGH :

Will the Minister of CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state :

(a) whether there is acute shortage of foodgrains and other essential commodities in the fair price shops in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether in the hilly areas of Uttar Pradesh and tribal areas of Bihar, people do not get rice, wheat, sugar and other essential commodities from the fair price shops for months together;

(d) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(e) the remedial measures taken or proposed to be taken to ensure adequate and regular supply of foodgrains to the above States, particularly hilly and tribal areas?

THE MINISTER OF FOOD AND MINISTER OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV) :

(a) to (e). A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT

(a) to (d). As per information received from the State Governments of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, there is no complaint of any shortage of foodgrains and other essential commodities in any area in the fair price shops.

(e) As regards the remedial measures it may be mentioned that for the successful implementation of Public Distribution System, both the Central Government and State Governments are responsible. The Central Government is responsible for procuring the commodities and making them available to the States, who in turn are responsible for subsequent distribution of these commodities to the ultimate consumers through the network of fair price shops. In so far as the responsibility of Central Government is concerned Food Corporation of India has been advised to ensure adequate and regular supply of foodgrains particularly in hilly and tribal areas.

[Translation]

SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT 'BACHDA' : We had hoped that the hon. Minister would do full justice to our question but he did not do so to our satisfaction. As you know, hill areas and particularly the northern region of Uttar Pradesh are surrounded by hills and dense forests with the result that the public distribution system cannot function properly and effectively in the entire Himalayan belt. Secondly, as stated by the hon. Minister, no complaint about the non-availability of food-grains has been received from the northern region but the people of that area have a very strong complaint. There all the workers of the Food Corporation of India went on strike from the 8th to 22nd June, 1996 due to which goods could not be loaded in trains and trucks at all the rail heads like Tanakpur, Haldwani, Ramnagar and Kotdwar rail-heads. As a result, all the godowns in our hill areas were emptied. Not a grain of food could be available at the fair price shops: Secondly, the Minister informed that no complaint had been received from the State Govt. in this respect but I myself sent a fax and a telegram to the Chief Secretary of U.P and discussed the matter with the commissioner and District Magistrate. As you know, ours is a border district adjoining Nepal and Tibet but the post of District Supplies Officer has been lying vacant there for the last two years. All the goods there are not distributed through R.F.C. That is an exception there. The goods are distributed there through the District Supplies Officer and that post has been lying vacant for the last two years.

If the House is not informed of the full facts, how will justice be done to the hill areas? A uniform policy has been framed for the entire country but the topography of the hill areas is such that except trucks and jeeps, no other means of transport are available there for transportation of goods. If goods are not loaded in trucks and jeeps then there would be trouble because rail service or air service are already non-existent there.

The hon. Minister said that no complaint had been received. According to the figures of June, made available to me 2500 metric ton wheat had been allotted to Pithoragarh district, against which only 2096 metric ton wheat could be sent there.

Against the allotment of 2500 metric tonne of rice, only 1773 metric tonne of rice could be supplied. There per capita consumption of rice is 10 Kg. When the supply fell so short of the allotment, on what basis does the hon. Minister say that there is no shortage there.

MR. SPEAKER : If you ask a longer question you are not likely to get its reply.

SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV : The hon. Minister expressed his apprehension that there is shortage of food-grains. He also read out some figures. I do not know from where the Member is reading but I would like to tell you the real position. Fact is that in June, 1996, in our hill areas, the stock of wheat and rice was 40,900 ton and 35,000 ton, against which allotment 09 wheat and rice was 24,400 ton and 19,900 ton respectively. As for lifting, 23900 ton wheat and

17300 ton rice were lifted. The percentage of wheat and rice therefore was 98.0 and 86.9 respectively. This shows that there is sufficient stock in the hill areas of the districts mentioned by you and the lifting is also 98 percent. This being so, how do you say that there is shortage? We have informed you about the stock position, lifting and the allocation. In all respects, we have a stock of food-grains for 3 months. If you need more, I am prepared to send the same also.

SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT 'BACHDA' : My second supplementary arises from this. I have given particular dates. During the strike period, the ration had not reached there you may look into it. My second supplementary is that at present, due to landslides, roads have been closed at several places. Food-grains are not reaching and there are no big godowns there. The godowns are situated in the Tarai area and there are no godowns in the interior of the hill areas. Therefore, will the hon. Minister take steps to have adequate number of godowns constructed there. During rainy season and snowfall, roads are closed. Will the hon. Minister assure us to have godowns constructed there so that a buffer stock of foodgrains could be built in all the hill areas.

SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the R.P.D.S. godown capacity, particularly in the hill areas of U.P. is 10,000 ton in Harewala, 2500 ton in Pithoragarh, 2500 ton in Yamuna Chat, which Ganga Ghat. These are fall in the Uttar Kashi district. Simla, which is in Chamoli distinct, has a capacity of 5000 ton. In the new R.P.D.S., we propose to provide godown capacity to the extent of 5000 ton in Mau, 35,000 ton in Dhamira, 30,000 ton in Roja, and 6500 ton in Etawah. These are non R.P.D.S. areas. We have proposals in some R.P.D.S. areas also. For instance, we propose to provide godown capacity of 2500 ton in Bhadohi and 2500 ton in Padrauna. We are considering new proposals also in this respect and soon we propose to accord sanction for provision for godown capacity.

SHRI RADHA MOHAN SINGH : Mr. Speaker, in the reply it has been stated that there is no complaint about the shortage of foodgrains and essential commodities. Even in the figures, there is no complaint. I would like to give an example of an area of Bihar here. The Food Corporation of India, which is situated at Chhapra, caters to the requirements of the entire Gopalganj and Sewan. The Government of India allotted to it the additional quota of sugar on the occasion of the Christmas Day last year. The wholesalers of Sewan and Gopalganj and also deposited the draft in December for the purpose. But still they did not get the quota in December. There are several irregularities in Food Corporation of India there. What has the hon. Minister to say in this respect? Hathua Sugar Mill is contiguous to Sewan but the wholesalers of Sewan are compelled to lift sugar from Sasaman, as a result of which they had to pay Rs.3.50 per bag extra in June, 1996. In July, sugar was brought from Sasamau to Chhapra and supplied to the wholesalers of Sewan. Due to which they had to pay more, while the stock was there in Parhathna Sugar

Mill, which is barely 15 Km. away. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he proposes to take certain steps against the Food Corporation of India, which is under his charge so as to check the additional burden being passed on to the consumers in the aforesaid manner.

SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member has asked his question in two parts. One is that foodgrains are not made available in Sewan. But the Central Government, as a rule, supplies any to the main distribution centre after allocation. Thereafter, the State Government supplies from the base godown to the various areas as per their requirements through the State Civil Supplies Corporation. Thus, it is for the State Government and not the Central Government to arrange for the further supply from the main distribution centre.

As far the shortage, we have of late obtained latest information from the Bihar Government in this behalf, which I quote here for your information :-

[English]

"No shortage of foodgrains such as sugar and other essential commodities have so far been reported from any part of the State including tribal areas."

[Translation]

This information has been furnished to us by the Bihar State Civil Supplies Corporation.

[English]

SHRI MANORANJAN BHAKTA : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister about our national policy on the supply of essential commodities including kerosene oil, and the names of those States and Union Territories which have less than the national average allocation and what action the hon. Minister is going to take for increasing the allocation in such areas in such States including Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has raised a very pertinent question, because as per the information received so far, the allocation made to various States, particularly to the union territories, is below the national average. In 8 states, viz., Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Haryana, allocation is below the national average allocation. when I looked at it, I myself felt the need for some positive initiative in this behalf.

The Government of India is giving it due priority and we propose to effect an increase of 3 per cent in the annual allocation for the entire country. Out of it, we propose to provide national average allocation to the states receiving less than 2 per cent and the per cent to those States which are above the national average allocation. But in view of the concern expressed by the Hon. Member, we propose to take a decision to provide

3 per cent allocation to the deficient States till such time they come at par with the national average.

SHRIMATI BHAGWATI DEVI : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to know the quantity of sugar and that of the kerosene oil provided to a person in Bihar.

SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the question here is that what is provided per unit. From here, we supply to the State Government. From here, we make allocations for the State Governments. I can tell you the question of allocations of wheat, rice and other essential commodities made from here. The price of sugar that we have fixed for the entire country is Rs.9.05 per kg. The price of common, fine and superfine rice is Rs.5.37, Rs.6.17 and Rs. 6.48 respectively from the F.C.I. godown. But it varies from State to State. We fix a uniform standard rate on behalf of the F.C.I. The question asked by the hon. Member perhaps pertains to the State Government.

SHRIMATI BHAGWATI DEVI : Mr. Speaker, I have not asked for the price. I want to know the quantity of kerosene oil, the litres, supplied per capita per month.

SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV : In Bihar, 7.5 litres of kerosene oil is supplied per capita per month.

SHRI SHIVRAJ SINGH : Mr. Speaker, Sir, my question is very simple. Wheat and rice being supplied from the Fair Price Shop in the tribal areas of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh are substandard and not fit for human consumption. I would like to know as to what steps are proposed to be taken to ensure supply of good quality wheat and rice there. My second question is...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : Only one question will be replied. Not the second one.

SHRI SHIVRAJ SINGH : Mr. Speaker, Kerosene oil is not at all supplied in tribal areas. Kerosene oil and sugar find their way in the black-market. We cannot leave the people of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes at the mercy of the State Government. Will the hon. Minister take steps to end consumption and ensure supply of kerosene oil and sugar to the people of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and in hill areas?

SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV : Mr. Speaker, the State Government is free not to lift the substandard quantities from the godowns where the Central Government sends the allocations. The State Government need not lift the substandard quantities. There is a rule to take three samples of the foodgrains before lifting. This rule should be scrupulously followed and only good quality food articles should be lifted. For this the State Governments are at liberty. The U.P. Government should not lift the inferior quality of foodgrains. Our endeavour has all along been not to supply substandard goods in the entire country. For this, we have also issued instructions to the F.C.I.

SHRI SANTOSH KUMAR GANGWAR : Mr. Speaker, the hon'ble Minister is fully seized of the problems of the rural areas. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have the same

problems. I would like to know whether the U.P. is supplied food articles as per the 1991 census and whether the food articles and the kerosene oil are supplied in equal quantity in the rural and urban areas or there is some difference. If less quantity is supplied in the rural areas, what are the reasons. Therefore, particularly when the kerosene oil is needed more in the rural areas. With the hon. Minister take steps to remedy this situation and ensure that food articles are supplied in the U.P. as per the 1991 census?

SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member has raised a very pertinent question. All the allocations made so far, particularly in the context of the kerosene oil have been urban based. We have started making rural-based allocations in Uttar Pradesh. We are trying to remove this imbalance wherever it is. As a result, 63 districts are now getting more kerosene oil than before. Secondly, it was pointed out that there is difference in availability in rural and urban areas. It is being removed and the U.P. Government have been issued necessary instructions in this behalf.

SHRI TARIQ ANWAR : Mr. Speaker, I read a recent statement from the hon. Minister that he proposes to review the public distribution system and introduce some economic restriction in it. Sir, the poor people, who are daily wage earners, cannot afford to buy articles for a week or fortnight at one time. Will the Government consider as to how to benefit them? In Bihar - I don't know whether it is so in other states as well - per unit allocation is more in urban areas, than in rural areas whereas need is more in rural areas, was said about the kerosene oil. Today, in the rural areas of Bihar, kerosene oil is being sold at the rate of Rs. 12 per litre. It is indeed a cause for concern. I would request the hon. Minister to give his reply after due consideration.

SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member has raised the question of review of the P.D.S. We are thinking in terms of its recognition. We shall soon take a final decision to revamp the P.D.S.

We shall also consider about the category of people referred to by the hon. Member. As for the question of economic criteria interview for the affluent people ...*(Interruptions)*

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : No, you do not have to answer him.

[Translation]

SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV : Government have under consideration a proposal to revamp the P.D.S. lock, stock and barrel. This will, no doubt, benefit the poor people a lot. We shall provide foodgrains at the specially subsidized rates to the persons living below poverty-line.

[English]

SHRI NIRMAL KANTI CHATTERJEE : Sir, my question is related to the answer he has just now given.

There has been a Chief Ministers' Conference. Unfortunately, those papers are not laid on the Table of the House for our consumption. In that Conference, there was a controversy on this point that if there is a subsidy on the supply of foodgrains for the people below the poverty line, what would happen to the deficit States like Kerala, where only fourteen per cent of the local needs could be met from the local produce? Would such areas - there are many other areas also - be covered under the public distribution system? Otherwise, there would be a terrific rise in the market prices of foodgrains, etc. What is the approach of the Government?

SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV : As for the P.D.S. as I said last time also, the State Governments also share the responsibility of controlling prices. We make allocations at the national level. About the concern expressed by the hon. Member about Kerala, I have to say that in the Chief Ministers' Conference on basic needs, held on July 4-5, I had cleared my position on P.D.S. The Chief Minister of Kerala had raised certain questions. Day before yesterday, he was here. I discussed the matter at length with him for about an hour. We are not distributing the subsidy being given by the Kerala Government on the basis of internal resources. But we shall positively provide goods at the specially subsidized rates to the persons living below poverty line...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI RAM KRIPAL YADAV : The hon. Minister has just now accepted in reply to a question that he proposes to revamp the P.D.S...*(Interruptions)*

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : You ask your question please.

[Translation]

SHRI RAM KRIPAL YADAV : I would like to know as to when you propose to implement your scheme to revamp the P.D.S. and how it will benefit the poor people living in the hill, tribal and backward areas of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV : We shall take a final decision for the restructuring of the P.D.S. at all levels in the coming month. The tribal and hill areas of Bihar will be benefited immensely under the P.D.S. because most of the people there are living below poverty line. We shall provide foodgrains to them at the special subsidized rates.

[English]

Employees Pension Scheme

*302. SHRI A.C. JOS : Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state :

(a) the changes suggested by the Labour Unions etc. in the Employees Pension Scheme, 1995;

(b) whether these suggestions have been examined;

(c) if so, the outcome thereof;

(d) the time by which necessary amendments are proposed to be made in the above scheme; and

(e) the number of employees opted for the pension scheme so far?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRI M. ARUNACHALAM) : (a) to (e). A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT

The Government had received suggestions for making certain changes in the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995. The suggestions inter-alia relate to removal of discrimination between married sons and married daughters and between remarrying widows and remarrying widowers, extension of the scheme, benefits to the employees drawing wages beyond Rs. 5000/- per month, provision for commutation, reduction in discounting rate for early payment of pension, Provision of ensuring pension payment in default cases, application of the scheme to the subscribers who did not join the Family Pension Scheme, 1971, refund of family pension - related withdrawal benefit in the case of exemption and coverage of piece-rated workers. These suggestions have since been examined and on 28.2.1996 a notification was issued for carrying out necessary amendments in the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995. Other suggestions like providing individual option, linking pension with the consumer's price index and giving pension as third benefit have not been found actuarially feasible for acceptance. As on 30.7.1996 pension under the new scheme has been distributed among 72,372 beneficiaries.

SHRI A.C. JOS : Sir, everybody is espousing the cause of workers of the organised sector, especially Unions like CITU, AITUC etc. Then have become bank employees organisations. I can understand it. And only bank employees and other salaried class employees benefit out of it.

But only ten per cent of the workers are in the organised sector. The remaining ninety per cent of the workers, including the construction workers, are in the unorganised sector. Will the hon. Minister consider extending the benefits of this scheme to the construction workers also?

SHRI M. ARUNACHALAM : Sir, I agree with the hon. Member that ninety per cent of the workers are in the unorganised sector. As far as the Act is concerned, the Employees Provident Fund Act, it does not distinguish between the regular, contract and casual employees. Sir, any worker who is a member of the Provident Fund automatically becomes a member of the Pension Scheme. Nearly 19.5 million workers are members of Provident Fund scheme.

The Provident Fund Scheme includes number of employees from unorganised sector including agriculturists, workers of fish processing units, stone quarry workers, building and construction workers. Even