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Title : Further discussion on the motion for consideration of The Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2004 (Insertion of new article 45A) moved by Shri Suravaram Sudhakar Reddy on the 17th February, 2006 (Bill withdrawn).

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, we take up the Bill for further consideration and passing.

Before further discussion on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2004 (Insertion of new article 45A) by Shri Suravaram Sudhakar Reddy is resumed, I would like to mention that 3 hours and 1 minute have already been taken on this Bill, as against 3 hours allotted for its discussion. As eight more members are there to take part in the discussion on the Bill, the House has to extend time for further discussion on the Bill.

Is it the pleasure of the House that time for this Bill be further extended by one hour?

SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. The time is extended by one hour.

SHRI C.K. CHANDRAPPAN (TRICHUR): Sir, I wanted to support the spirit of this amendment. The question of providing mid-day meal should not be taken as a kind of matter of charity. This is actually a responsibility of creating a new generation in our country who are healthy, who are intelligent, and who are dynamic. If we fail in our duty to do so, that will have its reflection on future of the country and its development. So, looking at this from this angle, I think, there is a lot of justification in this amendment where it has been proposed that more nutritious food should be ensured to be provided to children.

Now, Sir, there are a number of schemes and proposals. But, with all that, what is happening is that children are still largely neglected in their formative period.

Now, take the case of the Anganwadis under the ICDS Scheme by which the Government wanted to provide nutritious food for the children in their childhood, care and all that. According to the statistics of the Government, we require 1.7 million Anganwadis to take care of the children. But what has happened so far is that there are something like six lakh Anganwadis that are functioning. That means, two-thirds of the requirements are not yet met. Hardly, one-third of the requirement is met by that Scheme. If the Government is serious about providing facilities for the new generation – I began from that – to come up well in future, then one of the important steps to be taken is to ensure that the required number of Anganwadis under the ICDS Scheme is functioning all over the country. That is to say, if six lakh anganwadis are now functioning, then that number should be enhanced twice because 1.7 million is the required number of Anganwadis to take care of the children of this age. So, it is not a big task so far as the Government is concerned. But what is lacking there is probably a political will to do so. Of course, Shri Chidambaram, while presenting his Budget, enhanced the amount for the Anganwadis and all that. But the question is this. Considering the importance of the problem, whether this enhancement will be able to meet the requirements. When you look at that way, I think, the enhancement - of course, it is good - is too far from meeting the requirements.

There is one more question associated with the Anganwadis. Anganwadi is one of the institutions by which you can reach the children. Anganwadi is run in a manner where there is a helper and there is a worker also. The point is that they are treated almost like slaves. They are hardly given any reasonable payment. They are not at all treated like any person who is appointed for performing a certain duty. It is a kind of voluntary work that they are doing. There also, the payment that they are given is very pitiable. In that condition, it will be very difficult even for that institution to run by which you want to create a better generation of young people, you want to bring them up well and provide them with food. If the helper and the worker are not given sufficient support, then, probably the institution itself is likely to fail. So, this aspect should also be taken as a part of it.

Now, there are certain areas where the concentration has to be made if the Scheme of providing Mid-Day Meal is to be successful. So, if the Mid-Day Meal programme is to be meaningful, you have to identify the areas where it is maximum required. Firstly, the poverty-stricken people in this country are there. They should be the target area. Their children should be provided with sufficient support so that those children are taken care of. Whether it is a primary school or Anganwadi, from whichever institution they come, they should be given proper support.

Now, when you look at the poverty-stricken people, if you take more concretely the agricultural workers who get a very few number of working days throughout the year, according to Government's statistics they get hardly 100 days of work. So, with 100 days of work, an agricultural worker will be finding it extremely difficult to meet the requirements of the family and naturally the children will be

neglected. If their children are specially taken care of, then there is a possibility that this scheme will go a long way to meet the purpose for which it is introduced. Then, there are various areas. I can cite the example of tribals who constitute nearly 3 crore of our population. They are completely in wretched condition even today. If Anganwadis are concentrated in those tribal areas, sufficient help is provided and care is taken, then probably those children of the tribals, the next generation, will have a somewhat better life in future. So, if that has to be achieved, then the Government should have fixed priorities for tribals, for fisherman communities, for agricultural workers and the plantation workers, where again poverty-stricken marginalised people are working. If priority is fixed for their children, they are identified and if mid day meal is provided where they study, then, Sir, there will be some more meaningful reason for this project.

Before concluding I would like to say that the Government should take a new approach to this problem. The approach is not that you are spending some money so that some children will eat a little meal as mid day meal. That is not the thing. The thing is that we are purposely doing this so that the marginalised section of our people, their next generation, will be given a condition under which they will be provided nutritious food so that in the formative age, their health, their development and everything is taken care of. If we approach it with that view and with sufficient money allotted in the budget and with the approach that the institutions meant for it like Anganwadis are properly run, then I think this mid day meal will have a salutable contribution in creating a new generation of people, a new India. I hope, with this idea in mind, the Government will look at this problem. I support this Bill because this gives an opportunity for this House to discuss this problem and come to certain decisions.

SHRI BRAHMANANDA PANDA (JAGATSINGHPUR): Hon. Chairman, Sir, I extend my hearty thanks for giving me an opportunity to discuss on this sensational issue. Sir, we dream for a prosperous India and we say that by 2020, India will be a very powerful country. Children are really our wealth and unless special attention is given for the all-round development of the children, those who are real wealth of our country, we cannot dream for a prosperous India and the real dream of our great architect of modern India cannot be fulfilled.

While illiteracy is a big threat, widening the scope of basic education can play a preventive role in reducing female insecurity. Out of 21 crore children in the age group of 6 to 14 years, many do not have access to basic education. This problem persists despite numerous programmes for rapid expansion of the education system. Out of many incentive schemes to empower primary education, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme is really alluring. It is very shocking to see the way in which this programme is being implemented because in many cases it is found that nutritious food is not actually supplied to the children and the children suffer from various diseases. It is found that neither the authorities are attentive nor we give any special attention to ensure that good quality food is supplied to schools.

In this connection, I would like to submit that in a particular case, a truck carrying about 12 quintals of food for some towns in Uttar Pradesh was found in Delhi. If this type of scam is allowed to go on in this country, we cannot proudly claim that India is the biggest democracy in the world where we always give attention to honesty and transparency. These types of scams are increasing throughout the country. I would like to cite another incident here. In Azamgarh, 160 students have fallen ill and 50 became very serious after eating *kitchdi* in the school. These types of incidents are happening these days.

Sir, I represent the State of Orissa which is a very backward State dominated by the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. In our State also, due to lack of proper hygienic food, the children are falling ill and this has become a serious issue. When we are implementing this scheme to allure the children to come and attend school to expand basic education in our country, I would like to appeal to the hon. Minister that the Government should pay special attention to this scheme so that the real dream of achieving all-round development of our children can be fulfilled. The Government must pay special attention and see that this scheme is properly implemented at the lowest level. To make this scheme very effective, the people of all sections of our society must be involved in this. Apart from this, we have to see that nutritious food is supplied to the students and the food should be examined by experts before it is received by the school authorities.

Sir, in the tribal areas of our State, the situation is really very precarious because nobody goes to inspect this Mid-Day Meal Scheme. The inspectors and the DEOs who are vested with the power to inspect and see that this scheme is properly implemented or not, do not care for it. So, I welcome the proposal made in this Bill. This is really a very good programme with the aim to make our country more prosperous by alluring the poor children and the children of backward States like ours to attend school in large scale.

But unless the mid-day meal programme, which is the basis for this scheme, is being implemented in right spirit, it will not help. Its monitoring, the supply of good quality of nutritious food should be insisted and then only we can say that actually in true spirit the Government of India is going to implement this scheme. More attention and priority should given to States like Orissa where actually it is found that neither the good quality of food is supplied, nor is there any monitoring system, nor is there anybody to look after the system and nobody is serious about the issue. It is also found that the middlemen who are supplying the food are also involved in the scam and as a result, this has frustrated the whole scheme and the very purpose for which this scheme was created.

With these words, I conclude.

SHRIMATI ARCHANA NAYAK (KENDRAPARA): Hon. Chairman Sir, thank you for giving me an opportunity to participate in the discussion on the Constitutional (Amendment) Bill, 2004, seeking free nutritious food to all children being provided with free and compulsory education by the State, brought forward by hon. Member, Shri S. Sudhakar Reddy.

The children of India account for one-third of world's malnourished children and the country's rate of malnutrition is at 47 per cent, the same as that of Ethiopia. Children are the citizens of tomorrow. Healthy children are the treasure of the nation. Hence, we have to give more care on the well being of the young ones.

The United Nations Children's Fund report titled 'Progress for Children: A Report Card on Nutrition' reveals that half of the world's underweight, undernourished children come from South Asia, compared with one-third from sub-Saharan Africa. In India, girls suffer more from malnutrition than boys. The UNICEF report suggests that at least six lakh deaths of children under five can be prevented by simple health interventions, improved sanitation, and better food practices. By contrast, China has made remarkable progress bringing down its malnutrition to eight per cent and contributing significantly to the overall improvement in the East Asia's score. The UNICEF report points out fighting malnutrition, means tackling poverty, the lack of education, the marginalisation of girls, and social inequalities. Clearly, food aid alone will be insufficient to meet the crisis of malnutrition.

In India, the rate of malnutrition varies from State to State. Madhya Pradesh at 55.1 per cent and Bihar at 54.4 per cent top the list. But this in no way implies that prosperous States have well nourished children. A recent report indicates that in the Thane District of Maharashtra, the number of children dying from malnutrition right at the doorstep of Mumbai, India's financial capital, is shockingly high. Last year, 1100 children below the age of six are reported to have died in Thane District. While the cause of deaths are listed as pneumonia or other acute conditions, doctors say many of these children suffered from malnutrition and, in consequence, low immunity to disease and death. Many of the victims were children of the migrant workers, who suffer from economic deprivation linked with unemployment. This shows the connection between socio-economic conditions and malnutrition.

Malnutrition also stems from the low status of women in Indian families. The nutritional needs of pregnant women are given inadequate attention. This social failure, in turn, contributes to babies having less weight. Men have primary control over the typical household resources and, as a result, children's access to food has subordinate importance to theirs.

Instead of being in denial over this critical issue, the Government must ensure that all citizens can afford the cost of basic nutrition; they should also spare no effort in promoting gender equality in communities and within households. The rise of endangering the well-being of an entire generation is very real and urgent action is needed to safeguard the country's present and future.

The present allotment of fund for the Mid-Day meal is very low per child. Therefore I would like to urge upon the Government to increase the amount for the Mid-Day meal, so that nutritious and sufficient quantity of food can be given to the children. Even though States like Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Kerala are giving Mid-Day meal to the children, more and more States should be encouraged to introduce the scheme. The Central Government must provide adequate fund for the same.

I rise to support the Bill. With these words, I would like to conclude my speech.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRIMATI D. PURANDESWARI): I would like to voice my deep appreciation to Suravaram Sudhakar Reddy garu for the sensitivity and the concern that he had displayed in introducing a Bill which concerns the welfare and the well being of the children of our country. I would also like to voice my appreciation to the other Members for the sensitivity and the spontaneity with which they have participated in the deliberation. I have listened with rapt attention to the speech made by the mover of the Bill, Shri Suravaram Sudhakar Reddy. He moved this Bill for consideration, which seeks the insertion of a new Article 45 (a) in the Constitution and the amendment proposed reads as follows:

"The State shall endeavour to provide free nutritious food to children being provided with free and compulsory education by the State. "

Sir, it is heartening to note that from all quarters of the House, rising above Party lines, hon. Members and my hon. colleagues have all appreciated the intrinsic merits of the Mid-Day Meals Scheme which exists in most of our schools and in all parts of the country today.

Before we discuss the necessity and desirability of even introducing such a Bill, I would like to dwell briefly on the genesis and the present-day status of the Mid-Day Meals Scheme which is presently in existence in many of our schools. With heart-full of fulfilment

and satisfaction, I would like to bring to your notice and through you to the notice of other hon. Members of the House that the idea of introducing a Mid-Day Meals Scheme was mooted even 11 years ago by none other than our Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh ji who was then the Finance Minister. In his speech in the House in 1995 he observed:

"The schemes to provide Mid-Day Meals to school children have beneficial impact not only on child nutrition but also on school attendance. Some of the State Governments have been operating school Mid-Day Meal Schemes. As a part of emphasis being laid on this by the Government on primary education and taking into account the comfortable food stock with public sector agencies, it is appropriate that the Central Government should be willing to participate in the phased expansions of these schemes."

Sir, I would like to quote Article 45 of our Constitution, as was originally drafted. Article 45 says:

"Provision for free and compulsory education for children: The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years. "

This Article 45 remained untouched until the Constitution 86th (Amendment) Act of 2002 which substituted a new Article 45 which reads as follows:

"Provision for early childhood care and education to children below the age of six years : The State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years."

It shall thus be observed that long before the original Article 45 was substituted by a revised Article 45, we were not only able to conceptualise but we were also able to bring into operation a Centrally-sponsored scheme to boost universal primary education and also to improve the nutrition status of our children in the primary schools.

Sir, the revised Article 45 which laid special emphasis on early childhood care came in subsequently in 2002. The point that I would like to make here is that if we really intend to bring in welfare schemes and programmes for targeted sections of the society like the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, women and children, we can do it immaterial and independent of the fact whether or not there are enabling guidelines in the Constitution.

Sir, given the political will and the financial viability, any Government at any point of time is free to introduce welfare measures for any targeted sections of the society. Sir, here I can assure you that under the able leadership of our UPA Chairperson, Shrimati Sonia Gandhi and under the stewardship of our Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, and the cooperation of all our UPA allies, we will be able to march towards a welfare society with giant and rapid strides. And for such things, Sir, I do not think we need to resort to any kind of constitutional amendment here.

Before proceeding further on the matter, I would like to bring to the notice of the House certain details of this Scheme, which was started pursuant to the Finance Minister's Budget speech on the 15th March, 1995.

Sir, the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education or the Mid-day Meals Scheme was launched on the 15th August, 1995 to give boost to universal primary education. It was expected to increase enrolment, attendance, retention along with improving the nutritional status of the children in the primary classes in the Government schools, local body schools and also in the Government-aided schools. Sir, from October 2002, this Programme was extended to cover all the children studying in the EGS and the AIE Centres. The Programme provides for the distribution of cooked meals to children through the local implementing agencies. The Central Government provides foodgrains, which can be rice or wheat, free of cost at a rate of 100 grams per child per school day where cooked meals are served and 3 kilograms of rice per child per month where grains are distributed. The cost of transporting the foodgrains from the nearest FCI godown to the school is reimbursed to the State agencies and the district authorities. The State Governments and the Union Territory Governments meet the cost of conversion of food grains into cooked meals. About 64 million children, that is, about 59 per cent of the targeted age group, were supplied with cooked meals between the years 2005 and 2006. The Mid-day Meals Scheme was revised and universalised at the primary level from the 1st September, 2004. In addition to providing foodgrains free of cost to the States, the Central Government now provides assistance towards the cost of conversion of these grains into cooked meals at the rate of one rupee per child. There is a proposal to enhance it to Rs. 1.50 per child.

The transportation subsidy has also been further enhanced from Rs. 50 per quintal to Rs. 75 per quintal for all the States and to Rs. 100 per quintal in the Special Category States. When we say 'Special Category States', we are looking at the States in the Northern India mainly which have mountains and difficult terrain.

The mid-day meals are now being supplied to children in the drought prone areas also even during the summer vacation. The Scheme is now being implemented in convergence with the rural and urban development schemes for adequately meeting the infrastructural requirements.

Sir, turning now to the implementation status of this Scheme, the Programme is being implemented in a very decentralized manner with the involvement of the local level agencies like the School Management Committees, Panchayats, Parent-Teacher Associations, etc.

Sir, cooking is being done by women belonging to the self-help groups in many cases, and in the urban areas, NGOs have also been entrusted with the job of cooking meals for these children.

So far as coverage of school is concerned, beginning from 8.04 lakh schools, the Scheme covered 8.80 lakh schools in 2003-04; 9.04 lakh schools in 2004-05; and 9.53 lakh schools in 2005-06. The children covered under the scheme were 10.27 crore in 2002-03; 10.57 crore in 2003-04; 10.89 crore in 2004-05; and 11.94 crore in 2005-06.

Today, there are 12 crore children covered by the scheme. The assistance provided by the Central Government towards this scheme is as follows. In 2005-06, about 22.50 lakh metric tonnes of foodgrains was allocated and Rs.1690 crore was provided towards the conversion cost and Rs.22 crore was set aside for the purpose of management, monitoring and evaluation of the scheme.

Besides the above, the State Governments are also contributing from their resources for the betterment of this programme, particularly to improve the quality of meal. In addition, some of the States are also providing for the required infrastructural facilities like kitchen sheds. Today, all the States are implementing the programme and the implementation feedback points to a positive impact on enrolment and attendance of children in school. Social equality is fostered here through children sharing the meals with one another. Initially, there were instances of resistance to SC/ST children sitting along with other children or there was resistance to the consumption of food cooked by women belonging to the SC/ST communities. I must tell you here that such instances have come down considerably.

Having touched on the scheme, I would now like to touch upon certain points made by my hon. colleagues here. Shri Reddy has mentioned that in schools where there is a single teacher, the teacher is called upon to cook the meals and the same teacher is also expected to distribute the meals. He has also suggested that professional cooks should be appointed; kitchens and dining halls should also be constructed; and clean and potable drinking water be provided as these are some of the basic necessities required for more effective implementation of the Mid-Day Meal Scheme.

Shri Shailendra Kumar has also referred to some of the infrastructural deficiencies in connection with the Mid-Day Meal Scheme like absence of separate kitchen, store, school compound wall, etc. The main thrust of Shri Reddy's submission, however, is the need for enriching the calorific and nutritious value of the food and for supplying the same three times a day to the children instead of one time as it is done today. The proposal to increase the frequency of supply thrice a day has also been supported by Dr. P.P. Koya and Dr. K.S. Manoj also. In fact, the very purpose of pushing forward the present Constitutional amendment is to ensure that the school-going children are entitled to have three meals a day as a matter of Constitutional right. However, I must submit here in all humility that in the proposed manner in which the Bill has been brought forward today, I think, this would not serve the purpose. We would only be adding a Directive Principle to Part IV of the Constitution and this would not make it mandatory to carry forward the proposal as proposed by Shri Suravaram Sudhakar Reddy. This was rightly pointed out by Prof. Ramadass also.

Prof. Ramadass has, however, mentioned correctly that the nutrition of children at an early age is very imperative, particularly in the rural areas and the Government should supply free hygienic and nutritious food to children which would make a great impact and ensure free and compulsory education to children; and this would not only improve the attendance but reduce the drop-out rate also. Here, I would like to mention in this context that the provision of article 39 (f) of the Constitution already provides, in more broad based terms, for the protection of our children from exploitation and against moral and material abandonment.

We firmly believe that our children are the greatest wealth and as Nobel laureate Amartya Sen has aptly said, "they are reliable indicators of nation's growth and development". We, therefore, stand committed to our children's well being and welfare, be it education or health, whether there is a law in place or whether there is no law in place. The shortcomings and the deficiencies of the

on-going Mid-Day Meal Scheme have been effectively pointed out here today and most of them have been taken note of. Definitely, we would look into them.

Coming to the nutritious value of the mid-day meal which has been distributed to the children, I must bring to the notice of the House that State Governments like Haryana and Punjab have enriched their food by adding to their menu healthy and nutritious items like fruits and eggs.

West Bengal has added fish to its mid day meal scheme. States like Goa, Delhi and Manipur spend anywhere between Rs. 2.00 and Rs. 2.25 per child per day and Tamil Nadu contributes Rs. 2.00 per child and last but not least, Andaman and Nicobar Islands contributes Rs. 4/- per child, over and above the share given by the Government of India.

Shri Reddy has suggested that meals should be supplied thrice a day instead of once and this is supported by Dr. P.P. Koya and Dr. K.S. Manoj. Shri Sandeep Dikshit wants it to be served twice at least to every girl child initially. I am not very sure of the feasibility or giving in to the durability of the timings of the school. I do not think that this is a very feasible suggestion to make here. There was a suggestion that the third meal may be supplied in packets to be carried home by the children when the child leaves the school for the day. This raises the question of the time gap between the cooking of the meal and the consumption of the meal. We need to think twice here because by the time the meal is cooked and served to the child and by the time the child takes home the meal to consume, whether the meal would be in a fit condition for consumption or not. So, I do not think that it is a very practical suggestion.

Prof. Rasa Singh Rawat has very correctly pointed out that one substantive filling of tasty and nutritious meal with periodic changes in the menu of food items should be allowed and this has been taken care of and the menu is supposed to be displayed outside the school on the board so that the children and the parents of the children could have a look at the menu.

Shri Reddy has referred to some cast problems which hinder the operation of the Scheme. As I said, some parents earlier would not allow the children to sit along with the *dalits* and to consume their food. Similarly, they would not want their children to eat the food which was cooked by a woman belonging to SC-ST community. However, this cannot be addressed by simply passing a law. We all know that simply by passing a law, we cannot change the mindset of the society. We may enact any number of legislation but that will not resolve this social or caste malaise. To eliminate this, we shall have to create a social awareness which alone can alter the 'caste' mindset. In this effort, the NGOs, social activists and the participating people can definitely help us. The MPs, the sitting MLAs and the Panchayat members also can lend a supporting hand in a big way. I appeal to all of them through you Sir to help us in doing this. I may however add that the caste-related problems affecting the operation of Mid Day Schemes, as I had pointed out earlier, are on the wane considerably.

Sir, there were other points made by Shri Lakshman Singh, who referred to the elimination of corruption arising out of theft and pilferage. This was also highlighted by several other hon. Members. Mr. Singh has also suggested about making mandatory provision that only female cook from self-help groups should be appointed. Most of the States are appointing women belonging to the self-help groups and also women belonging to the SC and ST communities. This also considerably enhances or increases the employment chances for the women belonging to the SC-ST communities.

Dr. Karan Singh Yadav, while welcoming the Mid Day Meal concept, has stated that at places the scheme is in such a deplorable state of affairs that no food is available. If there are such instances, I would request the hon. Members to kindly bring it to our notice so that corrective measures could be taken. Besides the suggestion to increase the frequency of the meal twice a day, Shri Sandeep Dikshit has also suggested that children from 0 to 6 years and pregnant ladies should be covered under the Mid Day Meal Scheme, as has been pointed by Shri C.K. Chandrappan. I must tell you here that this is out of the ambit of the Bill because this comes under the ICDS. So, this should come in a separate form.

Sir, I have tried to cover all the points that have been raised by the hon. Members. As you are aware, the Mid Day Meal Scheme is a participatory scheme between the Central and the State Government.

16.00 hrs.

We stand committed to its cent per cent success by its effective implementation. In fact, we definitely want to strengthen it further because we know that by feeding our children good nutritious food we are actually building a healthy tomorrow. Today's children are the future of our country. In fact, we want to strengthen it further. We believe that the successful mid-day meal scheme will help us to attain several objectives also. It will improve the health of the school-going children. It will lead to the reduction of school dropouts. It will increase high literacy rate in the process and it will also help us in eliminating various other social evils like child labour and child marriage. We shall, therefore, extend as much support as possible, both financially and physically to the State Governments in making

this scheme a success.

I once again would like to mention that 12 crore children are now being covered under the mid-day meal scheme which is the largest lunch programme in the world. In his Budget speech this year our hon. Minister of Finance Shri P. Chidambaram has announced some increase in the allocation for this scheme from Rs. 3,010 crore for 2005-2006 to Rs. 4,813 crore for 2006-2007. Hopefully, we will be able to address some of the deficiencies in the scheme because we do have an enhanced Budget.

Turning to the 47 per cent malnutrition which Shrimati Archana Nayak has just pointed out, the Ministry has enlisted some home science teachers, Integrated Child Development Scheme Consultants and mothers to ensure that the quality of the meal which is going to be supplied to these children would be good and nutritious. The mid-day meal programme is not like any other governmental programme. Hailed by the world-renowned economist and Nobel laureate, Prof. Amartya Sen as the biggest pro-poor initiative since the land reforms of the 1970s, the mid-day meal scheme in 9.52 lakh schools for 12 crore children is fast firming up, complete with a well-defined implementation and monitoring process. For us, therefore, it is a mission. It is a matter of faith which we have to fulfil in any case at any cost. With our unflinching belief that 'feeding children is feeding development' the scheme is sure to enter the final phase of qualitative stabilisation very soon.

With these words, I would request Shri Sudhakar Reddy to kindly withdraw the Bill.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Shri Sudhakar Reddy, please be brief and precise. A number of speakers have already spoken. It should not be a second speech.

SHRI SURAVARAM SUDHAKAR REDDY (NALGONDA): Sir, first of all I would like to thank all the hon. colleagues who have participated in the debate and supported the amendment. Though one or two friends felt that there is no necessity of amendment, yet they agreed with the spirit of the amendment.

Sir, I feel still this amendment is necessary in spite of the effective defence put up by the hon. Minister Shrimati Purandeswari. The development of a country is decided not only by the GDP but by the Human Development Index. In our country, now we are visualising a 10 per cent GDP growth. But, at the same time, it is unfortunately a fact that more than 30 crore of the population are living below the poverty line. Hon. Minister has said that this is the biggest mid-day meal scheme in the whole world. It is also a fact that we are having the biggest poverty in the country, in the whole of the world. Largest number of the people living below the poverty line are in our country. About 15 crore of children are in need of this mid-day meal scheme. Our hon. Minister of Finance has given about Rs. 4,800 crore this year. But, in spite of this, it comes to less than 35 paise per child for food for each of the school days. It is very insufficient.

Sir, I would like to say that the prevalence of under-nutrition, a condition resulting from the inadequate intake of food or essential nutrients resulting in deterioration of physical growth and health, a chronologically weakened and under-supplied body heavily influences a child's productivity. It is exactly for this reason that we do need more nutrition to be supplied for our children.

Hon. Minister was telling about the feasibility of giving food thrice a day. There is a possibility, if we agree. If there is a will, there will be a way. The breakfast and lunch can be arranged in the packets with an egg and a nutritious drink like soyabean milk can be given to the child which will not get spoiled even if it is taken at home. I believe that if India has to advance, we have to help our children.

Right now, unfortunately, a very big debate is going on about the reservation to OBCs. A big section in our society is trying to prevent this good measure and on the name of merit, the SCs, the STs and the OBCs are being shown that they are giving them some sort of special treatment. They do not have nutritious food and they do not have equal economic opportunities. Hence, there is no possibility in fighting the so-called merit. It is exactly for this reason that you supply them nutritious food; you give them equal opportunities in economy; and you give them equal opportunities in studies and only then, the question of merit will come. Till then, this type of problems will be coming up again and again.

I believe that like any other Private Member's Bill, either I have to get defeated or I have to withdraw. While I agree to withdraw, I would request the hon. Minister to take into consideration the opinions of the Members of Parliament, the sentiments expressed during the debate for more nutritious food to be supplied and more amount of money to be allocated. Right now, I think, only 0.001 per cent of the Budget is allotted to nutritious food. This is very insufficient. The Common Minimum Programme also gives a direction to the Government of India that the nutritious food programme should be taken further to advance the general development of the country. I hope, these sentiments will be taken into consideration. Thank you.

Sir, I beg to move for leave to withdraw the Bill further to amend the Constitution of India.

MR. CHAIRMAN : The question is :

"That leave be granted to withdraw the Bill further to amend the Constitution of India."

The motion was adopted.

SHRI SURAVARAM SUDHAKAR REDDY : Sir, I withdraw the Bill.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shri Gingee N. Ramachandran – not present.