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Title: Need to address the problem of malnutrition in the country.

SHRI P.K. BIJU (ALATHUR): India has the highest percentage of undernourished children in the world. Approximately 60 million children are underweight in India. "The problem of malnutrition is a matter of national shame" Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said at the launch of the HUNGAMA (Hunger and Malnutrition) Report, which surveyed 73,000 households across nine States. Moreover, inequalities in under nutrition between demographic,, socio-economic and geographic groups increased during the 1990s attributed to the neoliberal economic policies and the structural adjustment programmes that advocates reduced funding in the welfare sector by the state. The existing response to malnutrition in India has been skewed towards food-based interventions and has placed little emphasis on schemes addressing the other determinants of malnutrition. Indian food prices have hit their highest level in more than a year, touching at an annual rate of 18 per cent. The percentage of rural Indian households that were undernourished rose from 48% at the time of NSS Round 43 (1987-88) to 67% at NSS Round 57 (2001-2002). Undernourished urban households rose from 37% in 1987-88 to 51% in 2001-2002. No pragmatic mechanism exists now to ensure the food grains to reach the masses. Improper storage facilities and poor maintenance across the country have destroyed a mind-boggling 10,688 lakh tones of food grains over the years. Primary policy response to child malnutrition, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) program is staggering with poor coverage. A calculation in 2004, based on simple arithmetic, showed that a budgetary allocation of at least Rs. 12,000 crores was required for the universalisation of ICDS. Yet, so far, the maximum amount provided in the Union budget of 2008-09, has been approximately half of that requirement. Through emphasizing micro-nutrient supplementation, private manufacturers of micro-nutrient enriched packaged food are to be progressively provided with assured demand through government procurement for ICDS. Through diverting several of the core functions of ICDS and its workers to NGOs, Self Help Groups and other private organizations, including the corporate sector, the governments responsibilities and administration of ICDS is hollowed out and privatization becomes a fait accompli. Strengthening of the PDS with sufficient storage facilities and effective distribution of stored food grains are other important steps to be taken to curb the problem of malnutrition.

So the Government should take necessary steps towards the above mentioned issues in order to curb the issue of malnutrition.