

simultaneously it is also a fact that all members would like to speak on the demands of Railways whether they are supplementary demands or general demands. It should be done that whomsoever would like to speak, let them speak. But after seven, the Minister may reply tomorrow after zero hour. Thereafter we will wind up this issue. As such I think that those who have a wish to speak will also be fulfilled. . . (Interruptions).

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Look, this is to be decided by the House.

SHRI RAM NAIK : Those who want to speak will stay . . . (Interruptions).

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Those who like to speak, only they will stay and none else.

SHRI RAM NAIK : That is right that only speakers will stay and nobody will raise the question of quorum. Thus, those hon. members who like to speak, will be able to speak and the House will also dispose this item . . . (Interruptions).

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : It is a matter of common understanding. You just look behind, some hon'ble members are raising their hands.

SHRI RAM NAIK : Those who like to go, they may go because it happens so. Those who want to speak they should be given a chance to speak. That is all what I want to say. . . (Interruptions).

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : Sir, when all hon'ble members every time would like to speak on it, then there is difficulty for us. When it is said that who want to speak, they may speak then it never happens that business is disposed of before seven in the morning. Every member would like that Minister for Railways should remain seated here, it is also a fact. The House should conduct its business by eight, nine or ten but don't do such type of work this time that we should be compelled to stay full night - because these are supplementary demands. Therefore, you may fix a time limit in this way that whomsoever wants to speak, they may speak by so and so hours.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA : Sir, time may be extended by 9 O'clock.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Alright, you sit down at seven, the House will run upto 9 O'clock. If it winds up before it, then that is right.

MR. BASU DEB ACHARIA : Sir, discussion will finish today.

17.40 hrs.

DISCUSSION UNDER RULE 193

Re : Need for Streamlining the Public
Distribution System—Contd.

[English]

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Now we shall take up item No.21 - further discussion under rule 193, on the need for streamlining the Public Distribution System. Shri Rambahadur Singh is to continue his speech.

[Translation]

SHRI RAMBAHADUR SINGH (Maharajanj) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, Food Corporation of India procures and stocks the foodgrains and allocates the foodgrains to the states for distribution through public distribution system. When the states get their allocations, they allocate the same at district headquarters level and issue licenses to the shopkeepers under public distribution system and monitor them. In order to make it more strong, the gov. has formulated several policies such as revamped distribution system. Revamped distribution system means to make available all things in hilly, drought prone and tribal areas.

Secondly, the Govt. will supply 200 grams foodgrains to the people living below poverty line for three days. Despite these managements, this system has not been proving to be successful. There is a reason to it that out of ninety crore population, 60 percent people, i.e. 54 crore people live below poverty line in our country. But the Government consider 32 crore people below poverty line and says that it can provide foodgrains only to those people. Earlier, 200 grams of foodgrain was made available at the rate of per day and per capita but that was also inadequate because at that time there was a need for 400 grams. Now, that has been reduced to 200 grams for three days. The Govt. says that it would not allow the people to die of hunger. I would like to make a request to the hon'ble minister that if any hon'ble member sees by putting himself in this situation, he will come to know as to how life can be led in such a low supply. The fire of hunger is so bad that it compels a person to commit any misdeed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I admit that the people of this country do not commit sin in order to satiate the fire of hunger. There are two types of persons in this country. One type of persons are those who commit sin to fill in their bellies. Others are those who commit crime for their luxury. Today, nobody is honest. Since people do not resort to honest means it is not possible for them to lead a dignified life. I can challenge that there is none

[Shri Rambahadur Singh]

in the country who is leading a dignified life. The reason is that unless, there is a check on evil deeds resorted to for lavish life. We can not stop the crimes committed to earn the bread. But it is an irony that the people who resorted to unfair means for their luxury are respected in the society, and those who do it for the bread are criticised. I would like to request the hon. Minister to give a serious thought on the issue as to how to save the people dying due to hunger.

The people for whom this facility has been provided, are not capable of buying the foodgrains once in a fortnight. They work for the whole day, and only after that they are able to earn their two square meal. When the shop of the Public Distribution system is open, these people have gone to earn their livelihood and when they get time, the shops of the Public distribution system are closed. If by chance the shop is open, the shopkeeper says that the foodgrains are not available. Even if the foodgrain is available, it is not fit even for the consumption of animals. That wheat and rice is not consumable even by the animals. There is a saying in Bhojpuri that tillers, grazers, poor, labourers, helpers down trodden and exploited lot are prohibited to take water from the wells. If they have to drink water, they should take it from a fountain, pond, tank or the river. When such is the mentality of people in this country, you may not succeed despite your best efforts. We are victims of the same mentality. You have been a socialist. You have got education of the socialism. Therefore we should give a serious thought on this matter. Unless you abolish this mentality, this system will not be successful at any cost. This is one aspect. The second aspect is that the shopkeeper takes dozens round of the Food Corporation of India even after submitting the draft. They do not get the foodgrains even after 30 days. Besides this you are also aware of problems faced by the shopkeeper in obtaining the licence. The shopkeeper has to please the supply officials and the members of the monitoring committee. If all that expenditure incurred for transporting the foodgrains from the godowns is included in this, the very commission which he gets is not sufficient. He has to pay from his own pocket. But nobody pays from his pocket and no one can, because it is not possible. One who enters in this business after selling his farms and land and by mortgaging his house, he will certainly indulge in black marketing. Due to this reason this Public distribution system could not become successful even today. I would like to make a request that we will have to resolve to take a stringent steps. So, with whom you have to fight are forceful, strong and are potent. The

persons for which you have to fight are weak, helpless, poor, and downtrodden. Therefore, I would like to make a request repeatedly that you should have will power. If it is not there, you will not get the foodgrains and if it is received, it would be rotten and if would be avail in black market. You give a slogan that we would not allow the people to die of hunger, and will save them from the soaring prices of the market and will stabilise the prices in the country. It can not be done. I would like to say that you are responsible for this increasing prices. You must have remembered the month of September 1996. In that month the price of the wheat was Rs. 400-500 per quintal and the prices of the same wheat in the month of December was raised up to Rs. 1000 per quintal. As to why it happened? It has created havoc every where. No where the wheat was selling at Rs. 1000 per quintal at that time. There was a lot of hue and cry that the wheat was being exported. The wheat was exported to south Korea for the animals. I have not heard so far that we do not have single corn in our home and we one trying to be honest. After that, due to pandemonium 10 lakh tonnes of wheat was supplied. After that why there were no effect of this? Government should have taken steps in the beginning. Had the Govt. raided people would have been caught but Govt. did this when situation became out of control. Those who had to fish in troubled waters, they did their job. They became millionaire. I do not know whose conspiracy is behind it? But I may be familiar or not, I can keep myself mum but general public talk about this. Each and every one talks about this that Govt. machinery is definitely involved in this scam.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to request that it is not enough to be honest but one should look honest also in the public. I do not take liquor but sitting on a wine shop if I say that I do not drink liquor no body will believe me. This is the position of this Govt. So these things should be considered seriously. If you would not do so, that day is not far when no body will be able to lead his life with respect and honesty and there will be violence in the country. Extremism will increase. What is going on in Central Bihar? People are fighting for respect and honesty in Bihar. To become an extremist has become their nature and any body can commit a crime to fill his belly. He has right to live. If these who were assigned the task of protecting the people, do not discharge their duty properly, the people have every right to select the path of their choice for their survival. If any body put hurdles, consequences will be very serious.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker Sir, according to Govt. 32 crore

people are living below the poverty line in the country, while actually 54 crore people are living below the poverty line. I challenge the Govt. What is the condition of these people in this country, I tell you. They have to work hard to win their bread to survive, Now tell me where will these 22 crore people go ? If they do not have meal, pandemonium will be there. It will give rise to extremism. It is my request that a survey may be conducted in this regard. Moreover you have played a cruel joke by giving only 250 gms. pulse every month. Today you are celebrating 50th anniversary of the independence of country and here 54 crore people do not get a morsel. You should provide 200 Grams per person, per day. You arrange for a week in place of a fortnight because a labourer goes to work in morning and when he comes back, ration shop is closed and during that period manipulations take place. You fix a time when he could get ration in time. Coarse ration may be arranged for them at Public Distribution shop, so that a poor man could purchase it. A poorman also desires that he could purchase wheat and rice and make his both ends meet.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, please don't handover the responsibility of monitoring to the State governments. It is the responsibility of both. in order to make this public distribution system a success a joint monitoring committee under the guidance of the both may please be constituted.

Shopkeepers are given very inadequate commission. They are given 5.83 rupees as commission for a bag of Sugar.

I have mentioned about the Food Corporation of India, licenses Supply Officers, members of the monitoring Committee and I have mentioned about the freight of taking it from godowns to shops. You take into account all these what sort of justice is this ? You knowingly force the shopkeepers to do black marketing. Therefore, you please think over the Commission issue so that they are deprived of this opportunity. Even after that if they do the same then it is your moral as well as legal duty that you should punish them but unless you improve upon this system, though you have got the Legal rights to punish them. You don't have the moral right to do the same. Therefore please think over this issue seriously.

I would like to submit to the hon. Minister this also that he is responsible for the irregularities being committed in the Food Corporation of India. Even after depositing the draft, why it takes even 30 days to lift the foodgrains. Why don't you take action against the officers of the

Food Corporation of India who act in this manner. I would like to quote an example that there is a FCI godown in Chhapra. It took 20 to 25 days after the draft was deposited to lift the foodgrains under the 10 kilograms scheme. You get it investigated. With these words I conclude.

[English]

DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY (Visakhapatnam) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the public distribution system is the most important system in today's modern society in our country. That is the reason why the issue was raised under Rule 193 for discussion by me and by Shri Sriballav Panigrahi. Other hon. Members spoke on the subject because of the fact that I was not there. Now it is my duty to speak briefly on the subject.

We have been hearing a lot of criticism of the public distribution system in our country. There is a strong criticism of how people do manipulate and furnish wrong facts and figures. The Government is providing the essential requirements to which the poor man is legitimately entitled, but he is not getting them. It is because there are many loopholes in the system. Most of the traders and dealers try to take undue advantage of the poor people. It is a known fact and I need not repeat it. What is the solution to this problem ? We are pained to hear that the traders mix kerosene with diesel and they also see that kerosene does not reach the poor man.

There are many malpractices going on in the Food Corporation of India and in various administrative systems. We keep on hearing about them.

I would draw the attention of the House to press reports and would like to get a clarification from the hon. Minister concerning food. The press report reads as follows :-

"Wheat worth more than Rs. 10 crore damaged. More than 2.4 million tonnes of wheat, buffer stock worth more than Rs. 10 crore was virtually reduced to cattle-feed."

It is phenomenally painful to see this report. It is a fact that we feel ashamed.

I want the House to know what is the reason for the damage of so much of wheat. We must know the truth of this newspaper report.

I quote from the *Indian Express* dated 3rd July, 1997 as follows :-

"Rice worth Rs. 14 crore missing from public

[Dr. T. Subbarami Reddy]

distribution system. Sources revealed that there was a discrepancy of 4.2 million tonnes of rice between the figures of the Food Ministry and the Food Corporation of India. The procurement cost, handling and carriage cost of 2.4 million tonnes amounted to Rs. 14 crore and the Cabinet Committee has ordered an inquiry."

I would like to know what happened to that.

18.00 hrs.

The entire House will be happy to know about one thing. Is it a fact that really a fraud involving Rs. 1400 crore has been committed in this case? How could the *Indian Express* publish so boldly a report on 3rd July? So, I would like to know the factual position about this matter.

There is another most important thing. I would like to give a small example. It has been mentioned like this: "Misappropriation and also total lack of efficiency." It has been mentioned that according to sources 11407 fair price shops in Adilabad District in Andhra Pradesh are - I am merely giving a small example in the country-supplying rice to 3,80,043 white ration card holders. But an average of 50 bogus ration cards are there. You can imagine the position. If 3,80,000 white ration card holders are having bogus ration cards, what is the state of the Public Distribution System? There are many loopholes. But I am happy that two days back, the Prime Minister also intervened when Shri Sriballav Panigrahi was speaking on the subject and said that he was also convinced that he must review the Public Distribution System. He also agreed that the present supply of 10 kg. of rice was not sufficient for the family of poor people and it must be raised. I appreciate that stand. But I will appreciate more if action is really taken after his commitment.

In Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa, we come to know that in most of the villages, there are no fair price shops and the people are suffering so much there. At least in this case, as an example in this great county, the Government must take an effort by opening more fair price shops and also by introducing a new system to see how best the poor man receives the real, deserving commodities from the Government.

There is another most important thing. The Government's policy on the foodgrains imports and exports has a tremendous and phenomenal bearing on our finality

of the distribution system. For instance, if Government does not properly judge what is going to be the production of wheat or rice or sugar in our country, say in a particular year, if the Government wrongly calculates it, it is going to be very dangerous for our system. I do not understand one thing. Just on the 4th of August, the Food Minister was committed in the Rajya Sabha that the State Trading Corporation of India has decided to import wheat from Australia. I would like to know what makes him import wheat from Australia. I would like to know what is today's production in the country. On the one side when the Government is suffering from foreign exchange problem, what is the necessity of the Government to think of importing it?

About sugar also, there is a gross confusion. There is a gross mis-communication about the sugar policy. Each newspaper keeps giving every day one policy stating that the Government is going to make free the import of it; the Government is going to allow export. I do not understand it. I do hear the story that the levy sugar is not lifted. It is already getting stocked in the sugar factories. They are not able to pay the sugarcane arrears to the farmers. What is happening? Why is it happening like this? Why does the Government not apply its mind to this sugar policy? I cannot imagine one thing. Today, in India, there is an abundant sugar production, sugarcane production and there are so many sugar factories. That being so, what is the necessity for us to import sugar? What is the necessity to think of it? Then, what will happen to the Public Distribution System? I would like to know the details about these things. Therefore, I take this occasion and opportunity to draw the attention of the Government of India and also the Ministry of Food to this aspect and request the Government to see that such a confused and miscalculated judgement does not take place about the availability of wheat, sugar and rice. The Government should also see to it that it will not hastily decide the import of these products.

Sir, it is easy to make criticism. Finding fault is very easy. But the million dollar question is; How to provide a small and efficient Public Distribution System in our country in such a way that every essential commodity like kerosene, wheat, rice, sugar and all other commodities reaches the poor man at a reasonable price, without any fraud, without any deficiency and without even losing anything? How should the system work? Of course, nobody can provide it fully. But the Government must make an effort in this direction.

What are the systems going on? What are the loopholes that are there? What best can they do to improve it? I feel that the Panchayat System should

be streamlined. In the Panchayat System, they must make the Panchayats responsible in the matter of distribution. The District Collector should monitor this scheme every week, every month, on a top priority basis. In a democratic country like India, if a poor man is not properly given the opportunity to receive the subsidised products, it will be a great crime. I must say that it will be harmful to the society.

Therefore, in conclusion, I very effectively emphasise the necessity of it and impress upon the Government that the top-most priority should be given to it. Let us review it; let us call a Conference of the Chief Ministers. The Prime Minister has committed recently on the floor of the House that he was going to call a Conference of the Chief Ministers and discuss with them. It is a welcome step. At the same time, I want the Ministry of Food to give a top priority to this and apply their mind with heart and soul to see what best they can do, how they can plug the loopholes and how they can ensure that black-marketing does not take place.

I do not believe in criticising the FCI totally. There are people in the Government machinery who are sincere. We cannot say that everybody is involved in a scam, we cannot say that everybody is deceiving, we cannot say that everybody is corrupt. I do not agree with this. Only thing is, if ten percent people are involved in corrupt practices, it causes an irreparable damage to the image of the biggest democratic country in the world. Therefore, a time has come when the Government administration must realise it and work in a national spirit so that people do not get an opportunity to laugh at the corrupt practices of this country. At the same time, we must have the heart and mind to appreciate the good people also. Therefore, even though we criticise the FCI, we criticise the Food Ministry and various administrative offices saying that so much amount has been lost, so much scam is there, we must also see the good things done by the people. We must also see as to how to plug the negative things done by them and make an effort in this direction.

In conclusion, I once again say that the public distribution system is very important. The Prime Minister has already taken a personal interest. I expect that at least within three month's time, the Government will come forward with a new blue-point about it as to how they are going to do it and how they are going to give a new life to the public distribution system.

[Translation]

SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT 'BACHDA' (Almora) : Mr. Deputy Speaker Sir, the hon. Prime Minister while intervening in the debates has mentioned about the fact that the T.P.D.S. or Targetted Public Distribution system

is not working properly. He also agreed that 10 kilograms of foodgrains is not enough to feed a family and assured that the government will think over it very soon and make a statement in the House after discussing it with hon. leaders of the political parties.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Like Shri Reddey ji, you too please finish your speech in the stipulated time.

SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT 'BACHDA' : Mr. Deputy speaker Sir, I am the single person to speak from the whole Uttarakhand region and Uttar Pradesh. I would like to draw you attention towards the problems there. Therefore if I exceed the time limit, kindly allow me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have been continuously drawing the attention towards this foodgrain problem particularly on the situation that has become prevalent in the hilly region since the last one year. I have raised this matter on 18.12.96, 21.2.97, 11.3.97, 15.3.97, 14.5.97 and 29.7.97 but in spite of this no positive step has been taken till date and the matter was closed by saying that distribution is a state subject. While distribution is a state subject but what has been the position of its allocation. If we look into these situations, then as has been said by all the speakers, their dissatisfaction gets reflected. It was said about Kerala that the Centre is discriminating with the State. This was stated by hon. Shri V.V. Raghvan and he narrated how the 24 lakh metric tonnes of foodgrains allocated to Kerala was reduced to 20 lakh metric tonnes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker Sir, Shri Srivallabh Panigrahi of Orissa, who is also the mover of this motion has also said that earlier the allocation of foodgrains was 1.5 lakh metric tonnes per months which has now become 35 thousand tonnes and this scheme has been opposed by Orissa too. Shri Lalit Bihari Tiwaryji has given the figures about Delhi which states that 65 thousand metric tonnes of wheat and 40 thousand metric tonnes of Rice were allocated previously which has now reduced to 40 thousand and 28 thousand metric tonnes respectively. The hon. Minister in a press statement has himself accepted about Uttar Pradesh that 15 lakh tonnes of foodgrains was being sent there. The demand of the state is of 38 lakh tonnes and it is expressing displeasure over it. In the Uttaranchal region, where shops, markets are not available and where inadequate crop cultivation is done and hardly one month's foodgrains would be produced even if there is adequate rain and the monsoon arrives in time, and the people there remains dependent on governments fair price shops for the rest of the year. In the meantime the Prime Minister visited the Uttaranchal region. When leaders of all the political parties, Journalists

[Shri Bachi Singh Rawat 'Bachda']

pointed out to the Prime Minister in the convocation ceremony of Pant Nagar University that there is a serious shortage of foodgrains in the Uttaranchal region and people are depending on wild grass and that he should solve the problem. He said that action would be taken within three days to solve the problem. We are in the month of August now and this assurance was given on the 21st of June. I welcome the statement made by Prime Minister in the House earlier that the matter will be looked into but the present day's situation is that people have resorted to blockades, closure of shops and trades in Dharchula, Munshari, Ranikhet, Bageshwar tehsils and Gangoli Haat for three to six days, even then foodgrains is not being made available there. The United Front Government which was committed to make foodgrains available had mentioned in its performance budget which was presented during the Budget session that the Public Distribution System which is part of the Common minimum programme of the United Front would be made effective by giving thrust to improve its basic services. It was mentioned that 10 kilograms of foodgrains would be provided on half of its price and while allocating foodgrains we would take into account the problems of hilly states, States having inaccessible areas where there is no regular market and the States with inadequate foodgrains. Whether it has been taken into account ?

If we look into this issue in terms of figures we will find that it is very awkward. I am having the data of May as this Plan was started on 1st June, 1997. There was an allocation of 25 thousand tonnes of wheat and 18 thousand tonnes of rice for hilly areas till May but in June it was reduced to Seven thousand tonnes of wheat and three thousand tonnes of rice. Thus it was reduced to one sixth. How can we assume that the affairs would be managed in such areas where there is no production. Gross injustice has been done to the hilly areas. It was the Government of Uttar Pradesh which diverted the foodgrains left out from allocated ones for the plain areas or from other sources and by managing its transportation to the hilly areas during crisis so as to bring stability in life there. The day before yesterday it was published in newspapers that the Gorkhaland National Liberation Front had warned that they would be observing a bandh for three days as the condition of some area of a hill state or a hilly area region in the state of West Bengal, is also similar. Shortage of foodgrains has arisen in that area also in the same way. There are no shops and Markets there that is why they are forced for three days bandh.

We are moving with the ninth five year plan. I have the approach paper 97 to the ninth five year plan 97

to 2007 before me. I Quote the matter given on the page number 18 :

[English]

"In particular, the Public Distribution System will be restructured in order to provide foodgrains at substantially lower prices to the poor in a focussed manner and to ensure availability of such commodities in the remote and deficit areas of the country."

[Translation]

Is Uttaranchal not a part of the country ? Even after raising the issue of Uttaranchal area seven-eight times that area remained neglected in such a way. The Central Government could not fix the price from 1st June to 14 June. As a result thereof the foodgrains available there could not reach the market and the consumers and therefore, people are scared. People were forced to close down their shops. Besides the closure of market and shops another big problem has cropped up and it is coming up in the form of inverte in Munshari of Tehsil Dharchula, Dist. Pitthoragarh.

It has been opened for the foreign tourists but the Indians cannot carry foodgrains without any permit. When the war broke out with China no shop other than the Govt. fair price shop could be opened within 15 kilometer of the border area. Another subject is coming in this issue that is transport subsidy is being given to the hilly states. A starred Question was raised on other hilly areas, whether they also would be provided with the transport subsidy for food grains. An assurance was given on this. Today whenever the matter on making arrangements for sending the foodgrains from plains to the hill area is taken up the only answer to it is no arrangement has been made on behalf of the Government.

The Jansatta dated 5th July presents the true picture before us. It says "Chawal ki Bandbant, Sarva Janik Vitaran Pranali Barason se Lakawagast hai". The United Front had announced to revise this issue in its political agenda but in vain and its effect is seen nowhere. Meanwhile it has come to the notice that the quantity of rice the Ministry of food had purchased from the farmers was not available with the food corporation of India. There is difference of 24 lakh tonne in both the data. Its price, maintenance etc. has been reduced to 1400 crore rupees. Such a big scam of rupees 1400 crore, however, is not the first case with Food Corporation of India. Only this year a foodgrain scam of 200 crore rupees has been unearthed in Chandigarh, but the records lying in the godowns of Food Corporation of India show full stock on papers. I made several complaints regarding the godowns lying under rail head of Uttaranchal in my

constituency. Actually it is seen that there is no stock of foodgrains in the godowns but only paper work is being done and even the poor, for whom a plan was chalked out, are not getting enough foodgrains. Actually what is the problem? It is not the problem that it is given at half a price or one fourth. The problem is the way in which 89 development blocks of Uttaranchal area was brought under Rapid Public distribution system and 10 kilogram of wheat, 8 kilogram rice per unit were made available so that they could purchase enough foodgrains. Today you are talking of providing only 10 kilograms, It would neither be enough nor the same would be available somewhere. How would you provide this? The hilly areas which have not been given the status of a state are assured of the same. The Prime Minister had given an assurance at Pant Nagar to solve this problem within three days. But, even today he has not said anything about solving the problem but had certainly intervened in it. He had told that it will be considered but till then the people in rural areas would have to remain hungry. Honourable Ministers would have to pay a special attention towards it. We have a long standing demand to implement the old Rapid Public distribution system. We do not require the food grains at half the price, but instead you should provide employment to the people. You talk of providing a subsidy of Rupees 200 crores whereas if the people be provided with employment they would prefer to purchase foodgrains after working with self respect. But where from would they get the foodgrains. They should be provided with the shops so as to enable them to get full quota food grains per unit and every family.

Kapkot, Garudh, Bageshwar, Bhaisiyachana, Lamgadha, Dhawadevi, Dorahat, Chaukhuti etc. are particularly the most affected areas of Almora Dist. Kanalichaeena, Bed, Moonakot, Champavat and besides it Dharchula, Munshiari, scheduled tribe areas of Lohaghat are such areas where no foodgrains other than beans (Rajma) and potatoes are produced. They are leading their lives in this manner. Some emergency plan should be chalked out for providing them foodgrains otherwise starvation like situation may develop.

With these words, I hope that honourable Minister would certainly take a decision at the earliest regarding the hilly areas where no foodgrains are produced, where there are no markets and he would also concentrate on such remote areas about which decision has been taken, and a mention has also been made in the Ninth five year plan. The common minimum programme of the United Front says that for maintaining price stability we would strengthen the Public Distribution

System, and I also hope that he would take an immediate decision in this regard and he would help in bringing normalcy.

[English]

SHRI N.K. PREMCHANDRAN (Quilon) : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity.

The public distribution system is one of the pillars which can control and regulate the open market system. One of the main objectives of the public distribution system is to ensure the availability of foodgrains and essential commodities to the consumers as well as to control and regulate the open market system in India.

The first point which I would like to highlight is for having an effective public distribution system. The Central Government as well as the State Government have got a joint responsibility. So, there should be a coordination between the Central and the State Governments so as to make the system effective.

The procurement of foodgrains and essential commodities as well as the supply of these commodities to the States is the main job which is entrusted to the Central Government. It has two purposes. One is to ensure that the farmers who are producing the essential commodities get reasonable prices, which would not be lower than the Central Issue prices; the other is to ensure that the consumers would get these products at affordable prices. So, the procurement of the foodgrains and their supply to the State Governments on time is the main objective to be achieved by the Central Government. The duty cast upon the State Governments is the actual distribution of the foodgrains and essential commodities to the consumers.

According to me, the Centre-State coordination is to be made effective and timely action by both the Centre and the States are required. When there is an acute shortage of foodgrains in a particular State, the Centre has to act on time. During the crop seasons, the procurement has to be made effectively so as to meet such acute shortages. So, the coordination between the Centre and the States has to be made effective so that the public distribution system will be more useful as far as the people are concerned.

The next question that I would like to raise is regarding strengthening of the public distribution system. The network is very important. There is a network system, from the Centre at the top to the States at the bottom, which is very important. A free, non-corrupt system is required. A mechanism is also required for evaluating

[Shri N.K. Premchandran]

the various schemes from time to time.

The next point which I would like to touch upon is streamlining of the public distribution system. The United Front Government has, in its Common Minimum Programme, stressed the need for streamlining and improving the basic minimum services. The public distribution system is one of the services which ought to be streamlined. It has to be streamlined in three ways; firstly, foodgrains shall be sold to the families below the poverty line at subsidised prices; secondly, the public distribution system need not cater to the affluent sections of the society; and thirdly, the management of the public distribution system shall be entrusted to the elected *panchayats* and *nagarpalikas*.

I am very proud to say that as far as the first point, that is, the sale of foodgrains to the families below the poverty line is concerned, the earlier Government headed by the then Prime Minister Shri H.D. Deve Gowda has fulfilled the promise of implementing the Targeted Public Distribution System by giving ten kilogrammes of – rice or wheat – foodgrains to each family below the poverty line at half the rate of the Central Issue Price. That was actually an achievement of the ten month old Deve Gowda Government. I would like to appreciate the Government for implementing this programme, which has been promised in the Common Minimum Programme.

As far as the second point is concerned, it has not been fulfilled so far. The management of the Public Distribution System should be entrusted to the cooperative sector as this sector has become a parallel economy, especially in States like Kerala. In the year 1997-98, a new system of public distribution has been introduced which is called Neethy Stores. These are being run by the primary cooperative societies which are in turn run by the farmers. Rupees fifty crore have been allocated for this purpose in the Budget. This new system is being experienced by the State of Kerala. I would like to share our experience with you.

Sir, the State of Kerala has started the Public Distribution System even during the period of Travancore Maharajas. A very effective system is functioning in the State for a very long time. Public Distribution System comes under the Department of Civil Supplies. In the year 1982 a new system was introduced by which not only the foodgrains but also other essential commodities have been sold through Maveli Stores. They are run by the State Government directly through the Department of Civil Supplies. During Onam festival in every nook and corner of the State, these Maveli Stores and

Departmental Stores function. The main purpose of the Public Distribution System is to control the price in the open market system. The Public Distribution System is playing an important role in controlling the prices in the open market system and it is effectively functioning in our State. But it is unfortunate that the Central Government is not considering all these aspects as far as our State is concerned. In our State more than sixty per cent of the people are dependent on the rationing system or the Public Distribution System. But it has not been taken into consideration. I urge upon the Government of India to take the special features of the State of Kerala into consideration in respect of Public Distribution System.

For the Targeted Public Distribution System, according to the norms, the Central Government's assessment of BPL is only 25 per cent. But the actual position is that above 50 percent of the people are dependent on the Public Distribution System. Not only the working class and the poor people but also the middle income groups are dependent on the Public Distribution System. So, the excess comes to 40 per cent. This excess burden is put on the heads of the State Government. I would like to urge upon the Central Government to take this aspect into consideration.

A statutory rationing system was introduced during the time of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in the Year 1964 and that is still being continued. So, considering all these aspects, more grant and special allocation should be given to the State of Kerala. Recently, the allocation of foodgrains to the State has been considerably reduced without any reason. The Onam festival is fast approaching. It falls in the month of September. During the last two years, we have got 20,000 tonnes of foodgrains as additional quota. I would like to urge upon the Ministry of Food and Civil Supplies to grant not less than 50,000 tonnes of foodgrains as special allocation to the State of Kerala as this festival is fast approaching.

With these words, I would again like to highlight the importance of strengthening the Public Distribution System network. The management of the Public Distribution System must be handed over to the local panchayats and the cooperative sector. The number of items distributed in the Public Distribution System should also be increased. Under the Neethy Stores system, even the products of Hindustan Lever are being sold. If the Public Distribution System is effective, it would be able to regulate and control the open market system which will help the poor people and the consumers of this country.

With these words, I conclude. Thank you.