

the House that we would adjourn at 6 O' Clock. Now the Minister proposes that the House be extended beyond 6 O' Clock in order to resume the discussion on the Demands for Grants relating to the Ministry of External Affairs. If the House agrees, we may extend the time up to 07 O' Clock.

SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: Yes, Sir.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: All right. After 6 O' Clock, we shall take up Demands for Grants relating to the Ministry of External Affairs.

17.49 hrs.

FAIR PRICE SHOPS (REGULATION)
BILL *Contd.*

[English]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr. P.J. Kurien to speak.

PROF. P.J. KURIEN (Idukki): Sir, I rise to support the Bill put forward by Shri Basavaraju. I congratulate him for bringing such an important Bill.

As you are aware, the Central Government is supplying foodgrains to the State Governments and it is the full responsibility of the State Government to distribute it through the public distribution system.

In our country there are thousands of retail shops where essential commodities are sold to the poor and ordinary people. They are supposed to stick to certain norms. They are supposed to sell these articles at fair price as the name itself indicates. They are supposed to display on board the price of the commodity that they are selling. But unfortunately the price of whatever they are selling are not displayed in the ration shops.

Therefore on the question of prices, the retailer or the shop owner can easily cheat

the poor illiterate people in the villages. Secondly, the poor people are cheated in terms of the quantity that they purchase also. In most of the shops what has been sold as a particular quantity mentioned will actually be less than what is mentioned by the shop owner. The poor villagers will not be able to recheck it. Therefore, in terms of quantity, quality and the price, in all these three ways the customer, the buyer is cheated.

I don't say, this cheating is being done with the collusion of the State Governments. I don't say that. But the complacency of the State Government is there. The officials of the State Government are colluding with the shop owners—not only retail shop owners, but wholesale shop owners also.

I here is a kind of vicious circle by which these atrocities are perpetrated on the poor people, on the poor villagers and the illiterate people who are buying from these fair price shops. The fact is that the State Government does not take serious note of this kind of malpractice going on under their nose. Some people say that those in authority or some of the State Governments are in collusion with the whole-sale distributors of essential commodities.

I have heard such complaints in the State of Kerala. When whole-sale shops are distributed by the State Government, especially by the present State Government in Kerala, they give the whole-sale shops to certain persons on a consideration. Because of that consideration, the Government officials are not able to touch that wholesaler. That wholesaler will be in collusion with the retailers and it works as a network and nobody touches anybody and from the retailer to the wholesaler both can resort to these malpractices and the political leadership will be supporting those who are perpetrating them. This is happening at least in Kerala and I am sure in some other States also.

AN HON. MEMBER: Throughout the country.

PROF. P.J. KURIEN: It is happening there. Now where does the defect lie? The main defect lies in the fact that although the Central Government is supplying the essential commodities rice is supplied by the Central Government—the Central Government has no responsibility over the distribution system. The Central Government has no power to monitor whether the rice or wheat given to the States is being distributed properly, whether they reach the really needy for whom these articles are meant. There is no mechanism now. According to me, that is the real problem that we are facing. And the tendency of the State Governments—especially in my State, I have seen—it that, for their inefficiency, they will be trying to blame the Central Government. I have seen a number of statements in the Press where State Ministers would blame the Central Government for their lack of efficiency in the distribution system.

I would strongly support the Bill and request that the hon. Minister should bring forward a new comprehensive Bill by which the Central Government will be able to control and monitor the public distribution system in our country. The Public Distribution System is not merely for supplying the materials for certain people. Above all, it has got a certain important role to play. In some areas of our country the food production is in excess and in some other areas there is no food production. In my State of Kerala, we do not produce even one-third of the rice that we need. We do not produce even a single kilo of wheat at all, whereas in Punjab rice and wheat are produced in excess. So the Public Distribution System enables, on the one side, to give reasonable prices to the farmers—where they produce, say in Punjab or in Andhra Pradesh or in Madhya Pradesh—and on the other side it helps to take the rice or wheat or other commodities to the areas where they are needed. So on the one side, it is helping the growers, helping the farmers, to get reasonable prices and on the other side, it is helping the poor and the needy to get the food materials at subsidised rates. Here I want to emphasis one point. We are spending at least more than

two crores of rupees as subsidy for the rice distributed through the fair price shops. But the benefit of the subsidy, which is given through the fair price shops is not reaching the poor. Here you should consider whether the subsidy component should go to all the people. I would suggest that the subsidy component should go only to those people who are below the poverty line. This subsidy component need not go to the people who are above the poverty line. So this aspect I would request you to consider.

In my State of Kerala, there is a Statutory Rationing System, by which the Central Government has agreed that according to the requirement of the State will be supplied without any break. This was an assurance given by the Government when the Statutory Public Distribution System was adopted.

18.00 hrs.

This had been accepted many years ago but over the years what has happened is that—may be due to lack of availability of rice or other reasons—Government forgot this assurance and there have been complaints that enough rice is not being supplied to the State of Kerala.

Sir, Keralites have special habits. They do not take wheat. They prefer to take rice. It is not only Keralites but also Bengalis and others. The point is that even a poor Keralite is not interested in buying wheat and using it because of the habit that he has developed over centuries. They want only rice. Now when you allot food to the State of Kerala you compute both rice and wheat and say so much quantity is allotted to the State of Kerala. What happens is that there cannot be any intake of wheat. Now you allot 1.40 lakh tonnes of wheat and rice together but the wheat component will not be taken by the shop-keepers because people do not buy wheat but you will say that so much quota had been allotted to Kerala but there is no intake. But the reality will be that at the ration shops people go for rice and they do not get rice and they refuse to buy wheat. So on the

one side they do not get enough food material whereas on the other side your officers. Supply an account that so much quantity of food has not been taken. This is kind of a strange situation where you supply and we do not get. So I request you to consider this problem. Please reduce the supply of wheat and give enough rice to Kerala. I have no doubt that you can do this because in many of the Northern States people like to eat more wheat. Therefore, supply of rice to Northern States may be reduced or more rice may be procured from there and this more rice should be supplied to a State like Kerala where there are only rice eaters.

Secondly there is a special type of rice which we call in Malyalam 'iron rice'. It is also called Punjab boiled rice. This variety of rice is rejected by Keralites. They do not take it at all. If you supply Punjab boiled rice then your account will indicate that Kerala has been given so much rice but there is no intake and, as such, the allotment may be cut. So I request you not to supply this Punjab boiled rice to Kerala.

Thirdly I would like to say a word about the functioning of FCI. I have only compliments for FCI. FCI has a large network throughout the country but there are certain areas where FCI is not having depots and godowns. So, this is sometimes creating problems in the public distribution system. In my district, the supply of ration rice to the people is sometimes delayed simply because of the fact that there is no FCI depot there. That is not a remote area. That is very much a central area. But simply because there is no FCI godown in my district, the supply of ration is delayed. I would request the Minister to consider this suggestion that there should be FCI godowns in every district, in every remote district and far-flung areas. Government should have a master plan in this regard. At least in the next Plan, the Government should consider to set up FCI godowns in all districts. When I talk about the public distribution system, the most serious problem is adulteration. That again is coming under the State Government. Actually, what is the item which you

are getting without being adulterated? Especially in Kerala, after the coming of the Marxist Government, adulteration has increased and they are supporting adulteration.

SHRI NAWAL KISHORE SHARMA (Jaipur): Even politics is adulterated in Kerala.

PROF. P.J. KURIEN: I would only request you to take stringent steps against those people who indulge in this malpractice of adulteration. This should not be left to the mercy of the State Government? The Central Government should have some monitoring machinery in this field, should have some power to book the adulterators who are actually the social enemies of the society. The Central Government should bring forth a Bill whereby they may acquire power to deal with the adulterators. With these words, I support the Bill brought forward by my friend, Mr. Basavaraju.

If this Bill brought forward by the Member is withdrawn, the Government should bring another Bill by which they can get more control over the public distribution system as well as the power to book the adulterators. With these words, I conclude.

18.07 hrs

DEMANDS FOR GRANTS, 1989-90

[English]

(ii) Ministry of External Affairs-Contd.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Now we will take up the Demands for Grants relating to the Ministry of External Affairs. Mr. Jaipal Reddy, are you willing to speak?

SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY (Mahbubnagar): No. Mr. H.M. Patel will speak.