

are losing crores of rupees because of short of railway line between Naligudi and Guntur. They are prepared to deposit a certain amount with the railways. I wish to know from the hon. Minister whether he will undertake construction of this railway line which will be useful for reduction of the cost of cement and for that they are prepared to give the deposit to the railways.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : It does not pertain to the question of Indian Railway Finance Corporation.

**Blind Population and Aid to blinds
for Treatment**

***146. SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMA-
CHANDRAN :** Will the Minister of
HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be
pleased to state :

(a) the estimated number of blind persons in the country as per the latest census;

(b) whether the number of blinds in the country has been decreasing or increasing during the last three years, year-wise;

(c) whether Government have any estimate as to what percentage of the blinds is curable;

(d) what help is being extended by Government to enable the curable blind to regain sight; and

(e) whether Government have any specific proposal/programme for extending financial aid to those who are blind and cannot afford treatment.

**THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IN THE
MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY
WELFARE (KUMARI SAROJ KHA-
PARDE) :** (a) According to I.C.M.R.
Survey (1971-73), 9 million persons were
estimated to have vision less than 6/60
i.e. they could not count fingers from a
distance of 20 ft.

According to National Sample Survey (1981), using criteria of counting fingers from 3 metres (10 ft.), 3.47 million persons were found to be blind,

(b) A country-wide sample survey for blindness is in progress at present and the decrease or increase in the number of blind will be known after its findings become available.

(c) Yes, Sir. About 80%.

(d) Free medical treatment is provided at all Government hospitals and in the eye camps.

(e) No, Sir.

**SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMA
CHANDRAN :** Sir, I understand that in order to tackle the problem of blindness, the Government of India had introduced a massive programme in the year 1976-77, and one of the salient features of this programme is conducting eye camps throughout the country. In view of the irreparable damage that these camps have posed in recent months in certain parts of the country by rendering hundreds of persons totally blind, may I know from the hon. Minister whether this eye camp approach has been entirely withdrawn or the voluntary organisations are being forbidden from conducting these sort of eye camps in future?

**THE MINISTER OF HUMAN
RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND
MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY
WELFARE (SHRI P.V. NARASIMHA
RAO) :** Sir, there are two sides to this. The eye camps in many instances have done a very good service, in some instances they have also unfortunately added to the blinds. So, it is a question of how efficiently an eye camp is run. During the recent meeting of the Central Council of Health, a decision was taken that eye camps run indifferently or with inadequate preparation or with inadequate after operation care, should be clearly banned. We should have some criteria which should be rigorously followed. We are setting up a committee to go into all the aspects of eye camps. It

is not possible for us to say categorically that there will be no camp at all. That would be wrong. But at the same time we cannot leave it to the whims and fancies of quacks masquerading as ophthalmic surgeons. So, this is a matter which has to be gone into. Decision has been taken and we will go into it.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : Sir, from the reply given by the hon. Minister, as also from the study made by the Indian Council of Medical Research, the total number of blinds in our country is alarmingly high despite the sincere efforts made by the Government. It is a known fact that the main reasons for the high rate of blindness in our country are low level nutrition, lack of sufficient number of ophthalmic personnel in the hospitals and, of course, lack of proper awareness in the minds of the people also. Under those circumstances, malnutrition being the chief reason for the high rate of blindness in our country, may I know from the hon Minister how much amount has been allocated or set apart in the Seventh Plan for the Vitamin-A programme and what is the number of children who are going to be benefited by this programme? Also, I would like to know the progress of this programme during the last three years.

SHRI P.V. NARASIMHA RAO : Sir, there are multifarious reasons for blindness. Blindness itself is defined in different ways on different occasions by different bodies. The WHO definition is one. There are other definitions also. The surveys have not been comprehensive so far. The area taken or the number of persons taken for survey have been far too inadequate. So, it is very difficult to come to any definite conclusion. The survey which is now being undertaken is a comprehensive one and I hope that when the results of the survey are available, we will be able to have a much better picture of what is happening on the blindness programme. I would only say that camps have been run and there are certain programmes of assistance from the Central Government, but I cannot give you exact figures at the moment. The figures of cataract operations, etc. are available but I would only add that we are paying

all possible attention to this. After the survey is completed, I would on some occasion, like to come to the House with all the findings and seek for the cooperation of hon. Members.

[*Translation*]

SHRI V. TULSIRAM : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he has received any report as to the number of cases which were cured and of those who lost their vision in the operations done in the eye camps? Secondly, earlier also, such camps were run in Uttar Pradesh and 200 persons had lost their vision in the course of such operations.

MR. SPEAKER : This has already been replied to.

SHRI V. TULSIRAM : Mr. Speaker, Sir, today itself I have read in the newspaper that 100 persons have lost their eyesight. May I know the reasons for that? What precautions are being taken to see that such incidents do not occur in future?

SHRI P.V. NARASIMHA RAO : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have already said that thousands of people have been cured but at the same time there are people whose cases have been spoiled, but the newspapers do not give the figures of those who are cured. The news in respect of the people who get blinded is prominently published. Therefore, we cannot reach a conclusion that everywhere the people are subjected to suffering. It is just possible that an odd case at some place was spoiled, but you cannot say that this is what is happening everywhere.....(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY : Why should even a single person go blind?

SHRI P.V. NARASIMHA RAO : That is why we are going to set up a committee and action will be taken only after the cases are thoroughly investigated.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : It is not a casual approach. He is trying to say something. Let him say. It is not a casual approach. How can this be a casual approach ? (Interruptions) You are un-necessarily (Interruptions).

SHRI P.V. NARASIMHA RAO : I am going to tell you that figure. During the Seventh Plan an amount of Rs. 31 crores has been allocated for the programme and I would like to say that I am not at all giving a non-serious reply. I am saying that this programme cannot be closed down tomorrow because it has been found beneficial in many places. It cannot be left to the whims of the quacks because some calamities have occurred. So, therefore, we will have to go into all these things. We have set up. We have taken at the highest level of CCH and we are going to go into this.

SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD ; There are approximately 90 lakh people who are blind in this country and fortunately majority of them can be given eye sight with a small investment by simple operation. May I know, under the National Programme for Control of Blindness, whether medical and para medical forces are in position ? If so, by what time it would be possible for the Government to give sight to those who can be given under this scheme ?

SHRI P.V. NARASIMHA RAO ; The National Programme for Control of Blindness which was launched throughout the country in 1976 aims to reduce the blindness in the country from 1.4% which it happens to be at the moment to 0.3% by the year 2000 A.D. and we are working with that as a target.

SOME HON. MEMBERS : Please allow us.

MR. SPEAKER : I cannot do it daily. I have so many Members more on the question list. (Interruptions)

SHRI A. CHARLES : Please allow me. I have been working on this.

MR. SPEAKER : If you are working on it, it is very good. Please keep working on it.

Repair and Maintenance on National Highway No. 12

*148. SHRI AJAY MUSHRAN : Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state :

(a) whether the repair and maintenance work on National Highway No. 12 has been delayed considerably;

(b) if so, the reasons thereof;

(c) whether the laid down norms for National Highways have been adhered to so far as National Highway No. 12 is concerned;

(d) if not, the reasons thereof; and

(e) the steps the Ministry propose to take to bring the National Highway No. 12 to the laid down specification ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI RAJESH PILOT) : (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) Yes Sir, within available resources.

(d) Does not arise.

(e) Improvement of the National Highways is a continuing process subject to availability of funds. Further improvement works costing about Rs. 37 crores have been included in the 7th Plan for being taken up on National Highway No. 12 in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

SHRI AJAY MUSHRAN : National Highway No. 12 was deeded as such in 1960 and in 1960 it was only about 500