

DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY: Sir, we had all praised the Railway Budget, presented by Mamataji two days back. Now, I would like to submit that for 15 new lines, we need 6,495 crores of rupees. I would like to know how much you are providing in this Budget. Then, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has agreed to spend almost 50 per cent on the Cuddapa-Bangalore line. I would like to know how much money you are going to spend on the new lines, during this year.

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE: Sir, the provisions in the Railway Budget are not State-wise. It is a national budget. If you want specific information regarding that, we can send you the details later on.

SHRI M.V. MYSURA REDDY: Sir, I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister to answer 'b', which says that the targets for the projects are generally fixed on yearly basis based on the availability of resources. But, in the Budget estimate of 2009-10, the revenue for the South-Central Railways is Rs. 8,700 crores, the expenditure is Rs. 5,600 crores. There is a surplus of Rs. 3000 crores. In view of this, will the hon. Minister explain the reasons for not allocating sufficient resources to the new lines, which had already been sanctioned in the South-Centra! Railway? What is the criterion for allocation of funds?

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE: We appreciate your concern. But if we give the full money to all the projects, then, we would be requiring about Rs. 1,70,000 crores. So, if all the Members plead for a one-time allotment of funds to the Railways, we will have no problem.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Question No. 104. ...*(Interruptions)*... This question is over. ...*(Interruptions)*... Question No. 104.

National Food Security Act

*104. SHRI N.K. SINGH:††

SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA:

Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government proposes to bring in a legislation to enact "National Food Security Act" backed by a new BPL survey and also to alter the ambit of those under food schemes;

(b) if so, the facts and details thereof;

(c) whether views of various State Governments have been sought before bringing any legislation on the subject; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and the time by when a final decision is likely to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) to (d) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

††The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri N.K. Singh

Statement

(a) to (d) Government proposes to enact the National Food Security Act. Under the proposed law, every BPL family is to be entitled to receive 25 kg of food grains per month. Details of eligible BPL families to be covered, methodology for their identification, issue of targeted identification cards to them, etc, are being worked out.

Examination of different aspects of the proposed law in consultation with various stake holders is presently in progress. As part of this exercise, first consultation with State/UT Governments on various aspects of the proposed legislation was held on 10th June, 2009. Comments from some of the State/UT Governments have been received.

SHRI N.K. SINGH: Sir, with your kind permission, my first supplementary is this. Even while recognising the last sentence of paragraph 1 of the answer, which you have laid before us, the central question on the implementation of this Act is determining the eligibility criteria of those who will be beneficiary from the proposed Food Security Act. There is a raging debate on the extent of people who are below the poverty line. The Planning Commission's latest figure, based on 2004-05, is 25 per cent. The N.C. Saxena Committee Report estimates 50 per cent. Dr. Arjun Kumar Sengupta, a colleague of ours, who has submitted a report of his Commission, has pointed out that 77 per cent people are living in less than Rs.20/- . The Economic Survey, which was placed before us last week, on page 261, points out that this number is only 60 per cent. Sir, my first supplementary is: Does the Department has any plan to seek a convergence on these conflicting methodologies in determining poverty so as to determine clearly and in a transparent manner those who will be the likely beneficiaries of the proposed National Food Security Act?

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: Sir, this is one of the major issues which we are also facing. We are discussing with various cross-sections and, ultimately, we will come to some decision, but we have not reached any decision yet. As the hon. Member said, we have different types of figures from different experts, yes, at least I have got three to four different figures from different experts and also something different from the Planning Commission. Sir, we have not taken any final view on that.

SHRI N.K. SINGH: Sir, my second supplementary relates to the efficacy of the likely delivery system. According to the Planning Commission's Expert Report, out of the 400,000 fair price shops which are functioning, the level of efficiency is not more than 56 per cent. In the context of the experience which we have had in the distribution of foodgrains through the fair price shops, is the Department considering any innovative scheme like food stamps or direct cash payments to the BPL families to enhance the level of satisfaction from the likely outcome of the proposed Food Security Act?

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: Sir, There are already two, three suggestions with us. One is regarding food theft, the second is to continue the present system and, the third suggestion is from the Chief

Minister of Bihar. Recently, we got a communication from the hon. Chief Minister of Bihar and the views of the Government of Bihar. One of the suggestions which the hon. Chief Minister has made—I will read exactly what he said – is: "Instead of complex system of delivering foodgrains under the TPDS, objective of the proposed National Food Security Act can be made more effective by direct cash transfer to the Ministry." So, this is one of the suggestions which has been made by them. But it is very difficult to accept because we have not reached any conclusion yet. But if we are going to accept the idea of cash transfer, then, I will have to think what exactly I should do with the Food Corporation of India, whether I should procure or not. There are a number of other issues and that is why we have not reached to these issues yet.

SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA: Sir, food security is a very serious issue, as also brought out in the Economic Survey. I would like to ask the hon. Minister, Sir, whether he would look at food security in its larger ambit, in a more holistic manner, because food security is not just about providing cheap food and access to food; it has to be seen in a more holistic manner because even in a more affluent State like Punjab where poverty is only eight per cent, malnutrition is 27 per cent. So, it, actually, includes sanitation, drinking water, nutritional value, etc. So, Sir, will the Minister address the urgent issue as the Economic Survey also says of actually looking at the outlays versus outcomes, measuring malnutrition to providing cheap food. If the exchequer's money is going in providing cheap food and access to food, it must result in lowering the levels of malnutrition in the country.

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: When we got the opportunity to interact with various experts, there were number of suggestions like detailed definition about the food security, what is food, what is security, what should be included in the food, whether only wheat and rice, whether clean water, whether meat, fish etc. So, a number of suggestions have come but I would like to just bring to the notice of the hon. Member that on 4th June, the President of India had delivered a speech on behalf of the Government of India.

There she has specifically mentioned that "My Government proposes to enact a new law – the National Food Security Act – that will provide a statutory basis for a framework which assures food security for all. Every family below the poverty line in rural as well as urban areas will be entitled, by law, to 25 kilograms of rice or wheat per month at Rs. 3 per kilogram." So, the commitment which the Government of India has made through the Presidential speech, as on today, is to provide a particular quantity of wheat and rice at a particular rate. Definitely, we are working on that; but there are a number of other suggestions, as the hon. Member has made, but we have not yet come to any final view because there will be substantial financial burden also. So, one has to assess that also. One has also to assess whether we will be able to cope up with that type of demand and whether we will be able to fulfil that type of demand.

SHRI SITARAM YECHURY: Sir, the hon. Minister has just read out what the hon. President of India said in her Address to the Joint Session of Parliament where the assurance that the Government will enact a National Food Security Act to provide every BPL family with 25 kg of foodgrains at Rs. 3/- per month has been given. Already, Sir, under the Antyodaya Scheme, BPL families are getting 35 kilos of rice at Rs. 2/- per kg. Many State Governments are further subsidising this and I won't take the examples of Left-ruled States but Tamil Nadu, for instance, is giving 20 kg at 1 rupee. They are further subsidising it. But the Antyodaya, a Central Government Scheme, is giving 35 kg at two rupees, and now you propose to bring a Food Security Act where you will reduce it to 25 kg and increase the price by 1 rupee. Would the hon. Minister consider, Sir, terming this new Act as the 'Food Insecurity Act, and not the 'Food Security Act' in the light of this?

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: Sir, of the various issues which are raised in our discussions and the communications, which I am getting from various States, one of the major issues which has been raised, is what the hon. Member has raised. As on today, the BPL family is getting 35 kg. The rates are different; the rates for BPL are, Rs. 5.65 per kg for rice and Rs. 4.15 per kilo for wheat. This is the present rate for the BPL families. But what the hon. Member has said is correct that we have another category called AAY, and, in AAY, we are charging two rupees. Now, if the commitment which has been made by Government is to be accepted in toto, then one has to see that one has to abolish the AAY category, which I feel is not proper. So, we are definitely considering that.

Secondly, as on today, for BPL family, we are supplying 35 kg but if it will come down to 25 kg, then we have to give a serious thought about that also. So, all these issues are before us to take a final view.

DR. (SHRIMATI) NAJMA A. HEPTULLA: Sir, I very much appreciate the concern of the hon. President and the hon. Minister for Agriculture who is so committed for the food security to the people and he is bringing a legislation.

But, Sir, I would like to know from the Minister whether he is aware of the rampant corruption which takes place while the delivery of the foodgrains is made. The foodgrains on its way in-between, from leaving the depots and reaching the distribution centre, land up at some vyapari's house or a shop. This was reported in the newspapers and also on the television. What are you going to do and what will be the food security as far as the corruption is concerned?

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: Sir, the Public Distribution System in our country is a system which has been implemented by both, the Government of India and the respective State Governments. The responsibility of the Government of India is, (a) to procure foodgrains and (b) make it available to the State Government at a particular place. Generally, whatever complaints we get, these complaints are not at that stage when the Government of India transfers foodgrains to a particular State.

But, definitely, we are getting complaints; particularly, at the depots-to-shops and shops-to-individuals levels, there are some problems. We have appointed some committees and they have placed a very serious and pathetic picture before us. The Supreme Court has taken cognisance of the situation and also appointed a committee, which has studied the case of Delhi. By and large, the report says that there are serious problems with the APL categories. In view of this, we called a meeting of the State Civil Supplies Ministers and Secretaries and we formulated a new policy with some eight or nine-point programme. We started, judiciously, a section of the programme in all the States. I had myself, at my level, organized meetings at various places – Kolkata, Assam, Bangalore, Mumbai – at the regional level, in order to assess the implementation of programmes. There is some improvement, but I am not in a position to say that it is totally transparent, and even today, we receive the kind of complaints that the hon. Member has talked about. Ultimately, State Governments need to take a serious view of this and see how to plug the loopholes.

MS. MABEL REBELLO: Sir, for the National Food Security Act to be successful, we need to identify the BPL families. I shall cite the example of Jharkhand. In Jharkhand, 50 per cent of the ration card holders and shopkeepers hold bogus ration cards. Twenty-five per cent of the APL families have ration cards meant for BPL families. Only 25 per cent of the genuine BPL families have ration cards. Thus, 75 per cent of the BPL families have been deprived of ration cards, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please, put the question.

MS. MABEL REBELLO: Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what he is going to do to eliminate from the BPL list the names of people not belonging to the BPL category and to see to it that only genuine BPL families get ration cards, so that the National Food Security Act is effectively and successfully implemented. Otherwise, it would be useless. I would like to know the mechanism the hon. Minister would adopt. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI ARJUN KUMAR SENGUPTA: Sir, may I raise just one point related to this question? The hon. Minister may, while answering to this question. ...*(Interruptions)*... Just a minute, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please, please. The Minister has not yet answered the question. ...*(Interruptions)*... Mr. Sengupta, please. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI ARJUN KUMAR SENGUPTA: Sir, I would like to put just one question. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, no. ...*(Interruptions)*... This would not be fair. ...*(Interruptions)*... I am afraid, questions have to be rotated and I can take only three questions. Please, go ahead and answer this, Sir.

SHRI ARJUN KUMAR SENGUPTA: Sir, my question is very much related to this question and it is a very simple point. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please, Mr. Sengupta. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: We have requested State Governments to start a campaign to eliminate bogus ration cards. We are getting State-wise reports showing that they are eliminating a certain number of bogus ration cards every month. So, some work is going on, but I am not totally satisfied because the figure, which the Planning Commission has given about BPL families in this country, is something like six crores and fifty-two lakhs, while the State Governments have, actually, issued more than ten crore ration cards. So, even the State Governments have bypassed the guidelines issued by the Planning Commission and the figure which the Government of India has communicated, and they have allotted additional ration cards. We have taken up this matter with them and are requesting them to reduce that number or cancel the cards.

Credit policy for farm sector

*105. SHRIMATI SYEDA ANWARA TAIMUR:††

SHRI VIJAY JAWAHARLAL DARDA:

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether incidence of suicides amongst farmers in Vidarbha region came down during 2008-09 when more than Rs. 60,000 crores debt relief package was implemented; and

(b) if so, to avoid elimination of such trends, whether Government would frame a holistic policy rather than piecemeal measures, as indebtedness has been caused not only by the conditions of agriculture market, but also from the farmers' inability to cope with increased privatization of basic services like healthcare and school education?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) and (b) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) and (b) Yes, Madam. The State Government has reported decline in incidence of suicides amongst farmers in Vidarbha region during 2008-09 as compared to previous years since 2006. The Government has initiated several measures for mitigation of farmers' distress. The major steps taken by the Government are as follows:

- (i) Effective implementation of the rehabilitation package for mitigation of agrarian distress in 31 identified farmer's suicide prone districts of Andhra Pradesh Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra.
- (ii) Other schemes, such as, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna (RKVY), National Food Security Mission (NFSM), Macro management of Agriculture, National Horticulture Mission (NHM), Agriculture Extension, National Agriculture Insurance Scheme (NAIS) are also being implemented through the State Governments. Further, the Union Budget 2009-2010 has also proposed, *inter-alia*, the following initiatives:-

††The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Syeda Anwara Taimur