

RAJYA SABHA

Friday, the 28th July, 2006/6 Sravana, 1928 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock,

[MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair.]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Prices of foodgrains for BPL and APL card holders

*81. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE:†
SHRI K.E. ISMAIL:

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

(a) whether Government are planning to increase the prices of foodgrains for BPL and APL categories;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether it is also a fact that Government are going to cut down the foodgrains allocations to both the sections of ration-card holders; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor?

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.

Statement

(a) to (d) Keeping in view the reduced availability of foodgrains, specially wheat, in the Central Pool and to ensure that the subsidy remains targeted towards poor households as well as to check diversion,

† The question was actually asked on the floor of the house by Shri Karnendu Bhattacharjee.

the Government took decisions to raise the Central Issue Prices (CIPs) of foodgrains for Above the Poverty Line (APL) households and to rationalize the allocation of foodgrains under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and

The Government, considering the representations from State Governments and others, has decided to postpone the implementation of these decisions.

SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Sir, to my question whether the Government is planning to increase the prices of foodgrains for the BPL and APL categories, the Ministry has given the reply that it was done keeping in view the reduced availability of foodgrains, especially wheat, in the Central Pool and so on, and that they have now to stop it due to representations from State Governments. I would like to know from the hon. Minister what the reasons are for the reduced availability of foodgrains in the country. At present, I wish to quote some figures. May I know whether Government's attention has been drawn to the latest UNICEF report to the effect that India has five to seven crore children who are malnourished and under-nourished, which is the highest in the world? India is one of the biggest countries of the world. We are growing day by day but the food production is decreasing. This is the country's food position.

Sir, my question relates particularly to the BPL, Below Poverty Line, and APL, Above Poverty Line categories. I would like to know from the hon. Minister, what are the criteria for determining the 'Poverty Line'? What percentage of people availing of PDS benefits fall in the categories of Below Poverty Line and Above Poverty Line? This is my first supplementary.

श्री शरद पवार: जहां तक अनाज की स्थिति है, there is no problem in the average production of rice. There is surplus production and the stock is also quite big-sized. But I have to accept one thing that this year, there has been a drop in the overall production of wheat, it is not as per expectations. Secondly, this is the first year when our procurement come down. In fact, we were planning to procure about 16 million tonne. we could procure only about 9.2 million tonnes. This is the reason that today availability of wheat is limited in the country's stock.

As for the second issue that was raised, it is true that about six

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months back, a decision was taken regarding hike in the prices of wheat and rice. But we have received requests from many State Governments and political parties, mainly the Indian National Congress, CPM, CPI and other Left parties. And then, we took the decision to suspend our initial decision of hiking the price. But I wish to clear one position to the House that whatever price was fixed for rice and wheat was in the year 2001. From the year 2001, till today, there has been no change in the issue price. But, simultaneously, we have improved the procurement price; practically every year, farmers have been paid additional prices.

Thirdly, in the year 2002, Government took the decision that the subsidy should not go beyond 50 per cent to the Below Poverty Line people. Now the subsidy has gone practically to somewhat near 67 per cent. That is also one of the reasons why we were thinking to raise the prices. Now, that decision has been suspended and we are continuing with the old prices.

SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: About the under-nourishment you have not given clear reply. Is the Government thinking to review, revise and raise the poverty line in terms of consumption units? If so, what is the Government's decision in this regard? My another point is ...*(interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: No other point.

SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: It is in connection with the price rise in the country. The prices of pulses, vegetables, cooking gas are rising. We are grass-root workers. We know the position. In black market pulses are being sold at Rs. 40 to Rs. 50 per kg. At least, BPL families should get these things through PDS. Is the Government thinking about this or not? I want to know this.

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: Sir, for the last number of years, there is a shortage of pulses in this country. Oilseed and pulses are the two items which we regularly import. This import is not only this year, but this import is there for last practically 8 to 9 years. This year the major countries which are supplying pulses to India are Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma. Unfortunately, there is a shortfall of pulses crop in Bangladesh and Pakistan. This has affected our import. That was one

of the reasons for non-availability of pulses. Still the Government of India has taken decision and we have practically instructed the NAFED to import pulses and they have imported pulses. So far as BPL criteria is concerned, the Planning Commission has prepared certain criteria. According to that criteria, the BPL list has been prepared by the respective State Governments and the Government of India allot foodgrains according to that list.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shri K.E. Ismail. Not present. Dr. (Shrimati) Najma Heptulla.

डा० (श्रीमती) नजमा ए० हेपतुल्ला: सर, मैं आप के माध्यम से माननीय एग्रीकल्चर मिनिस्टर साहब से सवाल करना चाहूंगी कि यह सरकार की जिम्मेदारी है कि वह पब्लिक डिस्ट्रीब्यूशन सिस्टम के जरिए affordable rates पर बिलो पावरटी लाने के लोगों को अनाज मुहैया करे और उस के लिए अगर सरकार को कोई सब्सिडी देनी है तो वह सब्सिडी का बोझ अपने ऊपर रखे न कि किसानों के ऊपर डाले। मेरी जानकारी के मुताबिक किसान आत्महत्या कर रहे हैं क्योंकि उन को उचित सपोर्ट प्राइस नहीं मिलती है। सरकार वर्षों से सब्सिडी देती है, पर वह सब्सिडी का बोझ उन किसानों के ऊपर ट्रांसफर कर दिया जाता है। सरकार उस सब्सिडी को पूरा करने की कोशिश नहीं करती है।

श्री शरद पवार: सर, जहां तक सब्सिडी का सवाल है, आज वह सब्सिडी 22-23 हजार करोड़ के आसपास है, मगर यह फूड सब्सिडी किसानों के पास ट्रांसफर नहीं होती है। यह कंजूमर्स को मिलती है। किसानों से हम अनाज मिनिमम सपोर्ट प्राइस पर खरीदते हैं जिसे सरकार हर साल डिक्लेअर करती है। यह खरीदी सरकार हर साल फूड कार्पोरेशन ऑफ इंडिया और दो-तीन गवर्नमेंट की एजेंसीज के माध्यम से करती है। इस सब्सिडी का लाभ किसानों को नहीं होता। इस का लाभ पब्लिक डिस्ट्रीब्यूशन के कंजूमर्स को होता है।

SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the criterion has been adopted by various States for the purpose of bringing the targeted group, people who are living in the tribal areas, and also the below poverty line people under that category. The hon. Minister says that they have accepted it and they are supplying the ration according to the limit. There are some States which have started giving rice at the rate of Rs. 2 per kg. The State Governments are subsidising from their own funds. In some States, it varies, especially for the Below Poverty Line people. Because some States carry their own subsidies ... (Interruptions) ... and they are not able to carry the subsidy.

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MR. CHAIRMAN: Please, come to your question now.

SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY: I would like to say that the guideline should be a universal guideline throughout the country. It should not vary from one State to another for fixing the criteria for Below Poverty Line and targeted growth because some States are not properly giving ration to the affected people. I came to know from one State, the Opposition ruled State, the ration cards have been cancelled for the tribal people in tribal areas by the State concerned. It should not be left to the mercy of the State Governments. Central Government should draw the guideline and the States should follow it. Will the Minister be able to do this or not?

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: There are three categories. One - AAY, which is poorest of the poor of the society; secondly - BPL, that is, Below Poverty Line; and thirdly, Above Poverty Line. The Government of India has given guideline to each and every State how they should select these people, or these families, which come under one of the categories. And, according to the guidelines, most of the States have accepted these categories and the list has been prepared and the Government of India is allotting foodgrains according to their list. There are very few States which have not completed their programme, for instance, West Bengal. West Bengal Government was eager to take the decision about AAY, but suddenly they had to face elections. There is a direction by the Election Commission that they are not supposed to select the people in this category at this juncture. That is why, their programme was delayed. Now, they are working hard to complete their list. There were certain States. There was a little problem because of various reasons, but these problems have been resolved and it is a responsibility of the State Government to resolve this issue. After completion of work from the State Government, we will allot additional foodgrains to that category.

SHRI DINESH TRIVEDI: My question arises out of two things. One is that hon. Minister says and he accepts that there is reduced availability of foodgrains and then he talks about the subsidies; beneficiaries are the consumers. Are these consumers really poor people and what is your policy about ration cards? Sir, there are many people who are middle-class, upper middle-class, rich class but the ration cards have become identity cards, and they have to have ration card even to

get Election Commission's identity card and get registered as voter. I know for the State of West Bengal, they have ration card and many a times, they have to pick up the thing and then they sell it in the black market. So, the poor people don't get it. And, there are many fake ration cards also. So, I want to know what you are doing about that and if the availability is low, how far commodity market, which does speculation, is responsible.

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: We don't think that commodity market is responsible because the question of availability was there mainly for pulses and wheat. जहाँ तक राशन-कार्ड की बात है, it is the responsibility of the State Government to issue a ration card. And, practically, most of the States are issuing ration cards. They have issued ration cards. It is true that there are certain complaints about the fake ration cards and there is a complaint also about some diversion of these, especially wheat and rice, to some other areas. But, we are continuously bringing it to the notice of the State Governments. At my level, when this House discussed this particular subject in the last session, then I called a meeting of the Food Ministers and Secretaries of the States. We brought to their notice the feeling of the hon. Chair and the entire House and we requested them that this is their responsibility to stop this diversion. Certain steps have been taken by most of the Governments.

SHRI DINESH TRIVEDI: Why do you make it an identity card? Why is it compulsory?

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: It is the responsibility of the State whether it is a ration card or a State card; whether it is red card or yellow card. Some State Governments have introduced, in their States, their own programme.

SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT: Sir, just a few days ago, this House discussed the issue of price rise in a Short Duration Discussion. सर, कुछ दिन पहले हाउस में प्राइस राइज़ के बारे में डिस्कशन हुई थी और उसमें पीडीएस संबंधी और बाकी तमाम सवाल उठाए गए थे जो पहले और दूसरे प्रश्न से संबंधित हैं, लेकिन उस समय माननीय मंत्री मौजूद नहीं थे। सर, लेकिन उनका आज का जवाब देख कर ऐसा लग रहा है कि जैसे जो हालात ताजा जख्म पर नमक छिड़क कर होती है, यह जवाब वैसा ही है।

And, I can tell you, Sir...

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MR. CHAIRMAN: What is your question?

SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT: I just want to draw the attention of the House to the way the questions are being answered by the concerned Ministries. Please, see the questions, Sir. It is very clear. What are the reasons therefor? And, what have they replied? "In view of the reduced availability of foodgrains". Why was availability of foodgrains reduced? The Minister has answered in one reply, "Our procurement was low". Why was procurement low? Procurement was low because of certain changes made in the Agricultural Market Produce Act which was permitted big traders to go directly to farmers, give them a small rise in the prices, very small, Sir, and then, they manage to procure the foodgrains. So, this is a matter of Government...

MR. CHAIRMAN: This has already been discussed.

SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT: Please, Sir, Because the Minister was not there when the discussion was going on...(Interruptions)... Sir, I have to raise these questions. Why was the Minister not present there on that day, Sir? We have no opportunity ...(Interruptions)...

SHRI DATTA MEGHE: This is not the question, Sir.

श्रीमती ब्रिन्दा कारत: वह आपसे ज्यादा जनरस हैं, I am sure the Minister does not mind answering my question. Therefore, Sir, the first issue is, we want this question to be revised and a proper answer should be given by the Minister ...(Interruptions)...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Should I postpone the question?...(Interruptions)...

SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT: I would request him because when we had the discussion, he was not there. The second point directly that I want to raise is that you have said that you have postponed the decision. Okay. It is good that you have postponed it. We welcome that. But, the point is you have already taken certain decisions which have already weakened the Public Distribution System, namely, the huge cuts in the allocation of wheat. You are saying that you are compensating by rice. But, if people are used to eating wheat and you are compensating by rice. ...(Interruptions)...

श्री सभापति: क्वेश्चन करिए...(व्यवधान)... अब आप क्वेश्चन करिए...(व्यवधान)।

SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT: The question is, has the Government cut allocations of wheat? And, what steps is the Government taking to restore all the allocations of wheat which it has clandestinely cut in the Public Distribution System?

श्री शदर पवार: इसमें एक ही काम किया है कि last three years' total allocation and lifting and last year lifting that has been treated as a base और इसके लैवल पर एवरेज निकाल कर ऐलोकेशन करना शुरू किया है। Why have we taken this decision? There were a number of complaints, especially in the category of above poverty line. That is one. And, secondly, there are some States, in fact, the food habits of which are not for wheat. That is essentially rice. But still, they were lifting 100 per cent wheat. When we inquired through independent agencies—the Planning Commission has appointed one group; the Government also appointed one group—ultimately, the report came that between 90 per cent and 100 per cent diversion is there. I do not want to name the States, but, there are some States where the food habits are only rice, but they are taking 100 per cent wheat and that wheat was diverted. That was the reason we had to stop it somewhere. We had to see that the needy people get the foodgrains. So, accordingly, a decision has been taken.

Regarding the point whether I was present there or not, that particular subject was handled by my colleague. I also got one notice that there would be a separate discussion on this issue. So, I thought, I would get an opportunity to explain my stand.

SHRIMATI PREMA CARIAPPA: Sir, there are great difficulties faced by the BPL category people to obtain ration cards. Specially, the Government offices are asking for so many documents which they cannot provide because they have to construct the houses; they are put up in *jhopris* on either side of the drains or unauthorised slums, and, therefore, they cannot provide the ownership of the house or any owner to give a letter. So, I would like to ask the hon. Minister what steps the Ministry has taken to help these BPL category people to obtain ration card easily.

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR: Practically, we have communicated with all the States. It is their responsibility to issue the ration card, whether it is AAY or whether it is BPL. Guidelines have also been given to them. If there is a specific complaint about any district, any city or any State, and if I get that information, I will happily take it up with the respective State Government and take corrective action.

श्री दत्ता मेघे: सर, मैं आपके माध्यम से यह कहना चाहता हूँ कि महाराष्ट्र एक ऐसी स्टेट है, जहाँ गेहूँ और चावल कम होता है। खास तौर पर वहाँ के जो आदिवासी एरियाज़ हैं जैसे Melghat, Garhchiroli, आदि, वहाँ बाल मृत्यु बहुत होती है। गरीबी रेखा के नीचे रहने वाले जो लोग हैं, क्या हम उनको अनाज नहीं दे सकते हैं ऐसे जो जिले हैं, जहाँ बाल मृत्यु हो रही है और जहाँ अनाज नहीं जा रहा है, वहाँ इन लोगों को स्पेशल अनाज मिले, क्या केन्द्र सरकार इसकी व्यवस्था कर रही है?

श्री शरद पवार: सर, वहाँ के दो-तीन डिस्ट्रिक्ट्स की जो स्थिति यहाँ बताई गई है, तो महाराष्ट्र के दो-तीन ट्राइबल डिस्ट्रिक्ट्स में यह स्थिति है और राजस्थान के भी दो-तीन डिस्ट्रिक्ट्स में ऐसी परिस्थिति है। वहाँ के लिए एक अलग कोट, ज्यादा कोट कम कीमत पर देने का डिजीज़न इससे पहले ही गवर्नमेंट ने लिया है और इस तरह से स्टेट गवर्नमेंट को ज्यादा एलोकेशन दिया जाता है।

श्री सभापति: नेक्स्ट क्वेश्चन।

Curbing the rising prices of pulses and other food items

***82. SHRI AMAR SINGH:**

SHRI JAI PARKASH AGGARWAL:

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

(a) whether Government are aware that the prices of pulses and other food items including vegetables have risen abnormally which are beyond the reach of lower middle class people;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the specific reasons for the increase despite bumper crop of wheat and sugarcane in the country during the current year, and

(c) the action Government have taken to curb the price rise and the result thereof?