

**The National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill,
2005—Contd.**

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH (Andhra Pradesh): Mr. Chairman, Sir, after the hon. Prime Minister's masterful speech, I think, we should have all stopped speaking and we should have taken the sense of the House, the Bill could have been put to vote and it would have become a law. But, we are continuing with the Motion after the hon. Prime Minister's speech. I will do my best not to repeat the points that have been made by him and by the other speakers, although, I do wish that the first two initiators of the discussion, both from the Opposition and the Treasury Benches, were present till the end of the discussion, which I hope, Sir, is a convention that you would enforce in the future.

I want to very quickly make three basic points on this Bill. I want to make some points on the history of this Bill that has been touched upon. Secondly, I wanted to address some of the concerns that have been raised by Mr. BalApte, particularly. And, thirdly, I want to make one or two suggestions for the consideration of the hon. Minister of Rural Development.

On the history of the Bill, Sir, it is well known by now that this Bill derives its inspiration from the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme. This was first introduced as a scheme in mid-60s and became law on January 26, 1979. Sir, in enacting this law, in many ways, we are paying tribute to the originators of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme and the names of Shri V.P. Naik, who was the then Chief Minister of Maharashtra. He was Chief Minister for 12 years. He was the first Adivasi Chief Minister of any State and the great Gandhian. Shri V.S. Page, Mr. Page's close colleague, Mr. R.S. Gavai, is present with us today by fortunate circumstance. When we recall the history of the Bill, the contributions of Shri V.P. Naik and Shri V.S. Page should not be forgotten. In fact, I would recommend to the hon. Prime Minister, while launching the Employment Guarantee Scheme, a commemorative stamp, in the memory of Shri V.S. Page should be brought out. It is a small token of our appreciation of the enormous contributions that Mr. Page made.

Sir, people have talked about Indira Gandhi's Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, Rajiv Gandhi's Jawahar Rozgar Yojana and Shri Narasimha Rao's and Dr. Manmohan Singh's

Employment Assurance Scheme. But they have forgotten one particular Chief Minister of a particular North Indian State. He was the Chief Minister between 1977-80, who introduced a very innovative employment and anti-poverty programme which, subsequently, became the inspiration for many of the employment programmes in the 80s and in the 90s. I am sure, you know who the Chief Minister is. I do not have to remind you of who the Chief Minister is between 1977-80, which State that was and the contribution that you made...

MR. CHAIRMAN: I don't remember.

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: Sir, the contributions that you made in launching Antyodaya Programme which became the inspiration for taking up anti-poverty and employment generation programmes, we should also recall that. And, having said that, I hope, you will allow me to continue my speech on this Bill tomorrow, on Monday and on Tuesday.

I do want to say and put it on record—it has not been said—the contribution that you made, as Chief Minister of Rajasthan, was, indeed path breaking.

Mr. Pani, whom we usually hear, did talk about the *Antyodaya*, and I do want to say that one of the main inspirations of employment-generating programmes in the 80s, in the 90s, apart from the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme, was the Antyodaya Programme of Rajasthan. So, it is not true to say that this is a path-breaking legislation. Mr. Bal Apte said, and the Standing Committee also says on page 8, that this is a path-breaking legislation. But the Standing Committee feels that before drafting such an important historic legislation adequate preparations should have been made. Sir, the fact is that we have over 30 years of experience in the implementation of employment-generating programmes. And, I think, with the experience of Maharashtra, with the experience of Rajasthan, and other States as the guide, this Bill has been drafted. There is so much of history. The recent history, of course, calls in to play the role that different political parties have played. And, today, we have seen remarkable consensus. The Standing Committee has supported this Bill. All political parties, including Mr. Jothi, had he not diverted to something else which has to do with Tamil Nadu politics...He is not listening to me, otherwise he would have objected. Even Mr. Jothi was, in principle, (*Interruptions*).

SHRI N. JOTHI: I am ready to respond. (*Interruptions*)

MR. CHAIRMAN: No; no, he is only appreciating you. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI N. JOTHI: I am ready to respond unless you are the Finance Minister. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: So, Sir, we saw a remarkable degree of political consensus. Cutting across the party lines, every political party has supported this piece of legislation. They have expressed fears; they have given concrete suggestions. But the fact is that there is a consensus. But I do want to introduce one element of party politics. And, that is the only element of party politics that I want to introduce. The fact of the matter is that the only political party, in whose manifesto the idea of Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme figures, is the Congress Party. This is the fact that has been acknowledged even by a very dispassionate ...(*Interruptions*)... even by a dispassionate...(*Interruptions*)... Please listen. (*Interruptions*) This is a fact...(*Interruptions*)...This is a fact ...(*Interruptions*)...

AN HON. MEMBER: What about comrades?

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: The fact is that the Congress party is the only party which...(*Interruptions*). Mr. Narayanasamy, please let me finish. (*Interruptions*). The fact that the Congress party is the only party whose manifesto contains the idea of a Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, is not my claim, this is a statement made by a most...(*Interruptions*) The only party to mention the Rural Employment Guarantee Programme in its manifesto is the Congress party. And, the source of this information is the most dispassionate, the most independent observer, an hon. Member of this House, Shri Sitaram Yechury. (*Interruptions*) Sir, I am not claiming this. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI SITARAM YECHURY (West Bengal): Will you please yield for a minute?

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: Sure.

SHRI SITARAM YECHURY: Mr. Chairman, Sir, my name has been mentioned. It is a fact that I had stated that this commitment or assurance that there should be a Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme was made in the Congress manifesto. I am not retracting from it. Neither am I denying

it. But the fact is that whatever they have said in the manifesto, it is the Left that has been persuading them and pressurizing them to implement that. *(Interruptions)* And, that is the fact that all of you will have to acknowledge. And, even on this Bill, Sir, the number of issues on which the dilution was sought by the Congress...*(Interruptions)* No, no. You please stick to your promises, otherwise will make you stick. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: Sir, I have no problem in...*(Interruptions)* There is no denying...*(Interruptions)*

श्री कलराज मिश्र: श्रेय लेने की होड़ लगी हुई है।

श्री सीताराम येचुरी: सुनिए, सर, अगर वे काम नहीं करते, तो हम श्रेय नहीं ले सकते।...*(व्यवधान)*...काम उनको करना है ...*(व्यवधान)*...

श्री कलराज मिश्र: तो बोलिए, सब लोग सहमति कर रहे हैं। ...*(व्यवधान)*...

श्री सीताराम येचुरी: वह काम करेंगे तभी हम श्रेय ले पाएंगे और हम काम उनसे करवाएंगे। वह काम उनसे करवाएंगे, यही हमारा दबाव रहेगा।

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: There is no question that the Standing Committee made major contributions. There is no question that...*(Interruptions)*...

श्री सभापति: आप एक काम और करिएँ। वह कमेटी के मेंबर थे, उनकी प्रशंसा कर दीजिए। फिर हाउस में शांति हो जाएगी।

श्री जय राम रमेश: सर, पाणि साहब के बारे में मैं आखिर में बोलने वाला हूँ।

श्री सभापति: अब तो खुश हैं।

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: There is absolutely no denying, no running away from the fact that the Left parties have kept up a consistent pressure to improve this piece of legislation and to remove its many infirmities that were present in the original Bill. The involvement of NGOs, the involvement of social action groups; the involvement of the media has been absolutely crucial in getting this Bill in this form. So, it is indeed a historic piece of legislation in which every section of our society and every political party has participated. But the fact of the matter is that Gangotri is the Congress Election Manifesto of 2004. That is what I want to say. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI N. JOTHI: Is this the only issue in your manifesto? ...*(Interruptions)*... Are there no other things? ...*(Interruptions)*... What about pure administration? ...*(Interruptions)*... What has your wonderful Finance Minister done? ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: In their manifesto there is Gangotri. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: Sir, I withdraw the word 'Gangotri.' ...*(Interruptions)*... It is the 'Cauvery' in the Congress manifesto. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jothi, ...*(Interruptions)*... you should say that only Gangotri is there in that.

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: I would say that it is Cauvery and not Gangotri if Mr. Jothi is happy. ...*(Interruptions)*...

Let me move on from the history to the concerns that have been raised on this Bill. Sir, in the last few months, as the Minister for Rural Development has highlighted, there has been a sustained campaign in the media, there has been a sustained campaign in certain sections of society that the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Programme has been a total failure.

(MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN in the chair)

In fact, our distinguished colleague, Mr. Sharad Joshi, gave expression to this view yesterday, and he was effectively countered by his Maharashtra colleague, the hon. Minister for Agriculture, Shri Sharad Pawar. Sir, the fact of the matter is that the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme, on which this bill has been founded largely, has been evaluated and studied in extensive details over the last few years.

There have been successes with the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme. There have been failures with the Employment Guarantee Scheme, but to condemn the entire scheme as a fraud, as a failure, as a recipe for corruption — as was implicit in Mr. Sharad Joshi's statement, and that is coming out in some of the newspapers—in my view, Sir, is completely wrong and goes against the facts. Sir, let me quote the believers in economic reforms. Let me quote the *mutt* of

liberalisation. सर, उदासीकरण का जो मठ है, वह वर्ल्ड बैंक है और वर्ल्ड बैंक की एक रिपोर्ट आयी है। Re-energising Agricultural Sector. And for Mr. Sharad Joshi's edification, Sir, on page 48 there is a whole box which says that Maharashtra's Horticulture success is linked with its Employment Guarantee Scheme, and it goes to talk about how one million hectares of agricultural land has come under horticulture because of a variety of horticulture development programmes linked with the Employment Guarantee Scheme. Sir, there is an evaluation of the Employment Guarantee Scheme in Maharashtra done by two very eminent economists. For want of any other phrase, I would call them "reform minded economists," Dr. S. Mahendra Dev and Dr. Ajit Ranade, who write extensively in favour of liberalisation, globalisation and privatisation. They have done a recent study, "An Evaluation of the Employment Guarantee Scheme and Employment Security", and their conclusion is the following. There are the three most important accomplishments of the Employment Guarantee Scheme in Maharashtra. Number one, it has put an upward pressure on agricultural wages. Number two, it has concentrated its activities in 3/4 of the districts of Maharashtra.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jairam Ramesh, whom are you addressing?

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: Sorry, Sir. I should look at you and aim at Mr. Sharad Joshi. I am not looking at Mr. Yechury, Sir. We are in total agreement on this that most of the programmes in Maharashtra were concentrated in the dry lands districts; those 10-11 districts that constitute the heart of the drought-prone areas of Maharashtra.

And, thirdly, about 40-45 per cent of the agricultural workers, who offered themselves for rural employment under the EGS were women. So, in fact, Sir, in terms of its upward pressure on agricultural wages, in terms of increasing women's participation rate in agriculture, in terms of building rural infrastructure, particularly, in relation to horticulture and in ensuring collective political action by the poor. I think the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme, far from being a fraud, far from being a colossal waste, far from being a recipe of corruption is, actually, something we can legitimately be proud of. Rural assets have been put on the ground in Maharashtra. There are successes that the poor have had in Maharashtra. The intensity of poverty was reduced in Maharashtra.

It is not as if Maharashtra has been completely transformed in terms of poverty and unemployment because of the Employment Guarantee Scheme, but in the absence of the Employment Guarantee Scheme, position of Maharashtra would have been far worse. So, I think, Sir, this is really the first concern that I have that we need to debunk some of these false propaganda that Employment Guarantee Scheme are really recipes for corruption and fraud. Sir, the other concern that has been raised is one resources and I will come to it a little later. Sir, to address the problem of fraud, to address the problem of corruption, I think, it is important to look at this Employment Guarantee Bill in the context of the Right to Information Act and the manner in which social action groups and NGOs have used the Right to Information Act. The *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan*, particularly, in Rajasthan has used the Right to Information Act to open up muster-rolls in Food-for-Work Programmes, to make public the list of works that have been undertaken as part of the Food-for-Work Programmes. I think, this shows the way as to how the use of Right to Information, particularly, by social action groups and NGOs can, in fact, act as a check on corruption and fraud, which Shri Bal Apte and some of his colleagues articulated. Sir, the other major concern that has been raised is on excessive bureaucratisation in the Bill. I do agree, Sir, that there is far greater degree of bureaucratic bodies that have been created in this Bill. There is a National Employment Guarantee Council, there is a State Employment Guarantee Council, there is a District Council, there is a Programme Officer at the block level, and finally, there are elected panchayats and the *Gram Sabha*. Sir, I think, it is legitimate that these fears have arisen. The fact of the matter is that the existence of all these bureaucratic structures do raise some doubts in the minds of people that clause 13 in the Bill, which gives primacy to elected panchayats for the planning and implementation of Employment Guarantee Programmes, will get diluted in actual practice. I hope that these fears will remain baseless and when, in fact, the guidelines are issued for the implementation of this Act, the precise advisory roles for these bureaucratic bodies are delineated and identified, and the executive role for the elected panchayats is also identified. Sir, alongwith elected panchayats, I would make a strong plea to the Minister to include women's Self-Help Groups as part of the implementation programme. Sir, today, in large parts of rural India, particularly, in Andhra Pradesh, thanks to the programmes started by N.T. Rama Rao, taken forward by Shri Chandrababu Naidu,

and now implemented by the Congress Government with increased vigour, the women's Self-Help Group Movement has become a true revolution. It is happening in Tamil Nadu. It is happening in Karnataka. It has happened in Kerala. It has happened in Orissa. It is happening in large parts of India...(*Time-bell*).. Panchayats are institutions of representations; Self-Help Group sare institutions of participation, and we must use the Employment Guarantee Programmes as an opportunity for linking institutions of representation with institutions of participation. And, in addition to the elected panchayat bodies, I would strongly urge the Minister that when he issues the guidelines for these programmes, he gives an important role to women's Self-Help Groups which have distinguished themselves in so many different areas. In this way, one of the concerns that has been articulated by leaders and activists like my colleague, the hon. Brinda Karatji, would also be reflected in the actual guidelines of this programme.

So, women self-help groups, I think, will play a very important role, Sir, and that is not reflected in this piece of legislation, but I hope this will get reflected in the Bill. Sir, I would now just touch two-three points, I don't want to take much of your time.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I think, you don't want the third bell.

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: Sir, I just want to make two or three points because a large number of issues have been raised.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Why I am saying it is because still there are fourteen more Members who have to speak. ...(*Interruptions*)... Just one minute. The time allocated by the business Advisory Committee for this Bill is four hours. In another ten minutes, we will be completing the allotted time of four hours, and still fourteen Members have to speak. So, I appeal to all the hon. Members to confine to the time.

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: Sir, I am doing my best not to repeat any of the points that have been made.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No; no; you are not repeating. But you have to be concise.

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: Sir, I am trying my best, but, in case I do longer, you are at liberty to ring the bell more frequently.

On the Bill itself, Sir, the concern has been raised by many Members that it is being targeted only at two hundred districts. Why aren't we starting a national programme? Sir, our commitment is to a national programme. The Common Minimum Programme, which was drafted among the Congress Party and Left Parties and the UPA Allies, does talk of a national programme. But, Sir, because this programme is historic, because through this programme, we are venturing into uncharted waters, we are taking on financial commitments, we are taking on a legal guarantee, we thought it prudent that we start it in a phased manner, and, that is why, Sir, these two hundred districts have been selected, and as the Prime Minister has himself very categorically said, this would be extended to the rest of the country. Now, Sir, on these two hundred districts, I do want to make one or two comments, because some of my friends who belong to the *Samajwadi Party* who are not present here, unfortunately, today, always talk about discrimination against Uttar Pradesh by this Government. Sir, out of these two hundred districts, almost twenty-six or twenty-seven districts are in Uttar Pradesh alone. In fact, Sir, I was doing account that where these two hundred districts are and, Sir, these two hundred districts are largely in States which are not having the Congress or the UPA Governments. This shows that this programme is not a partisan programme; it is not a political programme. Most of the districts that we are talking about, Sir, are in States in which the Congress and the UPA do not figure. These are Jharkhand, Orissa, Bihar—well, in Bihar, hopefully, it will figure soon—Uttar Pradesh... *(Interruptions)*...

PROF. P.J. KURIAN: In Kerala, there is only one district ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: I am coming to your point. I am coming to your point. ...*(Interruptions)*... I am coming to your point. ...*(Interruptions)*... Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. So, Sir, these two hundred districts are largely in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country. But, Sir, my good friend, Mr. Kurian, some of my friends from Tamil Nadu, some of my friends from Karnataka, are all very worried. Sir, Punjab has only one district of Hoshiarpur, Haryana has only two districts, and Himachal has only two districts. So, many of my friends from these States are saying that this is some sort of a give-away by the better-off States to the poorer States where governance is very poor ...*(Time-bell)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please conclude.

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: Sir, the fact of the matter is that these two hundred districts were selected on the basis of just three indicators. Just three indicators were used to select these two hundred districts, the SC/ST population in that district; the agricultural productivity in that district; and the agricultural minimum wage in that district. So, higher the SC/ST population, the district will figure; higher the wage, the district will not figure; lower the productivity, the district will figure. And, that is why you find that most of these two hundred districts, to begin with, are in Northern India, Central India and the Eastern India. And, for your information, Sir, Andhra Pradesh has twelve districts. So, you should be happy.

SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY (Andhra Pradesh): Sir, a district like Srikakulam is omitted. ...*(Interruptions)*... Can you reply to this?

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: Sir, you can always find one district that is omitted this year, But, I am sure, it will be taken up in the next year, But the fact of the matter is, three criteria that have been ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jairam Ramesh, these are matters of details.

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: Sir, I am concluding. I am concluding.

SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: We are implementing it in all the twenty-three districts. You are confined to only ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Kindly conclude. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Sir, ...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You can ask that point from the Minister. Why are you asking it from Shri Jairam Ramesh?...*(Interruptions)*... Why are you asking it from Shri Jairam Ramesh? He has been only giving some information. ...*(Interruptions)*...

प्रो० रामबल्लभ सिंह वर्मा: सर, क्या ये माननीय मंत्री जी के बोलने के लिए कुछ नहीं रखेंगे?

श्री उपसभापति: इनके पास जो एडवांस इन्फार्मेशन है, वह दे रहे हैं।

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: Why on these two hundred district—I was intrigued—the bill says that this will apply to the entire country, except the

State of Jammu and Kashmir. But the fact of the matter is that there are three 'food-for-work' districts in Jammu and Kashmir. So, I would like to ask the hon. Minister to kindly clarify the state of the Rural Employment Guarantee Programme. There are 'food-for-work' districts in Jammu and Kashmir; the *Rashtriya Samvikas Yojana* is in Jammu and Kashmir. There are three districts, Doda, Uri and Poonch that have been taken up.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I think, you are not listening to the time-bell.

SHRI JAI RAM RAMESH: Sir, I can't hear your bell.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please, conclude.

SHRI JAI RAM RAMESH: Sir, you have confused me; I am confusing between 'bell' and 'bill'!

Why does the Bill say that it will apply to the entire country, except Jammu and Kashmir?

Finally, I do believe. Sir, that this is an opportunity for us to integrate a large variety of Government programmes. As the hon. Prime Minister has said, there is *Bharat Nirman*; there are programmes, like afforestation; there are programmes of water development; there are programmes of wasteland development. I hope the hon. Minister would realise that in Schedule I, 'wasteland development' does not figure. मंत्री जी, बंजर भूमि विकास को शेड्यूल एक में नहीं शामिल किया गया है, जोकि होना चाहिए; बंजर भूमि विकास कार्यक्रम भी इसमें होना चाहिए ... (व्यवधान) ... ।

श्री उपसभापति: आप इतनी इन्फॉर्मेशन देने के बाद यह बोल रहे हैं कि वह नहीं।
...(interruption)...

SHRI JAI RAM RAMESH: I think what you need to do is use the Employment Guarantee Programme to integrate...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jairam Ramesh, please conclude.

SHRI JAI RAM RAMESH: ...the various programmes that exist under various Heads and you will find that in this way, the resource problem that has been identified by many speakers, is really a myth. There are resources under different programmes and different schemes. If you put

it together, you will find that the Employment Guarantee Programme is eminently suitable for financing in a non-inflationary manner.

Thank you, Sir.

DR. P.C. ALEXANDER (Maharashtra): Sir, I feel very happy that my speech follows Mr. Jairam Ramesh's speech. I really appreciate his very handsome, eloquent and well-deserved tribute to the performance of the State of Maharashtra in the matter of providing guaranteed employment.

[THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA) in the Chair]

I do not know whether there are many people who would share the views expressed by some hon. Members within the House about the alleged failure of the Employment Guarantee Scheme in Maharashtra. As Mr. Jairam Ramesh has pointed out, this is a scheme, which has been evaluated not only by experts within our country, but by impartial, international experts and researchers as well. I doubt whether any other development scheme in our country would have been evaluated on a greater number of occasions, by a greater number of experts, than had happened in the case of the Employment Guarantee Scheme. And universal conclusion has been that in spite of problems in the implementation, or certain drawbacks in the implementation at the field level, it is a very well-conceived scheme. It has actually been recommended as an example to be followed by other developing countries of the world.

[MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN in the Chair]

Having said this, it gives me an opportunity to find out where the new Bill is departing from the plus-points of the Maharashtra scheme. The Maharashtra scheme has been acknowledged as a great success because, in the first place, it acknowledged the right of the people to work. Though we have enshrined 'right to work' in the article covered by the general heading 'Directive Principles of State Policies', we have to take note of the fact that the most important factor which inspired the authors, of the scheme was that this scheme will be implementing the

6.00PM

great gospel, or principle, of right to work. In my opinion, the omission to refer to the right to work in the new Bill is a very conspicuous one.

And I really do not understand why after so many months of discussion on this Bill, this particular point, which has been put forward very strongly by those who supported the Bill, has been ignored altogether. In the Maharashtra Act, in the preamble, it is stated, "An Act to make effective provision for securing the right to work by guaranteeing employment to all adult persons", and then it proceeds, "whereas it will be expedient to make effective provision for securing the right to work laid down in article 41 of the Constitution..", and then it goes on to describe that it is to be done. Whereas the present Bill, which has been introduced by the hon. Minister in the Lok Sabha and which we are discussing, now just comes suddenly without a proper preamble, without a proper build-up for what was to follow, comes suddenly to the objective of "enhancement of livelihood security." My first point, therefore, Sir, is that, at the earliest opportunity -- I am not saying that the Bill should be held up because of this defect -- when you think of amending the Bill and making it more acceptable to the people, you should try to bring back the concept of right to work which has been recognised in the Bill, but not articulated in the Bill. The second point that I would like to make is that this Bill should not be treated as just an anti-poverty Bill. No doubt, it is keeping alleviation of poverty or eradication of poverty as an important objective. Nobody can dispute that. But if you read the Bill, you will find it goes far beyond the scope of just eradicating poverty. I congratulate the authors of the Bill for removing the words 'poor household' and just keeping only 'household'. It is a very significant and eloquent step because it will convey the message that this is not one of the half a dozen or more schemes which are designed to reduce poverty, but it has much greater objective. In this connection, I would like to inform the hon. Minister a point, which Jairamji has made in his speech, that a scheme like this should be utilised also to achieve certain economic objectives, and he very rightly pointed out the fact that horticulture in Maharashtra has reached the present level of efficiency in production and export it is because of the solid support that was given to the horticulture scheme under the Employment Guarantee Scheme. Hon. Minister may be aware of the fact that within five years Maharashtra has become the largest exporter of fruits and vegetables in our country and that was because they linked the Employment Guarantee

Scheme with horticulture. The hon. Minister will be particularly happy to know that the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, who do not have less than one hectare of land each are allowed under the horticulture development scheme in Maharashtra to work in their own field and get their wages under the Employment Guarantee Scheme. If you visit some of the backward regions of the backward districts in Maharashtra where the scheme has made a great success, you will find that today the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes are earning much more than small industrialists in the urban areas because of their interests in working in their own field and producing vegetables and fruits. A great social revolution took place in Maharashtra and, therefore, the objective of the scheme should be not merely providing employment to the poor which is very good, but also to achieve certain economic objectives like horticulture development, export promotion, small-scale industries development, training for village industries, etc. If these additional objectives are focussed upon during the drive for doing propaganda for the scheme in these areas, people will feel more enthused.

Taking again from Shri Jairam Ramesh's acknowledgement that the Scheme derives its inspiration from Maharashtra, I wish to point out a few more areas where it has departed from the Maharashtra. If we recognise the right to work as Maharashtra did, and rightly, so we have one day, not a very distant day, to come to the next stage than what is provided here, and that is, give the right to work to everyone. You cannot just limit it to one person in a household. If you go to the rural areas of Maharashtra, you will immediately realise the significance of what I say, particularly in the communities like the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. They live together. A household, sometimes, means 10 to 12 people and if you just give one man or one woman the right to work, it makes very little impact on that family or household. Therefore, very soon, when you bring an amendment to the act -- I am sure amendments will be brought forward -- we must extend the right to work not to one person in a household, but to all those who wish to work, and then only, you will find the real impact of the Scheme.

I would also like to suggest to the hon. Minister not to be discouraged by the propaganda which seems to be going around about the enormous or the size of the expenditure involved. I personally do not subscribe to the view that this scheme is going to cost Rs. 40 thousand crores or

Rs. 50 thousand crores. I do not believe that. In Maharashtra, where everyone has a right to work, and where the Scheme has been introduced in 33 out of the 35 districts -- only Thane and Mumbai city have been taken out of this Scheme and practically, the whole of Maharashtra is covered -- where everyone, who wants to work, has been given the work and everyone who wants to work for any number of days, has been given the work, the expenditure in 2003-04, that is the latest I could get, was only Rs. 1050 crores. Therefore, I do not know from where they have culled out the figure of Rs. 40 thousand crores or Rs. 50 thousand crores, if it is introduced all over the country. I am sure a veteran rural person like the hon. Minister, who knows the rural problems better than many of us sitting here, will not be discouraged by this frightening statistics about the amount of money that will be set apart for the Scheme. When you implement the Scheme, you will find that all this is very highly exaggerated estimation.

One more suggestion I would like to give for the hon. Minister's consideration. The Common Minimum Programme, when it refers to guaranteed employment, refers also to the urban poor. It refers to the rural poor, but it also says, "the need for providing guaranteed employment to the urban poor." I would suggest, as the Government of Maharashtra has done, have the benefit of the scheme extended to at least, C-class municipalities. If you see rural areas in the Maharashtra Act, rural areas include C-class municipalities. About 167 C-class municipalities, which had all the problems of rural areas, have been enjoying the benefits of the Scheme. If you bring an amendment of this Act in future, please remember this suggestion that the definition of rural areas should include C-class municipalities. (*Time-bell*) I have no doubt in my mind that this is a good beginning, a good beginning which can really provide benefit of good administration and good governance to the country as a whole. With these words, I commend the Bill to the House.

MESSAGE FROM LOK SABHA

Nomination To Committee On Public Undertakings

SECRETARY-GENERAL: Sir, I have to report to the House the following message received from Lok Sabha, signed by the Secretary-General of Lok Sabha: