

18.04 hrs.

DISCUSSION UNDER RULE 193

Need for Streamlining the Public Distribution System — *Contd.*

[English]

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Now let us take up Discussion Under Rule 193.

SHRI P.C. CHACKO (Mukundapuram) : I am sorry I did not know that we have come to take up the Discussion under Rule 193.

Sir, I thank you very much for giving this opportunity. You have very kindly permitted for a discussion on the basis of the question about this new PDS system. Now in the whole country, people are very much anxious and agitated over these changes because it is very adversely affecting them.

Sir, this Targeted Public Distribution System, with all its good intention, is not doing good to the people in various States. These are the reports which are coming to us.

I come from a State where the Public Distribution System is functioning very well. I am not speaking about my own State, Kerala, but I am quoting it as an example in the background of this new Targeted Public Distribution System. According to the requirement of this new Public Distribution System, rice and wheat are for the distribution in the State and it was a promise from the Central Government. When the new Targeted Public Distribution System comes up, there are new norms and on the basis of the new norms, the Government is deciding what should be the quota allotted for each State. But we are a State which is not growing wheat or rice. We are basically a State which is growing cash crops and earning thousands of crores of rupees for the whole country. ...*(Interruptions)*. When these cash crops are being cultivated in the State and when we export these cash crops like cardamom, pepper, ginger, etc. we get foreign exchange. That is the pattern of cultivation which is more economical to the State of Kerala. So, we are asked to continue with that. We are encouraged to continue the cultivation of these cash crops and, at the same time, we are offered that the Government would compensate for them. The Central Government took it as their responsibility to feed the States like Kerala which are deficit States as far as wheat and rice are concerned.

Today, the Public Distribution System in Kerala requires not less than 1,75,000 tonnes of rice every months. The hon. Minister knows that when the new

Targeted Public Distribution System comes, Kerala's quota is going to go down.

The hon. Minister has come to the conclusion that some people are to be excluded from this category. I do not oppose these norms, because I know that those who are above a certain level need not be given the benefit of the Public Distribution System. But what about the States where rice and wheat are not grown and where the State's economy is largely dependent on the cash crops and exportable commodities? We are asked to do that. So, there are certain agreements and certain background to this. So, the Targeted Public Distribution System should not ignore these facts.

If you take a view of the whole thing, the Public Distribution System is there in Mumbai and in other major States. But the whole State of Kerala is covered with a network of ration shops, a system which is so well built up over a period of time. Can we destroy it? In every two panchayat wards, we have a ration shop; in thirteen thousand panchayat wards, we have almost 6,500 ration shops in the State of Kerala. ...*(Interruptions)*. That means every two wards of a panchayat have got one ration shop. So, this is a model.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I request you that you should visit our State once and see how this system is working there; system, which is working and which covers the entire population of the State whether it is sugar, kerosene or any other item which is being distributed, is there. We have a very beautiful system and if he decides to destroy the whole system by his new Targeted Public Distribution System, then that will be a big tragedy for the whole State.

The hon. Minister's predecessor is sitting behind him and he knows it. So, I have a special request to the hon. Minister. We are not against the Targeted Public Distribution System, because those who own afford, let them go out of the net. But, at the same time, in the State which are totally depending on the Public Distribution System, statutory rationing is prevailing.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, when he was the Prime Minister, promised to the State Government when statutory rationing was introduced in the whole State of Kerala, not in towns or cities like in many other parts of the country that sufficient quantity would be given to them.

Now, we are having the festival season in Kerala.

The festival season is coming. Our *Onam* festival is coming. During the festival season, the Government used to give us an additional quantity. This has been our rightful claim. But now it is seen that all our requests are falling on deaf ears. How can it happen? How can a very

[Shri P.C. Chacko]

affectionate person, the Minister in charge, ignore it? So, I request him to kindly go through the background of the system which is prevailing ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Chacko ji, one minute. I am quite hopeful that the hon. Minister is very vigilant and he will take care of all the things you are referring to.

SHRI P.C. CHACKO : Thank you very much, Sir. I am grateful to you and all the people of Kerala will be grateful to you, Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir.

When we are discussing the Targeted Public Distribution System, certain things come to my mind—the procurement, the production and the distribution. These aspects ought to have a fresh look. I do not think that we are doing it on a scientific basis.

We are grateful to our agricultural scientists who have brought this country to a near self-sufficiency position as far as the foodgrains are concerned. But are we in a position to procure these in proper manner? When the procurement season comes, the Government is always dilly-dallying about the procurement price. Of course, you can import the foodgrains also.

Today morning during the Question Hour, we were discussing that we are importing 500 million tonnes of pulses, spending Rs. 800 crores every year. But we are not prepared to give any incentives to our farmers. If we give them some incentive after a lot of persuasion or if the decision comes late, that is not of any use. The Minister should declare the procurement price sufficiently in advance and make sufficient stock. Last year, I very well know that we had taken a panicky decision to import wheat. What happened then was that there was the import and the export of it. What was the basis of exporting the foodgrains? It was based on a wrong calculation. Our assessment about the crop was wrong. Who was responsible for that? I am not blaming any Minister or any particular Government, but when India decided to export wheat, what was the basis of that decision? That was because of a wrong assessment about the harvest that year. Then finally we imported some quantity. When our stocks were depleted, when our stocks did not reach a sufficient level, we had taken a panicky decision to import. What was the loss in export and what was the loss in import? How much has this poor country suffered because of the faulty policies of the Government? This happened not only with regard to wheat or rice but also with regard to sugar.

Sir, the Minister knows very well how much money is due to the sugarcane farmers in Uttar Pradesh, the sugarcane farmers in Maharashtra and the sugarcane farmers in various parts of the country, from the mills. The mills are not paying money to the farmers. Shri

Sarpotdar knows that in a State like Maharashtra, hundreds of crores of rupees are due to the farmers and these are not being given. Now they are shifting their cultivation also because this has become uneconomic. If the money is not paid in time, if the procurement price of sugarcane is not decided in time, if the farmers are suffering, then a calamitous situation will develop and finally we will again be forced to import sugar. We know how a scandalous and an astronomical situation developed when sugar import took place in this country a year and a half back. All of us know that. This kind of a situation shows that we do not have a scientific approach towards the procurement of foodgrains or sugar and do not give remunerative prices to the farmers. This is one of the problems.

The Food Corporation of India godowns in the country are overflowing. That is what we are saying, and we are proud of that. But what quantity of wheat and rice and other food items are being wasted in our godowns? I know that the Ministers in charge of these things know that not less than a thousand crores of rupees worth of foodgrains are being wasted because of inadequate facilities for stocking these foodgrains in our godowns. The quality is being degraded because it is getting wet or because they do not have proper arrangements for keeping these foodgrains. This has been happening because we do not have proper storage facilities. So, even today we are not able to follow the technological advancement in the field of procurement and stocking of foodgrains on a scientific basis.

This is the haphazard manner in which it is done when we are celebrating 50 years of our Independence. After 50 years we gained a lot; we achieved a lot. We could produce our foodgrains to our sufficient requirement. But we are not able to give our farmers their due share. We are not able to keep it properly. At the same time the distribution also is a problem.

Now a new thing is coming. This is something which should be discussed in a wider scale because now the rations for various items are distributed through the ration shops. Kerosene also is distributed through the ration shops. But what is happening? What is the ration system or the public distribution system and the corruption involved? Can anyone of us deny as to how corrupt the system is? Most of the kerosene which is distributed through the ration shops is going to the blackmarketeers. What is the system of surveillance?

What is the system to check this? What is the system to monitor these things?

I do not think that any effective system is prevailing in this country. May be kerosene is going for adulteration patrol or dissel. This is happening. So that system is decaying and the system is imperfect and it is not giving the desired results. When the Minister is announcing the schemes he should consider these things.

Now this Targeted Public Distribution Scheme is there. Previously it was a different system. Any new scheme is good for announcement. But who is analysing as to how it is affecting the life of the common man ultimately who is in the long queue before the ration shops? These are certain lacunas in the system. I am not opposing the system. At the same time, the Targeted Public Distribution Scheme should not destroy, or affect the statutory rationing which is prevailing in various parts of the country, whether it is cities, or some States like Kerala on a universal scale, where it is existing. That system should not be destroyed. But at the same time we should be able to plug the loopholes in the system of procurement of foodgrains and keeping of foodgrains and distribution. We should be able to avoid corruption in the system and make it as perfect as possible.

These are some of my suggestions. I thank you very much for the time given to me.

SHRI ANADI CHARAN SAHU (Cuttack) : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I would like to say just one sentence. I want to add to Shri Chacko's statement. In Orissa the F.C.I. is selling rice at Rs. 8.77 per kilogram whereas it is available at Rs. 7 per kilogram outside. It is a faulty system. I am only adding to what Shri Chacko has said. It is a faulty system being adopted by the F.C.I.

SHRI SEBASTIAN PAUL (Ernakulam) : Hon. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, at the outset I am expressing my profound gratitude to your honour for inviting me to make my maiden speech in this august House. I am particularly happy that I am called upon to speak on a subject which is of great significance and relevance as far as the poor people of this country are concerned.

As I was listening to the various speeches made by hon. Members for the last few days, it has come to light that the Targeted Public Distribution Scheme which came into force on 1st of June with much fanfare has become the target of much criticism it is meant to provide foodgrains to nearly 33 billion people at reduced or concessional prices. It is a flashing point in the Common Minimum Programme of the United Front Government.

But, as the hon. Prime Minister has admitted in this House, the scheme is fraught with faults and he has admitted that there were lapses and shortcoming. After the assurance given by the hon. Prime Minister that the faults will be corrected and the scheme will be streamlined, I have nothing more to add on that point.

Coming to the situation prevailing in my State, Kerala, I have to mention a few facts at the risk of repetition before this august House. Kerala is a model State for running a streamlined and well-oiled public distribution system as my friend Shri Chacko has just now pointed out. That scheme, with a statutory rationing system, is caused to be upset by the introduction of the new scheme.

With the advent of this system, the entitlement of allocation to Kerala is reduced from 24 lakh tonnes to 17.76 lakh tonnes. It is on the basis of new scheme of taking the average offtake for the last 10 years. This calculation has caused a great injustice to the State of Kerala which requires at least 24 lakh tonnes per year to meet its requirements. Although the average offtake for the last few years was 17.76 lakh tonnes due to various reasons, Kerala is entitled to get 24 tonnes for meeting its requirements and that was the assurance given to the State when the Chief Ministers and the Food Ministers met in last July or August. It was decided in that meeting that the requirement of food deficit States would be met and such States would be given a special consideration while fixing the allotment. But unfortunately that promise has not been kept and Kerala is now receiving a reduced allotment.

As is well know, Kerala is a food deficit State. It is not because the people in Kerala are not doing any agricultural operations but because the Keralites for various reasons and constraints have diverted their work to cultivating cash crops. This is benefiting not only the people of Kerala but also the entire country because our agriculturists are earning the most required and necessary foreign exchanges for the country through cultivating cash crops. The per capita availability of foodgrains through local production in Kerala is only 32 kilograms whereas it is as high as 976 kilograms in Punjab. The total requirement of Kerala is 40 Lakh tonnes. We cannot meet this requirement unless the required allotment is given to the State in full, discarding this impractical method of allocation.

Another point I want to raise before this House is that the well-organised and well-knit public distribution system, which can be taken as a model for the entire country, cannot be permitted to degenerate or get upset by this method of fixing allotment on an artificial basis of taking the average for the last ten years. I would request

[Shri Sebastian Paul]

that the earlier allocation of 24 lakh tonnes should be maintained or at least, the last year's lifted quantity of 20.75 lakh tonnes should be allotted to the State at Central Issue Price. This is most urgently needed because of the advent of our annual festival season, that is, *Onam* which is falling next month.

I hope that the House and the hon. Minister will understand that the present allocation of 17.76 lakh tonnes is totally inadequate to meet the requirements of the State which is a food deficit State. Taking into account the special circumstances and facts of the situation prevailing in Kerala, I hope that the Minister will restore the earlier allocation and the promise given to the State in the last Chief Ministers' Conference will be kept.

Almost all other points have been covered by the hon. Member in this House. So, I am not repeating all those points. With this request to the hon. Minister, I once again appreciate and record my gratitude to the hon. Deputy-Speaker for inviting me to make a speech at the fag end of the day.

Translation]

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : I have a list of members who are yet to speak. The Hon'ble Minister is also supposed to give a reply to it. I would like to request the Hon'ble Members to take only 5 minutes so that this debate could be concluded.

...(Interruptions)

18.25 hrs.

PRESIDENTIAL AND VICE-PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (SECOND AMENDMENT) BILL*

[English]

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Now, Shri Ramakant Khalap will introduce a Bill further to amend the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Act, 1952.

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP) : Sir, I beg to move for leave to introduce a Bill further to amend the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Act, 1952

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : The question is:

"That leave be granted to introduce a bill further to amend the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Act, 1952."

The motion was adopted.

SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP : Sir, I introduce the Bill.

* Published in the Gazette of India Extraordinary, Part II, Section-2, dated 12.8.97

18.27 hrs.

STATEMENT RE : PRESIDENTIAL AND VICE - PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (AMENDMENT) ORDINANCE—Laid

[English]

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP) : Sir, I beg to lay on the Table an explanatory statement (Hindi and English versions) showing reasons for immediate legislation by the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections (Amendment) Ordinance, 1997.

Sir, in the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Act, 1952, as originally enacted, no security deposit was prescribed. The nomination paper of the candidate, however was required to be subscribed by the candidate himself as assenting to the nomination and by two electors as proposer and seconder.

In order to discourage frivolous candidates from filing nominations to the offices of the President and Vice-President, the Act was amended in 1974 to provide that, in case of Presidential election, the nomination paper should be subscribed by the candidate as assenting to the nomination and also by at least ten electors as proposers and at least ten electors as seconders. In the case of Vice-Presidential election, the requirement was that the nomination papers should be subscribed by the candidate as assenting to the nomination and also by at least five electors as proposers and at least five electors as seconders. The amendment also provided that the candidate for Presidential and Vice-presidential elections shall have to deposit a sum of Rs. 2,500.

The aforesaid amendments are not sufficient deterrent to discourage non-serious candidates. The Election Commission of India, in February, 1997, suggested that the security deposit for elections to the offices of the President and Vice-President may be enhanced.

The Government considered the suggestion made by the Election Commission and decided to enhance the security deposit to rupees fifteen thousand. It also decided to increase the minimum number of proposers and seconders to fifty each in respect of election to the office of President and twenty each in respect of election to the office of Vice-President.

As Parliament was not in Session and the notification for Presidential election was to be issued on 9th June,