

**12.04 hrs.**

**Title:** Regarding reported Regional Imbalance in various parts of the country, especially in Northern part of West Bengal.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI (RAIGANJ): Sir, I call the attention of the Minister of Planning to the following matter of urgent public importance and request that she may make a statement thereon:

"The situation arising out of reported regional imbalance in various parts of the country especially in Northern part of West Bengal."

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SMALL SCALE INDUSTRIES, MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES AND PENSIONS, MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENTS OF ATOMIC ENERGY AND SPACE (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): Sir, the hon. Member of Parliament, Shri Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi has raised a matter regarding the situation arising out of reported regional imbalance in various parts of the country, especially in the Northern part of West Bengal.

Similar concern has been raised by the hon. Member about the overall economic development of the said region on a number of occasions by raising Matters, 'Zero Hour' submissions, letters to the hon. Prime Minister, the Ministers of State for Planning and the Deputy-Chairman, Planning Commission and his anxiety for the area and its people is very well known.

The hon. Member has raised the issue of regional imbalance and lack of infrastructure development like road network, health, rural electrification, industry, exploitation of agriculture potential and construction of over-bridges on railway crossings, etc. in the area as also issues relating to the socio-economic and cultural development of backward communities like the Rajbanshi community and the promotion of Hindi and development of other languages in the region.

These issues, raised by the hon. Member, have dwelt on the perceived imbalance in the development of North Bengal, within the State of West Bengal; upliftment of Rajbanshi community in North Bengal, need for all-round development of North-Bengal; remunerative price for jute growers, declining tea industry and lack of support from banks; all-round development of North-Bengal; infrastructure development in North Bengal; making provision for a 250 bedded hospital in Malda and metalled roads in Mahananda; socio-economic development of sub divisional headquarters; socio economic development of North Bengal; *ad-hoc* grant of Rs. 15 crore; allocation of funds to West Bengal; and overall development of Harishchandrapur Assembly Constituency. Very recently, he has raised issues, concerning overall development in respect of Karandighi Assembly Segment, Goalpukur and Chakulia Revenue blocks, Chanchal Sub Division and Ratua Block under Rule 377, the replies to all of these are under process.

These issues have been examined, from time to time, in the Planning Commission. The planning and development of the area and allocation of funds for the purpose are primarily the responsibility of the concerned State Government. However, the Central Government supplements the efforts of the State Governments in the reduction of regional imbalances. Almost, all the matters, raised by the hon. Member, fall within the overall responsibility of the State Government. Inter-se allocation of funds, which are sanctioned for the States in the Annual Plans, is entirely the prerogative of the State Government. The funds for the Annual Plans, I may reiterate, are allocated to the States. Except for a handful Area Development Schemes, that are run by the Central Government, development of specific areas in the State, is the responsibility of the Government of that State. Various programmes have been formulated to deal with the special problems of identified areas such as the Tribal Sub-Plan, the Border Area Development Programme, Hills Areas Development Programme, (which covers Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Development Council), etc.

Towards this end, on these occasions, in response to the matter raised by the hon. Member, suitable communications have been addressed by the incumbent Minister of State for Planning to the Chief Minister of West Bengal, bringing to the latter's notice, the concern of the hon. Member, with the request that the matter may be examined and appropriate action taken at the level of the State Government. In response to every notice/mention, replies have been sent to the hon. Member, regularly.

I may mention that the State Government has constituted a body namely, Uttar Banga Unnayan Parshad in the year 2000-01 with the objective of formulating schemes for the development of North Bengal region.

The University of North Bengal has prepared a socio-economic perspective Plan for North Bengal, 2001-2010,

which is under active consideration of the Parishad. The State Government has proposed to allocate an amount of Rs. 112.53 crore for the Tenth Five Year Plan to this Parishad.

Besides, keeping in mind the repeated requests for development of North Bengal, raised by the hon. Member, as a special case, it was decided that a Study would be conducted in respect of the North Bengal region in order to understand and address the issues involved therein. The Study, named 'Research study on the comparative backwardness of North Bengal region', was commissioned to the Institute of Applied Manpower Research, an autonomous institution under the Planning Commission in September, 2001. The Study was meant to bring out the inter-district disparity in different dimension of development, broadly, under the following heads: (a) Physical Resources (b) Human Resources (c) Physical Infrastructure (d) Social infrastructure including education and health facilities (e) Economic Sectors and (f) implementation of development schemes. The Study has been envisaged as a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analysis of districts of North Bengal vis-à-vis future development initiatives. The Study has since been carried out and the Report is in the process of finalisation.

It is also pertinent to mention that a State Development Report for the State of West Bengal, which includes, *inter-alia*, North Bengal also, is under preparation, for which, a Core Committee has been constituted under the Chairmanship of Dr. S.P. Gupta, Member, Planning Commission. Different aspects of Study have been assigned to reputed Institutions, such as, Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta; Indian Statistical Institute, Jadhavpur University; and also the Calcutta University.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Sir, the region, which I mentioned in my Calling Attention notice, is like other regions.

Sir, you may recall that when the Maharashtra and Gujarat were reorganised, the Constitution of India in article 371 provided development aspects of those regions like Saurashtra, Kutch and Vidharbha in a special footing.

Sir, North Bengal is a part of West Bengal where several districts have had to be reorganised when the Reorganisation Bill of Bengal and Bihar took place in the 50s. Thereafter, the entire development scenario is languishing. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (BOLPUR): It is a very beautiful statement!

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : I am thankful to the Minister and to the former Chief Minister of West Bengal, Shri Jyoti Basu who, in the year 2000, tried to make a committee called the *North Bengal Unnayan Parishad*, without any statutory obligation of the Board to discharge its responsibilities. Now the Tenth Plan is to take shape. The House may be aware that by road, the only gateway to the North-Eastern States is North Bengal. The House may also be aware that even by railway to North-Eastern States, it is the North Bengal which is the only link. The House may also be aware that when the 1962 aggression by China took place, the only way for the army from Delhi or any other part of India to reach Nathu La, was North Bengal. Even the Naxalite movement was originated from North Bengal. Therefore, I would like to know from the hon. Minister, through you, Sir, that since the Tenth Plan is to take shape now - and take shape very fast - will she consider consulting the State Government of West Bengal and involving them, because they are also equal

y responding, from time to time, on matters which we raise, to shape the Tenth Plan document in a manner by which the imbalance created here is fully compensated.

Forty-two years before, a university was founded, called North Bengal University and I had the privilege to become the first graduate from that university. Thirty-two years before, there was only one medical college, known as Siliguri Medical College. Thirty-five years before, there was only one engineering college, known as Jalpaiguri Engineering College. If you look at the statistics of the other parts of India, including West Bengal, you will find that three Censuses had taken place by this time and several engineering and medical colleges had come up in respective regions, excepting this part of India. Therefore, I have been approached, not politically but by several social organisations, including my colleague Shri Amar Roypradhan of Forward Bloc....(*Interruptions*)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE: I appreciate his efforts.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : I have also been approached by my colleagues Shrimati Minati Sen of Jalpaiguri and Shri Joachim Baxla of Alipurduars. It is not an issue by which we want to score politics, it is a serious issue. This part of the region has to be attended to by the Planning Commission properly because there are the borders of Nepal and Bhutan on the one side and the border of Bangladesh on the other side. I tell you - Advani Ji and the Chief Minister will also share my concern - that even the terrorist outfits of various parts of Nepal and Bhutan are considering this region as a ground for harbouring their activities. Therefore, the peace-loving people of this region, including the social and ethnic population, have been agitating enough. There is a community only in

North Bengal, which we call *Rajbangshi* Scheduled Castes. They are suffering in terms of getting higher education for girls in colleges and schools. We all talk of secularism, but you will be shocked to know that there are two or three revenue blocks like Harish Chandrapur, Goalpokhar, Hemtal and Chakulia etc. where 60 per cent Muslims stay, but there is no college worth the name in that region. Where will these people go?

My friends from North Bengal will agree that every alternate year, the havoc of floods destroys all economic opportunities of this region, be it in my district, be it in North Malda, be it Cooch Behar or be it Jalpaiguri. Yet, in successive four Plans – Sixth, Seventh, Eighth and Ninth – not a single Master Plan has been conceived for the water management problem of the flood affected areas. Once upon a time, Jalpaiguri was the headquarters of North Bengal, culturally, politically and economically. The tea town is shattered after two floods and thereafter it could not grow at all. The circuit Bench suggestions recommended and approved by the State Government are still lying with the Law Ministry. Nothing has been signalled for Jalpaiguri. I urge upon the Minister, through you, Sir, to consider a comprehensive Task Force for several other regions, including North Bengal, for taking appropriate measures in the Tenth plan document to compensate the infrastructural deficiencies, including flood management device, Master Plan, and educational and industrial infrastructure.

I have been inviting Shri Somanth Chatterjee for the last three months to visit my area. He said, he will come. The downstream product of Haldia Petrochemicals can have a better opportunity for small-scale industrial growth in the region because there is a positive Indo-Bangladesh and Indo-Nepal market.

The youngsters, those of the unemployed sections have been addressing to me as to why we do not address this issue to the Government of India. I am grateful to the hon. Minister for admitting this notice. At the same time, I would request the hon. Minister one thing. Will she consider consulting the Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs and also the Government of West Bengal to see whether the equal development area status, in line with Vidarbha, Saurashtra and Kutch, as provided by Article 371 of the Constitution, could also be considered in this region so that this region can come up and come up with a better footing shortly?

The medical college in Siliguri is taking care of the load of the entire North Bengal and the State of Sikkim. You can imagine what could be the pressures. Therefore, an additional college for this region is considered highly necessary at this moment. Even the people of Bhutan rush to India and the first door for their treatment is Siliguri. Even to maintain our friendly relations with Bhutan and Nepal, I think this region requires this kind of a support.

I will mention about two instances and then I will conclude. The first instance is about the last three severe floods in 1998-99. Do you know the election process in the districts of Malda, Dakshin Dinajpur and Uttar Dinajpur was conducted? The polling booths were placed on the boats and people had to go there, even swimming to vote. Hon. Member, Shri A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhary, former Minister of Irrigation of Government of West Bengal did the Mahananda Plan. But till today the embankment has not been renovated. The resource generation programme of the Planning Commission never took up the Plan. Hon. Member Shri Somnath Chatterjee will also agree with me that this has resulted into a situation where Malda is inaccessible during floods. I am told by the experts on the river that river Ganges is trying to change its course. If the river Ganges changes its course from Farakka to Rajmahal and it enters into Malda, devastation will come to that area within five to six years.

I submit that the situation is really alarming and threatening. On the one hand, the Teesta canal project is at a halting stage for lack of resources, the entire support for Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri which comes to Teesta canal for their highest irrigation opportunities, including Dinajpur, is at a halting stage. Therefore, all these issues, combined together, create a situation in which the Government of India owes a responsibility in shaping the Tenth Plan document to provide substantial economic support and infrastructural support in the Tenth Plan document for the entire North Bengal region.

I also appeal on one thing. A few extremists are trying to engineer violence in North Bengal inciting the ethnic passion of *Rajbangshis* which we condemn and disassociate. Large sections of *Rajbangshis* are peace-loving people. They want their cultural heritage to be preserved by the State and North Bengal University. They also want opportunities of jobs, development of infrastructure in their region and that other things which should be honoured. Not even 20 hostels are there in the entire North Bengal for the large number of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people of that area to have education. The rivers Teesta, Kulak, Punarbhaba, Aatreya, Srimati, Pagala, Mahananda and Phuluhar are in a situation now where no effort has been made by the Ministry of Water Resources either through the Ganga Action Plan or through the Mahananda Development Plan to support, to expand the river-basin's base and to arrange proper desilting which is deposited there for the last several decades. It should be dredged out failing which the entire North Bengal will be affected.

I now find to a situation which is alarming, which the hon. Minister has admitted in her statement and which I brought to the notice of the hon. Prime Minister. The river Phuluhar has threatened, by this time last week, several villages have submerged. There is danger from this river and from the river Ganges, which we call Bhagirathi, on the other side in the entire Jagirpur sub-division of Murshidabad and other villages are on the line of extinction. My

friend Shri Moinul Hassan has brought in a Resolution in this regard through Private Members' Resolutions. The erosion in Mahananda, Ganges and Phuluhar has eliminated the villages one after another.

I would request the hon. Minister to pay a visit to the island called Mahananda Tola and Bilaimari in Ratna block. She would be surprised to see that the distance between the river and the village is now only half-a-kilometre which was eight kilometres ten years back. People are staying there in a condition of nightmare. This is because no action has been taken by the Ministry of Water Resources till now through their Plan support to make barges or to give special cover to the eroded river Gank.

Sir, while concluding I would request the hon. Minister, through you, about three things. I again reiterate this. Firstly, will you consider consulting the Ministry of Law on giving the status of the special area development programme under Article 371 of the Constitution to this region which was re-organised after Bangladesh-Bihar Re-organisation Bill in the '50s? Will you consider to constitute a task force for shaping the Tenth Plan and will you please consult the Government of West Bengal to give a statutory status to the Uttar Banga Unnyan Parishad, instead of giving a lip service, overlapping the programmes of the *Zilla Parishad* and municipalities? Will you assure this House that the Government of India would come up with required resources for North Bengal that the Government of India wants to invest for the development of the North Bengal through the Tenth Plan document? If you deny resources, it will be a problem. With great difficulty we have managed the problem of Darjeeling Hill Council. The problem with different dimensions will come now.

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Dasmunsi, please conclude now. You are aware of the rules.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Sir, please give me only one minute.

Sending the Army and the CRPF to manage the law and order will not help. Please ensure that sufficient funds from the Central Plan outlay in the Tenth Plan for the overall development of the North Bengal.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. Minister to reply now.

...(Interruptions)

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE (CALCUTTA SOUTH): Mr Speaker, Sir, generally in discussion on Calling Attention three to four Members speak. We do not know when this notice was served. Only one hon. Member has raised it. We are also interested in the development of that region. We are also from the same State. We have also to say something. I would request that the hon. Minister may reply after hearing us.

MR. SPEAKER: Mamataji, I have no objection for doing it. But then, let me tell you that there is a 'Zero hour' after this. If this discussion is taken up further, then the 'Zero hour' will not take place. Therefore, please cooperate with the Chair.

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE : Sir, at least two to three Members may be allowed to speak. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: I may not be able to do that. As per the rules, only one Member who puts the question is to speak. I am sorry.

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE : Sir, in the discussion on Calling Attention generally three-four persons speak. We also belong to the same State. We do not know when this notice was given. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Mamataji, you can use any other device to raise the question. I will definitely permit you.

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE : Sir, please allow me to raise only one question.

MR. SPEAKER: I am permitting Kumari Mamata Banerjee to raise only one question.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Sir, in such a case everybody will have to speak. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Mamataji, please cooperate with me. I may not be able to do that.

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE : Sir, I want to cooperate with you. ...(Interruptions)

SHRI SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY (CALCUTTA NORTH WEST): Sir, if such type of rules are cited that 'if she is allowed to speak, then I will have to be allowed', then I will have to apply all those rules. ...(Interruptions)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Do not use the words that I have not said. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: That is not his contention.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Sir, this is the problem. â€¦! (Interruptions)

SHRI SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY : Sir, he is a person who speaks on anything, on every issue. ...(Interruptions)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : I have never said that. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: May I tell you? His contention is quite clear.

SHRI SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY : Sir, ...\*

...(Interruptions)

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE : Sir, we also represent the Opposition in the State. We are the main Opposition Party there. We are raising questions there. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: I will ask Mamataji to use some other device and I will definitely permit you. The hon. Minister to speak now.

SHRI AMAR ROY PRADHAN (COOCHBEHAR): Sir, there was a discussion on this in the Eighth Lok Sabha. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: I do not think there is anything to be raised now. I have requested her. She has agreed. Now, it is time for the hon. Minister to reply.

SHRI AMAR ROY PRADHAN : Sir, a reference was made in the Eighth Lok Sabha and at that time the hon. Speaker has allowed for having a discussion under Rule 193. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Do you want me to read the rules? For your information, I have read the rules. The rule permits only one Member to speak, who has raised the issue. It is for the Chair to permit others. But then the 'Zero hour' may also suffer. The hon. Minister to reply now.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL (HOOGLY): Sir, she must know how to conduct in the House. ...(Interruptions) Sir, the word used by hon. Member Shri Sudip Bandyopadhyay in response to what Shri Somnath Chatterjee has said should be deleted from the records. You should examine the proceedings. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: There is nothing to delete.

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : Sir, he has used an objectionable word. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: I have understood what he has said and there is nothing objectionable in what he has said.

\* Expunged as ordered by the Chair.

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : He has used the word \* .

...(Interruptions)

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: Sir, at the very outset I would like to reiterate about the concern expressed by the hon. Member. ...(Interruptions)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Sir, I do not mind anybody calling me \* . But are you permitting such expression of one Member using it against another Member, to remain on record? ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: I have said that there is nothing wrong in what you have said. That was my contention.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : It has been said \* .

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: If the word is unparliamentary, it will be removed from the record. There is no problem.

Now, the Minister can go ahead.

SHRI SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY : It the word is unparliamentary, it has to be removed; if it is not, then, it has to be retained. ...(Interruptions)

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL: Sir, he has used the word \* .

SHRI SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY : Sir, North Bengal is under the jurisdiction of the State Government. There is an utter failure of the State Government. Here, they are accusing the Central Government, but it is a State matter. ...(Interruptions)

---

\*Expunged as ordered by the Chair.

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE : It is a State matter. Still, they are not doing anything for the people of North Bengal. It is being neglected by the State Government. ...(Interruptions)

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : Sir, â€|â€|. \*

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: But I have already told that if the word is unparliamentary, it will be removed from the record.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY : Sir, he is now using my word \* . He is learning from me. It is fortunate enough that he has learnt from me. ...(Interruptions) Now, he is using the word \* . That is not an unparliamentary word! This is the correction of the ...(Interruptions)

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : You must know the rule. Only the person who is calling the attention of the Government is allowed to speak. ...(Interruptions)

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE : You do not know anything. You keep quiet. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : You should read the rule book. ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: I think, this is enough now. Let the Minister reply. The question which has been raised is important. Now, the Minister may start.

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: At the very outset, I had said and I would like to say again that the concerns of the hon. Member ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister has started the reply. Please sit down. This is much more than what is required.

...(*Interruptions*)

---

\* Expunged as ordered by the Chair.

MR. SPEAKER: I have already said that all unparliamentary words will be removed.

...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Sir, although it is a State matter, I appreciate the effort of the hon. Member. I have said that he has very appropriately raised it. Let the Government give an answer properly. But all sorts of things are being brought in. Ordinarily, State matters should not be raised, but I have not taken objection on this ground in this matter. ...(*Interruption*)

MR. SPEAKER: That is what I am also anxious to listen to.

Now, the Minister may go ahead.

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have said it at the very beginning and I would like to reiterate it that the concerns of the hon. Members, not only the hon. Member who raised it but also of the rest of the hon. Members from West Bengal, have really been communicated to the Planning Commission earlier also and these points, which have been raised, have been deliberated upon extensively. The planning and development of a particular area, with allocation of funds, is actually the responsibility of the concerned State Government and the Central Government supplements basically the efforts of the State Government in the various developmental projects and also in the development of backward areas through various means.

I would like to emphasise over here the means which we use to do this and that is the weightage for backwardness. There is a formula which is used for the distribution of Central assistance. Successive Finance Commissions have

laid stress on this backwardness formula for actually determining the share of the Central tax proceeds. Basically, the weight of the inverse of *per capita* State income criteria takes note of this backwardness. The Eleventh Finance Commission has assigned a weight of 62.5 per cent for the award period of 2000 to 2005 which is higher than the weight was assigned by the previous Commissions. In addition to this, they have also used the criteria of "area" and the "index of infrastructure", which helps backward States. Basically, larger area and lower development of infrastructure is associated strongly with backwardness and in recognition of this, the Eleventh Finance Commission has assigned a weight of 7.5 per cent to each of these in place of five per cent, recommended by the Tenth Finance Commission.

Now, assessing the requirement of the revenue gap Grants is also an exercise which basically accords special consideration to the backward States. The States which are relatively more backward are not able to raise finances and that much money as the better off States can and this gets built into what we call Revenue Gap grants.

The Finance Commission also takes note of specific requirements of each of the States when they come to visit the States. Such requirements, then, are met through the recommendation of Grants for special problems and also upgradation, and, thus, provide an opportunity to the backward States, actually, to put forth their claims. Various programmes like the Tribal Sub-Plan, the Border Area Development Programme, the Hill Areas Development Programme, the Desert Development Programme, the Drought Prone Area Programme are all programmes which have been, particularly, drawn up for fixing the levels of allocation to the States, which are suffering from these particular relativities.

Further, there are a number of programmes which are only drawn up for poverty alleviation, and those for employment generation, infrastructural development watershed development and social security are there to improve the life of people in the rural areas and to assist all those people who are below poverty line.

To encourage speedy industrialisation, there are other schemes in the industrially backward areas. There are, actually, category-A and category-B districts which have been identified for the purpose of Income-tax concessions. In fact, there are various schemes for infrastructural development of the industrial sector. These are coming under the scheme called Growth Centre Schemes, scheme for integrated infrastructure development and others.

The Mid-Term Appraisal of the Ninth Plan has highlighted the fact, that, the root cause of underdevelopment is not just paucity of funds alone but also efficiency and efficacy of the delivery mechanism and the systems of governance.

Finally, we find that owing to the financial problems that some of the States are undergoing, Plan funds are diverted for Non-Plan purposes, and Central assistance remains unutilised because of the lack of the counterpart funding and the allocations are not, therefore, utilised to the maximum. During the Ninth Five Year Plan period, the actual expenditure anticipated expenditure, against the originally agreed outlay for the Annual Plans have been in the range of only 68 % - 81 % in the State of West Bengal as compared to States like Andhra Pradesh where it is 86 % to 106 per cent; in Karnataka, it is 93 to 106 per cent, in Kerala, it is 88% to 108 per cent. This highlights the need on the part of the State Government to actually improve their fund utilisation so that they come up to the levels of other better performing States. The States also need to improve their transparency and upgrade their systems of delivery by ensuring a degree of commitment, motivation, professional competence and definitely, the integrity of the political and bureaucratic systems. In the Tenth Plan, it is proposed to focus on reduction in these regional disparities. We are going to try and make effort.

I would like to say, briefly, the steps which we have taken to do so in North Bengal. Under the Hill Areas Development Programme which covers Darjeeling District of the North Bengal region, Rs. 22.23 crore have been released during each year of the Ninth Five Year Plan.

A Dutch-assisted agricultural project is being implemented in North Bengal. Two phases have been completed. Phase III, with a financial involvement of Rs. 33.06 crores, including the State Government's share of Rs. 2.55 crore, needs to be dealt with immediately. In the first phase, the total area which is covered for irrigation facilities is 2,300 hectares, and the number of farmers who have been benefited are over 4,000. In the second phase, the area which is covered through different irrigation facilities is almost 10,000 hectares, and the number of benefited farmers is over 53,000. Work in phase III has started from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1995. The *Uttarbanga Unnayan Parshad* now has been constituted in 2000-2001, under the Chairmanship of the Chief Minister, a Minister, elected from North Bengal, as Vice Chairman, Members of Parliament, Members of the Assembly, *Sabhapathies*, and District Magistrates of the five districts of North Bengal as member. The *Parshad* monitors planning and implementation of the development schemes in this area. The State Government has proposed to allocate Rs. 112.53 crore to this *Parshad* during the Tenth Five Year Plan.

Sir, the study that I had mentioned before, the "Research study for the comparative backwardness of North Bengal region", has been carried out. The report is in the process of finalisation. The State Development Report, which is,

basically, for the State of West Bengal, which includes North Bengal, is also in the process of being finalised and is being prepared by those particular institutes.

Sir, I would say over here that there are a few issues which the hon. Member has raised. He said that North Bengal is an important strategic area. We also agree with him that special attention should be given to North-Bengal. Discussions on the Xth Plan and the Annual Plan for the state are slated for 29.05.2002 between the Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission and the Chief Minister of West Bengal and the concerns of the hon. Member would be kept in mind and also communicated.

As far as the issues of no colleges, flood ravages, railway links and putting up a Task Force are concerned, basically, infrastructure deficiency and backwardness, the hon. Member would agree, lies in the realm of the State Government. But as far as setting up a Task Force and talking to the Law Ministry on the interpretation of article 371, is concerned in relation to right to equal development in the context of North Bengal, I would say that we shall, certainly, consider these points and send an appropriate reference to the Law Ministry.

Sir, as far as the concerns of the *Rajbanshis* are concerned, I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Member to the letter of Shri Arun Shourie dated 21.09.2000 in which he has told very clearly that there are a lot of schemes, particularly for the *Rajbanshis* which are being taken care of through the State Government. Even though the Government of India has allocated funds for the development of such groups through a whole lot of schemes that are there, issues like promotion of Hindi and looking after these people basically is in the purview of the State Government and they should take necessary steps to preserve the identity, culture and language of these people...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Is there any special Plan allocation for North Bengal?...*(Interruptions)*

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: Discussion on issues of Bengal itself is being undertaken very shortly. Your concerns would certainly be carried to the Chief Minister of West Bengal and the Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission...*(Interruptions)* We would certainly bring these concerns to their notice. These would be discussed and talked about. It cannot be done without a discussion...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Then, what for was this discussion over here?...*(Interruptions)* It is an amazing attitude ...*(Interruptions)* Sir, why are we having a discussion on this under this motion?...*(Interruptions)*

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND (SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN): We did not ask for it...*(Interruptions)*

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: Sir, as far as Mahanadi is concerned...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Sir, the notice which he gave was for reported regional imbalance in various parts of the country but not a single word here has been said by the hon. Minister about the other parts of the country...*(Interruptions)* We did not expect such irresponsible comments against the State Government...*(Interruptions)* It is an irresponsible comment by the hon. Minister...*(Interruptions)*

THE MINISTER OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION (SHRI ANANTH KUMAR): Sir, the hon. Member has used the word 'irresponsible' against the hon. Minister. It should be removed from the records...*(Interruptions)*

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: Sir, I object to it...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : I repudiate this...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER: May I ask the hon. Member to let her complete the statement?

...*(Interruptions)*

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: I have given the figures...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI ANANTH KUMAR: It is an irresponsible remark by the hon. Member...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: I will remove it from the record, if it is unparliamentary.

...(*Interruptions*)

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: I have made it very clear...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Minister, you have made your point. You please conclude now.

...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : What is the responsibility of the Central Government...(*Interruptions*)

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: Sir, I have made it very clear that fund allocation has not been fully utilised by the State Government and it should be utilised...(*Interruptions*) I would like to assure the House that the Government of India would continue to take necessary and appropriate steps for the removal of imbalances...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Mr. Minister, would you consider, in consultation with the Ministry of Water Resources...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Dasmunsi, you can put a question only after she has finished her statement.

SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE: Sir, finally, the Central Government recognises the fact that the solutions to the chronic problems would be resolved at the local levels and we would be completely supporting the steps...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY : So, it appears that West Bengal has been recognised as a non-performing State in comparison to other Statesâ€¦ (*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Now, before taking up 'Zero Hour', I would request Shri Pramod Mahajan to present the Report of the Business Advisory Committee.

---