

- (b) Nil.
 (c) No, Sir.

(d) The arrangements for the annual Amarnath Yatra are being made by the State Government and they have now been providing facilities to pilgrims in accordance with the recommendations of the Dr. Sengupta Committee, which was constituted after the Amarnath Yatra tragedy in 1996. One of the recommendations related to restricting the total number of pilgrims. This year, during the Amarnath Yatra, due to the unprecedented increase in the number of pilgrims, some complaints were received regarding non-registration of pilgrims as they had crossed the prescribed limit. These complaints were referred to the State Government. Some complaints were also made about the imposition of Rs. 25 as registration fee, which were also referred to the State Government for appropriate action.

- (e) In view of above, question does not arise.

15-Points Programmes

263. SHRI RAJO SINGH : Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government have taken/proposed to take any action for strengthening the 15-point programme for the welfare of minorities in Bihar; and

(b) If so, the action taken by the Government to implement this programme?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI) : (a) Yes, Sir. The 15-Point Programme for the welfare of minorities in the country including minorities in Bihar, is under revision.

(b) The implementation of the programme is done by the State Governments/Union Territory Administrations and closely monitored by the Central Government on the basis of the half yearly progress reports received from the States/UTs.

[English]

Village Grain Banks

264. SHRI DINSHAW PATEL : Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government have implemented a Central Scheme called Village Grain Banks for Tribals

in Gujarat;

(b) if so, the details thereof?

(c) the funds released by the Government to the State for the scheme during the last three years, year-wise; and

(d) the number of tribal families benefited in the State therefrom during the said period?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI) : (a) and (b) The Scheme of Village Grain Banks was launched during 1996-97 as a preventive measure against deaths of children in remote and backward tribal areas, identified as vulnerable from the point of view of malnutrition/starvation among the tribals in 13 states, including Gujarat.

Under the scheme, a one-time grant towards purchase of food grains @ 1 quintal per family for 100 families, cost of weights and scales and storage facilities is provided for establishing one village grain bank. A member-family can borrow food grains from the bank during times of scarcity and can repay them later. The funds are released to Tribal Co-operative Marketing Development Federation (TRIFED) who in turn releases the grants to the state governments in accordance with the proposals received for setting up grain banks.

(c) and (d) Implementation of the scheme commenced during 1996-97. Rs.17.92 lakhs and Rs. 19.20 lakhs were released to the State for setting up 28 and 30 banks during 1996-97 and 1997-98, respectively, which will benefit about 5800 tribal families during times of scarcity. Grants for 1998-99 will be released on receipt of proposal from the State Government.

[Translation]

Capital Punishment for Rapists

265. SHRI SADASHIVRAO DADOBA MANDLIK: Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Union Government are still following the Police Act of 1861 and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872 enacted by the Britishers;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the Government are contemplating to introduce a Bill seeking to provide for Capital punishment for rapists;

(d) If so, the time by which such a Bill is likely to be introduced;

(e) whether the Government have studied various aspects of this Bill to avoid misuse of the Act; and

(f) if so, the reaction of the Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI L.K. ADVANI) : (a) and (b) By virtue of constitutional provisions, various State Governments have amended the Indian Police Act, 1861 to meet their local requirements. The Indian Evidence Act, 1972 has also been amended from time to time to meet the requirements.

(c) to (f) The Central Government is interacting with the State Governments on the question of providing capital punishment for rapists. All aspects of the matter will be kept in view while formulating necessary legislation.

[English]

Education to Blind Children

266. SHRI RANJIB BISWAL : Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government have any scheme to impart education to blind children;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the States where these schemes are being implemented by the Government;

(d) the amount of Central Assistance extended to those States for running blind schools and other institutions for providing education to the blind children; and

(e) the number of blind children studying in those schools?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI) : (a) and (b) While there is no specific Scheme of impart education to blind children, however, a scheme namely Grant-in-aid to Voluntary Organisations for establishment and development of Special Schools for the disabled is being administered by this Ministry. Under the scheme, voluntary organisations are given grant-in-aid to establish and develop special schools for the disabled including the visually handicapped children to impart education to them.

(c) to (e) A Statement is enclosed.

Statement

(Rs. in Lakhs)

Sl. No.	State	Name of the Organisation	Amount released 1996-97	Number of beneficiaries	Amount released 1997-98	Number of beneficiaries
01.	Delhi	National Association for the Blind	1.77	32	1.88	42
02.	Orissa	Neelanchal Seva Pratishthan	6.17	76	5.41	76
03.	Andhra Pradesh	Navjeevan Blind Centre	3.30	50	3.32	50
04.	Tamilnadu	Indian Association for the Blind	3.86	88	4.12	91
05.	Haryana	All India Confederation of the Blind	2.43	31	3.16	55

[Translation]

Institute for Physically Handicapped

267. SHRI SURESH CHANDEL :

SHRI MAHESHWAR SINGH :

Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether three and half years B.Sc. (Hon.) Physiotherapy and B.Sc. (Hon.) vocational studies degree courses the Institute of Physically Handicapped

which is affiliated with Delhi University are inferior in comparison to the four and half years degree courses of similar nature run by other institutes;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the Government propose to increase the duration of the course being run by the Institute for Physically Handicapped to four and half years;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor ?