

[Mr. Speaker]

as President of the Republic. I have accepted his resignation with effect from to-day, the 21st July 1977, after-noon.

✓
17.35 hrs.

HALF-AN-HOUR DISCUSSION

RURAL POOR

SHRI CHITTA BASU (Barasat):

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to raise a discussion on the question relating to the rural poor in our country.

(MISS ABHA MAITI in the Chair)

Madam Chairman, rural poverty has got many facets of its own. As I have got very little time at my disposal, I think you will agree with me that all the factors cannot be discussed in a proper way, and in a proper manner. Therefore, I shall limit myself to certain facets only so that I can bring to the notice of the House the immensity or the alarming proportion of the problem.

But my first endeavour would be to really locate or rather identify the dimension of the rural poor. In this effort, instead of marshalling facts and figures and statistics from other sources, I would like merely to rely upon the editorial today in the *Economic Times*. In that editorial it has been succinctly pointed out:

"According to the National Sample Survey of 1975 one Indian out of every five is a severe destitute, one in every three is a destitute and nearly half the population of the country is below the poverty line. The poor number over 245 million."

It goes on further to state:

"In rural India nearly 200 million people could spend less than 92 paise a day on bare necessities."

It further continues to say:

"The poorest rural households with assets less than Rs. 500 are

concentrated in Tamil Nadu, in Andhra, in West Bengal, in Karnataka and Maharashtra in that order."

Therefore, it is quite clear, the nation should know, this Parliament, this august House should know, what is the actual dimension of the poverty of our country. I am thankful to the Speaker, because he has allowed us to raise this very very important question on the floor of this House.

As I have mentioned earlier, rural poverty has many facets. I only want to take some of them. One is rural indebtedness. Let us try to identify the magnitude of the rural indebtedness. In that respect, I again rely on a statement made by the Reserve Bank of India. I shall say nothing from memory or sources which have no governmental authority. This is from the All India Debt and Investment Survey conducted by the Reserve Bank of India as on 30th June, 1971. There is a long list, State by State. In view of the shortage of time, I do not like to mention the figure of rural indebtedness for each State, but I certainly want to mention certain States. For example, I will mention Tamil Nadu, where the total indebtedness is Rs. 447 crores, and Andhra Pradesh Rs. 444 crores. Then I come to UP, where it is of the order of Rs. 475 crores. As I belong to West Bengal, I shall not do any injustice to my State also and to the poor people of my State. There the figure is Rs. 122 crores. If you total it up, it comes to about Rs. 4,000 crores.

Even a casual glance or a bird's eye view would reveal that the total liabilities of the rural households amount to a staggering figure of Rs. 3,921 crores, to be more exact. It further reveals that UP have a share of Rs. 475 crores, Tamil Nadu Rs. 447 crores, Andhra Pradesh Rs. 444 crores, Karnataka Rs. 400 crores and West Bengal Rs. 122 crores. On further scrutiny it is found that out of total liabilities of all the rural house-

hold, the share of liabilities of landless and those owning land upto five acres was estimated at 48.72 per cent meaning thereby that this weaker section of the community owns a debt burden of about 2000 crores approximately. That is the report as on June, 1971. Therefore, I would urge up on this House to really understand the magnitude of this problem. These statistics pose a very gigantic problem as to how liquidate rural indebtedness. This is the biggest problem which the Janata Government has to face today. It is not only the Janata Government but the entire House, the entire nation has to face this problem. I would not say that the matter has not been received the attention of the Government all these years. Certain actions were taken and I want to mention them. But what we emphasise is that the actions which have been taken are too adequate to meet the challenge, to fight the monster of poverty.

An inter-ministerial group consisting of representatives of the Ministry of Law, Home Affairs, Finance, Reserve Bank of India and Central Statistical Organisation recommended the following guidelines in July, 1975:

1. Suitable legislation for imposition of moratorium on debts due from landless labourers, marginal farmers, small farmers or rural artisans for a period of one year,

2. Legislation to cover total relief in the case of marginal farmers, landless labourers, rural artisans whose household income does not exceed Rs. 2400 per annum.

3. Legislation for the liquidation of rural debt by stages.

On the basis of these guidelines, legislations were enacted in various States but they were not adequate to meet the challenge. I merely want to point out that the object of the guidelines was very much limited. The object was to declare moratorium for

one year or merely to scale down the debts, the object was not there to cancel the debt. Therefore, I want to point out to the hon. House that if we want to properly tackle the problem, Government will have to take measures to see that all the debts of the rural poor agricultural labour, rural artisans with Rs. 5000 income per annum, marginal farmers with 5 acres of land—should be immediately cancelled. Therefore, I say that this should be the new guideline. Because of the changed conditions of the country, the Janata Government should frame new guidelines immediately.

AN HON. MEMBER: Will this include Government loan also?

SHRI CHITTA BASU: As far as I have understood the guidelines, these does not include the debt from Government, from cooperatives. I think, in the matter of computing indebtedness, debts taken from the Government, from the cooperatives, should also be taken into account.

In this debt is cancelled, that does not mean that the present-day rural population will not need further loan. Moneylenders have been abolished completely by legislation. But no substitute source of providing credit has been created as yet. In this matter, an expert committee has been appointed and that Committee has estimated that Rs. 175 crores will be needed to meet the consumption needs and they have limited their study to those persons who have 5 acres of land. The Government should not accept the recommendations of this Committee and new guidelines should be formulated so that consumption loan should be extended to all the rural poor so that the minimum needs of the entire rural poor can be met.

Now, the question of rural unemployment comes. Here the crucial question of land reforms comes. Unless you clearly bring about land reforms, the question of providing employment to

[Shri Chitta Basu]

the rural population cannot be guaranteed. In this respect, I want to tell the House the sordid performance of the erstwhile Congress Government. I have got these figures with me. It says that the total area which was declared surplus as on 30th April, 1977 is 37,08,641 and the number of beneficiaries is 8,16,544 all over the States. I have got the figures of all the States but due to paucity of time, I do not want to quote them. According to the Mahalanobis Committee Report, the total surplus land available was 630 lakh acres. In May, 1966 it was said that the total declared surplus was only 16 lakh acres. Of this 16 lakh acres, Government has taken possession of only 10 lakh acres and distribution so far has been made of only 4 lakh and 23 thousand, etc. The House will remember that the Mahalanobis Committee estimated that the available surplus would be 630 lakh standard acres. In 1970-71, the Dandekar and Raj Committee estimated it to be 4 crores and 20 lakhs. In 1972, according to the statement made by the Agriculture Minister, the available surplus was estimated to be 4 crores. Now, we have come to 37 lakhs out of which only 10 lakhs have so far been under the possession of the Government.

So far as the rural employment is concerned, I can give another startling figure to you. The Government says that they have made certain rural employment schemes. From 1972-73 to 1974-75, the total amount spent or released was Rs. 992 lakhs. What is the employment generated? This amount has generated employment for man-days of 181 lakhs. I do not know whether you are aware of the fact that there are at least 5 crores rural unemployed persons today. Of course, the Government has not come out with any figure in that respect.

I have merely described certain aspects of this problem. I want to know from the hon. Minister whether he is prepared to accept some of the suggestions I am going to make. Having re-

gard to all these facts, I suggest the following measures to be taken up by the Government. Firstly, a high-powered committee should be set up to make an in-depth study of the problem in its comprehensive nature, to recommend measures on long-term basis and also, by way of short-term measures, to take immediate steps to review the guidelines framed in July, 1975 by the inter-Ministerial group. Secondly the Government should review the State legislations made in this behalf with the objective in view that all debts of the rural poor beginning from the agricultural labourers to poor peasants owning upto 5 acres of land and artisans whose household income does not exceed Rs. 5000 per annum. They should see that legislation shall include all debts including those of the Government departments and co-operatives. Lastly, they should take such measures as are required for augmenting the rural employment potential.

In conclusion, I say, if the hon. Minister replies to the suggestions made, whether he accepts or rejects them, I think he will do a service to the nation and, thereby, fulfil the electoral promises which his party made during the election campaign.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU (Diamond Harbour): Madam Chairman, this half-an Hour discussion, strictly speaking, to tackle the problem of rural poor is in fact adding insult to injury.

The United Nations report on per capita income shows that after 30 years of Independence, under the congress rule, of course, we are in deplorable condition. If you see the international figures, you will find that ours is not only the lowest per capita income but in the matter of consumption of calories or proteins, we are one of the lowest in the world. They talked about rehabilitating the bonded labour. By

their own admission. although they identified 75,000 such bonded labour—it is not really the full figure—they were able to find alternative occupation for only 3,000 people.

The expert committee on unemployment, that is the Bhagwati Committee, was set up on my resolution. Mr. Lakshappa knows all about it. That Committee had given a final report, but that has not been found its mention in the plan document, it was not mentioned in the plan document and there are no figures on rural unemployment today. There are no reliable figures on rural unemployment today.

After the Third Plan, the Planning Commission has religiously avoided giving figures. Today, we have about 120 million people who do not have enough money to buy cereals regularly. Fifteen per cent of the cheap cloth does not reach even 15 per cent of the poor people out of our total population because of poverty. On crash programme for rural employment. Mrs. Gandhi had got Rs. 120 crores. I was just going through one of the documents which is under my signature, that is the Public Accounts Committee's Report on 'Crash Programme For Rural Employment' (1974-75), 117th Report. Rs. 150 crores were taken out simply to feed certain political elements in the country and we have rehabilitated them. Similarly, there is also a programme called EAPP (Emergency Agriculture Production Programme). There also, money was taken out to feed certain political elements. I do not want to say anything more.

I want to know what is the thinking of the present Government with regard to tackling poverty in this country, which is so very acute. I do not have to ask anything more because this is a futile exercise.

SHRI K. LAKKAPPA (Tumkur): This is a very interesting, useful and important subject. My friend has raised this issue. Do not see it from

a political angle because I know that every political party, when it comes into power in this country, one way or the other, has miserably failed to tackle this important problem. You cannot trade any more on these rural poor people. This is a very difficult situation. There is an article written by Mr. O. R. Krishnaswami. It says:

"Deterioration in their conditions.

But the causative factors were not studied. With a view to filling in this gap, the present author made a comprehensive empirical study of the factors affecting economic conditions in the context of the agrarian changes during 1971-73. It showed that agricultural labourers in general are illiterate in the rural part belonging to the lower castes and are landless. They suffer from many socio-economic problems such as unemployment, lower wage rate, low income, no income, indebtedness, lack of any kind of organisational set up or association. The extent of their average unemployment is 183 days per year. Their average per capita annual income from wage and non-wage sources of income is Rs. 327. They spend more than 80 per cent of their income on their food which shows very low standard of living" let alone rehabilitation problem, housing problem and their health conditions.

I think one-third population of this country are suffering from these things. Even in Karnataka, we brought a series of legislation on bonded labour removal of bonded labour. I think, Mr. Rachaiiah would agree with me that we have brought a legislation on liquidation of indebtedness.

18.00 hrs.

What has happened in the last three or four months? We had nationalised the banks so that they could become involved in helping the poor, we had introduced this socio-economic measure to help the poor. But now they are not coming forward to help

[Shri K. Lakkappa]

the poor because the policy of the present Government is coming in the way of helping the poor, in the way of bringing any far-reaching and revolutionary changes in the society. I can see the thinking of the present Government. They are not for the poor people; they only pay lip-sympathy and shed crocodile tears. I want to tell them that these things will not work. It is no use appointing only committees and commissions because the present Government is very famous for appointing committees and commissions. I would like to know what is their comprehensive plan to help the rural poor, as a short-term measure, immediately, without loss of any time, what is the thinking of the Janata Government in eradicating rural poverty once and for all, by what time they are going to do it, what is the time limit that they are going to fix for the purpose—because they have fixed ten years to tackle the unemployment problem. I want to know whether the Janata Government is coming forward with a comprehensive programme, as a short-term measure, and by what point of time their Ministry is thinking of bringing such a measure—to eradicate poverty from this country.

SHRI KRISHNA CHANDRA HALDER (Durgapur): You know, Sir, the rural poor consists of agricultural labour, share-croppers and poor peasants. The situation has become so grave and horrible that the hon. Prime Minister—this news has appeared today in the newspapers—has written a letter to the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Shri Ram Naresh Yadav, and to the Chief Minister of Bihar, Shri Karpooji Thakur, to save the rural poor from the attack of the landlords and big land-owners; he has urged upon the Chief Minister to take urgent and proper steps to save the rural poor. As you know, the agricultural labourers are not getting the minimum wage fixed by the Government. The share-croppers are prevented from being recorded as share-croppers and

they are evicted from their lands. Even the poor agricultural labourers, who had been distributed the Government—vested land, are being evicted from those lands. Under these circumstances, we find that the feudal land relationship, the feudal exploitation, the feudal mentality, is the main cause of rural indebtedness and rural poverty. So, I would like to know from the hon. Minister what steps Government are going to take to end this feudal exploitation. If Government wants to end this feudal exploitation, is there any proposal with them for radical land reforms? Is there any proposal with the Government so that the agricultural labourers will get their minimum wage? What steps are Government going to take to save the share-croppers from eviction? To all these questions, I want answers from the Government.

SHRI SAMAR GUHA (Contai): I know this is a fantastic problem for the Janata Government to tackle—even to reduce poverty, let alone removing poverty; such is the extent of poverty of the rural population. I also know that it cannot be tackled by the Agriculture Minister alone but that it has to be done in cooperation with the Minister of Finance as the policy of banking is also involved. I would like to tell my friend Shri Lakkappa that there is a 30 years' backlog and the exploitation of rural people has become worse in the 30 years' rule of the erstwhile Congress Government. (*Interruption*).

Now, I would like to ask the Minister a few categorical questions. Firstly, in reply to one of my questions earlier, as to whether the Central loan given to agriculturists in the drought-prone areas can be immediately remitted, I was told that the State Government can do it. I would like to know whether this policy will be pursued.

Secondly, I would like to know whether the Government will take certain adequate measures to see whether, by single stroke, it is possible to completely abolish rural indebtedness by

bringing in a new type of banking policy so that the rural people, instead of going to landlords and money-lenders, can derive benefit from the rural banking system. That is the crux of the problem and only if we tackle that can we remove poverty.

SHRI S. KUNDU (Balasore): Before the Minister replies, I want to draw his attention...

MR. CHAIRMAN: There is no time please. Only four people have given notices and they have been called. Please don't waste time.

SHRI S. KUNDU: That is why, I want only to say that in regard to the problem of backward States, I think he should also make some sort of a policy announcement.

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATION (SHRI SURJIT SINGH BARNALA): Though the time for discussion was very limited, it has been a useful discussion and I am thankful to the hon. Members.

This problem of rural indebtedness has been a very serious one for the last many years. This was so during the British regime and after that, also, it has been so far the last 30 years. Only in 1975 some action was taken in this direction and, considering the magnitude of the problem, certain guidelines were issued to the State. As my friend Shri Bosu has stated, the guidelines were issued to all the States. Certain States passed legislation in accordance with the guidelines while certain others have not complied strictly with the guidelines. Probably Mr. Bosu did not have all the facts with him. Guidelines regarding redemption of debt in the case of the weaker categories and scaling down in the case of other categories were issued. The total amount of rural indebtedness was to the tune of Rs. 3,921 crores. It was calculated that up to the extent of five acres the indebtedness was Rs. 1,910 crores, covering about 78 per

cent of the families living in rural areas. So, it was a big problem and the States started passing legislation according to the guidelines and most of the States (I have got all the data with me) passed legislation mainly for giving maximum benefit to the poorer sections of society. For example, in Assam the Assam Rural Indebtedness Act was passed in 1976 which was for the benefit of categories like marginal farmers, landless labourers and artisans. The object was total discharge of debts of 'scheduled debtors' and moratorium on debts due from marginal farmers and agricultural labourers with land-holdings upto eight bighas upto 8-11-77. The relief was: total discharge of debt to artisans with land-holdings upto 2 bighas and income limit of Rs. 1800/- per annum and of "scheduled debtors". The weaker sections of the society were cared for in the first instance. In West Bengal, the Act was passed in 1975 and then there was some amendment in 1976. The categories covered were: marginal farmers, small farmers, share croppers, landless labourers and artisans. Total discharge benefit was given to marginal farmers, whose land is unirrigated, share croppers, landless labourers and artisans with income upto Rs. 2400/- per annum. In the case of small farmers, marginal farmers with irrigated land, the debt was scaled down to 20 per cent of the estimated gross value of agricultural produce, multiplied by 7 repayable in seven years. In some States, legislations have been passed already. The Government of Bihar has taken action in respect of total discharge of debt of all categories having land upto 4 acres. The State Governments of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have passed legislations in respect of total discharge of debt of categories having land upto five acres. This is what has been done... (Interruptions) but we cannot remedy all the ills that have been left by the previous Government in a short period. We are, however, trying our best to do it... (Interruptions).

श्री मुबरज (कटिहार) : जब से यह सरकार बनी है, क्या आप एक भी एक्स्टेड टेनेन्ट को रेस्टोर कर सकते हैं ? क्या आपको किसी भी राज्य सरकार से कोई ऐसी रिपोर्ट मिली है कि एक भी बेदखल बटाईदार को, जो एग्जीक्यूटिव लेबर का भी काम करते हैं, उनको जमीन दिला सकी है ?

श्री उपसेन (देवरिया) : काँग्रेस राज की क्या बात उभार रहे हैं, यह तो तीस साल का पाप है।

SHRI SURJIT SINGH BARNALA: The question posed was not raised initially in the discussion. The discussion relates to the question of rural indebtedness.

I would, however, like to mention that there have been some questions in this House regarding eviction and it was mentioned by my predecessor that they have not received any complaint of any such evictions. If particular cases are brought to the notice of the Government, necessary action would be taken accordingly. I have enquired from the office, and so far no significant complaint has been received regarding eviction from any particular area.... (Interruptions)

Some mention was made of the difficulties that the previous debtors are now facing. They have been absolved of the previous debts, but whenever they need money at occasions like marriage, or some other occasion in the family like birth, or some death, they have to incur some expenses. Previously, the poor people used to get money from the village money-lenders. Now, for that, it has been provided that consumption credit will be given.... (Interruptions).

श्री महीलाल (बिजनौर) : यह आर्ग्यूमेंट जो मंत्री जी दे रहे हैं यह तो बड़े किसानों और सरमायेदारों वाला आर्ग्यूमेंट है।

श्री सुरजीतसिंह बरनाला : ऐसी बात नहीं है।

श्री हुकम चन्द कच्छवाह : (उज्जैन) : मैं आपके माध्यम से मंत्री जी से कहना चाहता हूँ कि वे सरकारी भाषा ऐसी बोलें जो कि जनता की भाषा हो। वे पूँजीपतियों की भाषा में न बोलें।

श्री महीलाल : सोशल वर्कर भी यही बात बोलता है।

श्री उपसेन : 1950-51 में पावर्टी लाइन के नीचे कितने फीसदी लोग थे और अब 1977 में कितने फीसदी हैं, इसका जवाब मंत्री जी दें।

MR. CHAIRMAN: Will you please hear the hon. Minister first?

SHRI SURJIT SINGH BARNALA: As I was telling, for that purpose consumption credit is being given to the poorer sections of the society. The institutional societies have been asked to help them at the time of such needs.

Madam Chairman, every effort is being made to give more and more facilities, cash credit and consumption credit to these poorer sections and it will be our endeavour to help them in every possible way.

With these words, I thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, the House stands adjourned till 11 A.M. tomorrow.

18.16 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Friday, July 2, 1977/ Asadha 31, 1899 (Saka).