

19.05.98.

MOTION RE: NATIONAL POLICY FOR CHILDREN—Contd.

MR. SPEAKER: Now we take up further consideration of the motion regarding the National Policy for Children. The Minister to continue his speech.

THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, SOCIAL WELFARE AND CULTURE (PROF. S. NURAL HASAN): Yesterday I expressed my gratitude to the hon. Members for the keen interest they had taken in the whole matter and for the many valuable suggestions they have made. Unfortunately, in the limited time at my disposal I will not be able to refer to every point which has been raised by the hon. Members, but I can assure the House through you that all the suggestions which have been made will be given full consideration by the Government.

I would like to take up some common points which have been stressed by a very large number of my hon. friends here. The first point that has been stressed by a very large number of members deals with the question of the care of expectant mothers and the care and particularly, the nutritional care of smaller children upto the age of 8. There is no doubt that this is the most important period in the life of any human being and any lack of effort in this age group can have very serious consequences when the child grows into adulthood. For this purpose, my Ministry in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Department of Co-operation and obviously, with the co-operation of the State Governments, has started the integrated child development services which aim at all these points that have been emphasised.

The concept of integrated child development services has been explained by us before, but, I would crave your indulgence to explain again in a few minutes the main

concept of the integrated child development services. It starts with the question of nutrition and health care of expectant mothers and the ante-natal care of the mother and the child. Then, there is a full-fledged programme of immunisation, which certainly includes the triple vaccines, which has been raised by my hon. friend there. Along with this there is the question of regular health check up, referral services, nutrition, supplementing the nutrition and the diet, and pre-school, non-formal and informal education. We consider it absolutely essential that children of the age group 3-6 and particularly those belonging to the weaker sections of the community should be provided that such care so that they can develop proper attitudes and motivations and also their character formation is influenced in a healthy direction. And, for this purpose, we propose under this scheme of integrated child development to set up *anganwadis* as far as possible in close proximity of a primary school, to involve elder children of the primary schools, especially, girls, to participate in the looking after of the younger babies as a part of their work experience.

It would provide them with adequate training to learn about how to look after children and younger babies. It would also provide assistance to the *anganwadi* workers and a full-fledged training programme of the *anganwadi* workers has been undertaken. Because this was a new scheme and because it involved the cooperation of a very large number of agencies it was felt that let the modalities be worked out in a small number of blocks and we have chosen 33 blocks; 19 of these are rural blocks; 10 are in tribal areas and 4 in urban slums. This programme is being tried out and Government would like to expand this scheme to a very large number of other blocks so that we are able to cover hopefully by the Sixth plan period every block in the country. This is an important scheme whereby the problems of the rural

[Prof. S. Nural Hasan]

children and the children belonging to the weaker sections of the community would be looked after from the point of view of health, from the point of view of immunisation and from the point of view of what may be called pre-school education or attitude formation and so on. This programme, I am glad to say, has evoked proper response from all the Ministries of the Govt. of India and most of the State Governments. But we felt that an independent agency to monitor this scheme would be extremely useful. For this purpose we invited the medical colleges and I am glad to say that 27 medical colleges have responded to our invitation. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi is coordinating the work that is being done by the medical colleges for preparing the base-line data about nutrition, about the general health of children and of expectant mothers and so on. It would also be supervising the implementation of the scheme in other respects so that along with the administrative set-up which is looking after this programme there is also an independent organisation which can monitor and which can provide expert guidance for the implementation of this particular programme.

We have also insisted that in each village there should be Mahila Mandals formed because, without involvement of the women of the villages and the localities concerned no worthwhile programme for children is likely to succeed.

Sir, the progress so far in this regard has been on the whole satisfactory, although I would like greater emphasis being placed by the State Government on the setting up of Mahila Mandals in each of the villages. I am in touch with the State Governments and I am hoping that the pace of setting up of the Mahila Mandals will catch up as soon as possible.

The Ministry of Health has a scheme of ensuring that over a number of villages there should be at least one auxiliary nursing midwife and that programme of auxiliary nursing midwife is being run by the Health Ministry in cooperation and coordination with my Ministry so that the integrated child development services are being developed with the supervision of the Primary Health Centres and sub-centres. We are giving one additional doctor to the primary health centre especially to look after the children. Skeleton staff has been provided so that this programme can be taken up. In the light of our experience and in the light of the reports we get from this continuous monitoring, whatever changes are called for, I have no doubt that it will be possible for the Government to make those changes. We are not rushing ahead with these programmes because to ensure cooperation from so many agencies is a difficult task and we need to have experience so that detailed procedures can be worked out which can then be duplicated or replicated on a mass service scale throughout the country.

The second very important point that was taken up was with regard to education, especially, elementary education, of children. In respect of elementary education, I would like to submit that I am deeply disappointed and I share the disappointment of hon. Members that what we should have achieved by 1960 we are not likely to achieve even by the end of Fifth Plan period. Perhaps, we might be able to achieve it during the Sixth Plan period.

But, Sir, without offering any excuses, I would make a few submissions for the consideration of the hon. House. The submission is the enormous increase in the number of pupils who have started going to the primary schools, particularly, in the age-group of 6 to 11 in classes I to V. If I may, with your permission, give a few figures, the target for 1974-75,

the first year of the Fifth Five Year Plan, for the country was 664 lakhs which would be 86.4 per cent of the children in the age-group of 6-11. The actual achievement is estimated at 663 lakhs which is 86 per cent in 1975-76, the target fixed was 688 lakhs and the achievement is estimated to be 685 lakhs which is 87.8 per cent. The targets for the current year are 708 lakhs while the achievement is estimated to be 89.9 per cent. What I am trying to submit is that the net increase in numbers is appreciable although in terms of percentages, from 86 per cent we are hoping this year to reach 89.9 per cent.

As I would submit, I do not consider this to be a satisfactory figure, but considering the various difficulties which are mainly economic, partly social, I would respectfully submit for your consideration that this is not an achievement which we can reject as being totally unsatisfactory. Of course, more efforts have to be made and these include changes in a number of directions. The first and foremost of these changes is providing better incentives, because it has been noticed that the main shortfall is among girls and Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children. Therefore, my Ministry has been striving its best to have Schemes which will ensure that these deprived sections are able to send their children to schools. The incentives which are very important have been provided in the case of girls. Frequently girls have to look after Younger babies. Because of the scheme of *anganwadis* we hope it would be possible for girls to come to school because the babies can also be brought to the *anganwadis* which will be attached to the school. In many places, it has already been attached and is functioning.

It has further been stated that adequate funds are not being provided for these various incentives, specially the midday meal.

SHRI D. BASUMATARI (Kokrajhar): It should be provided.

PROF. S. NURUL HASAN: It should be provided.

The incentives are being provided as part of the minimum needs programme, and I hope that State Governments will provide the necessary funds in their programme and ensure that the incentives programme for the weaker sections are not given up or whittled down or reduced.

For the tribal areas, as the House is aware, tribal sub-plans are being made and every effort is being made to bring tribal children to school.

SHRI R. S. PANDEY (Rajnandgaon): It should be a Central scheme, instead of asking the States to provide the money. Where from will they get the money? When you have not got the money, States are not going to have it. Ultimately it is a question of money.

SHRI D. BASUMATARI: It is so in backward States like Madhya Pradesh and others.

SHRI R. S. PANDEY: In Assam, and Bihar also.

PROF. S. NURUL HASAN: I am told that the Home Ministry is satisfied that funds will be made available for all tribal sub-plans, that they would not allow a shortfall in the allocations for the programme of tribal sub-plans.

Then it was again rightly emphasised that apart from nutrition, the physical health of children and physical education of children has to be given a very high priority. Government agree fully with this concept, and I am glad—I have myself had the occasion to see it—in the Union Territory of Delhi, the Delhi Municipal Corporation have launched a scheme of providing special training to their regular teachers so that they can provide physical education and training in games and sports for the children. Only two days ago I had occasion to see some of the items presented by

[Prof. S. Nurul Hasan]

over a thousand school teachers who had been given special training in physical education and culture.

Regarding the quality of education being provided in the municipal schools or in the primary schools in the villages, I should only submit that efforts are being continuously made to improve the standard of education and teaching. From some of the schools that I have visited in the rural areas in different parts of the country, I should not like to paint such a bleak picture as some of the hon. friends have painted here. In fact the standard of education in many of those schools is reasonably good. There are naturally difficulties in the problem of dealing with children who are first generation learners, the problem of dealing with all the prejudices that exist in our rural society. All those problems are every much there. But then to pass a wholesale vote of censure on the village schools or on the schools run by municipal committees or corporations is, I would submit, unfair....(Interruptions). Some are good, some are not so good and some are bad. It is a mixed picture. But as I said an effort is being made to improve the quality of education by various methods that are being adopted, including the method of in service training of teachers.

I am glad that when I am coming to the next problem, my distinguished colleague and friend and in some ways mentor, Prof VKRV Rao is present here. This is in regard to children's literature. Government entirely agree with the view that children's literature has to be given very high priority both for ensuring that children do not lapse back into illiteracy and for non-formal education and developing the right attitude and approach to life. Therefore, we are taking up this problem in right earnest internally and we also propose to raise this matter at the forthcoming general conference of UN-

ESCO because the standard of children's books in many of the countries outside ours is higher than ours. I have no hesitation in learning from any country if there is something to learn for the sake of children. In some cases we may have something to offer. So this international co-operation is likely to be beneficial to everyone. I hope that the resolution which the Indian delegation proposes to sponsor at the forthcoming general conference will receive general support and acclaim.

The next point that has been raised is in regard to the question of beggary. In respect of beggary our attitude is that while we recognise that socio-economic factors at times are responsible for children begging in the streets, there is at the same time a racket going on; there are people who deliberately kidnap children or entice them away under one excuse or another; maim them and compel them to beg and as was rightly pointed out by an hon. friend here, whatever money they get, they are not permitted even to eat a squaremeal out of the money that they get.

They have to give all the money that they have secured as a result of begging to the person who makes them beg. This is exploitation of the children in the crudest form and there can be no question of sparing those who do it. Therefore, the laws are being looked into to see that any exploitation of children in this manner is put down with a very heavy hand. I do not think it would be fair to say that even half the children who go and beg are the children who are doing it because they have not had a square meal and therefore, they do not know what else to do except to beg. There are children who are forced by economic circumstances, but we must adopt a differential attitude towards them.

In the same way, there is the question of juvenile delinquency and crime. Again it has been found by many social surveys that a large number of juvenile delinquents take to crime because organised crime gangs exploit

these children and utilise them and even train them for the purpose of committing crimes. There again there should be no mercy shown to such persons who exploit the children in this way.

AN HON. MEMBER: Films are equally responsible.

PROF. S. NURUL HASAN: I would accept the superior knowledge of my hon. friend; unfortunately I am not one of the film-goers and I cannot speak from personal knowledge. But side by side with this, the government have initiated a fairly ambitious programme of assisting voluntary organisations to set up homes for destitute children, so that destitute children are not compelled to take to either begging or a life of crime. The scheme was started in 1974-76. In the first two years, grants have been given to 245 voluntary organisations benefiting about 16,000 children. The total amount of grants disbursed is Rs. 208.20 lakhs. Also with a view to take care of children whose mothers are going to work or are ailing, grants are given to voluntary organisations to run creches. In 1975-76, 52 voluntary organisations had been sanctioned grants for 741 creches covering 18,525 beneficiaries. The amount released was Rs. 28.83 lakhs.

Hon. members have rightly expressed concern about exploitation of child labour. An inter-departmental working group on employment of children was set up by the government and its report is expected shortly. A national seminar on employment of child labour was also organised by the National Institute of Public Cooperation and child development. The recommendations of the seminar have been studied by the said working group. This National Institute has also taken up the study of child labour in metropolitan cities. The working group's report on the findings of the study undertaken by the National Institute will help to identify the lines on which further action should be taken.

I would like further to submit for your consideration that, as my colleague, the Deputy Minister, stated

in his introductory speech, social welfare is something which cannot be done only through governmental effort. More than any other such effort, it needs voluntary effort of public-spirited persons. I would not like to minimise the role which public-spirited persons, voluntary organisations, and society in general, can play in bringing about any measure of social service and social welfare. Government's duty should be to provide help and assistance to the extent possible.

I have expressed my disappointment at the fact that the funds that are available are inadequate to meet the needs and the requirements of all the voluntary organisations that exist. But I would also like to say that, considering the overall constraint on resources, funds have been provided for at least the more important of the schemes. But what we are noticing is that, whereas in the developed parts of the country there are good voluntary organisations, there are many other parts of the country which, unfortunately, have lagged behind, where voluntary organisations are not forthcoming. In several of the schemes of my Ministry I have noticed that the most developed metropolitan cities have been submitting excellent schemes, but there are vast areas from where no worthwhile schemes come, or very few worthwhile schemes come. Even within a State there are proposals coming from the more developed parts of the State, but from the comparatively lesser developed parts, proposals for assistance do not come to us. This certainly is a matter of great concern, not only to the Government but, I have no doubt, it would be equally so to the House. I would appeal to my hon. friends, the Members of the House, that they might take a special interest in this matter and motivate public-spirited persons who, I am sure are spread in all parts of the country, to organise themselves and to organise voluntary effort.

I can well understand that in some of the economically less developed parts

[Prof. S. Nurul Hasan]

of the country voluntary organisations may not be able to raise enough money. But money is not the only thing. We have been modifying and changing our rules and our Grant Code so that the involvement of local funds is reduced to the minimum. But, what is more important than local funds is the coming forward of public-spirited persons, specially ladies, in taking up programmes of welfare, especially of the children.

In this connection, I would briefly mention the family and child welfare scheme, which was started during the Fourth Plan period by the Central Social Welfare Board, which in this Plan has been transferred to the State Governments. Some State Governments have not been able to find adequate resources to develop and to run these schemes properly. I have appealed to all the State Governments, including the Chief Ministers and the Ministers of Social Welfare, to make special efforts to see that whatever programmes have been started are continued.

One or two specific points were raised. One was that the special nutrition centres in Delhi were not looking after the poorer sections and that there was leakage of funds. We have already taken steps to see that the leakage is stopped, and we have asked the National Institute to undertake another survey to find out how far the remedial steps have been effective.

If there are any specific complaints that the mid-day meal programme in primary schools is not being implemented properly, I hope they would either be brought to the notice of the State Government or to my Ministry, and we will try to see that these programmes are re-structured and that due care is taken to see that the food reaches the children.

Because of a reduction in the allocation for my Ministry, we have even approached some foreign agencies,

particularly the UNICEF and CARE to provide us with assistance so that this very important programme does not suffer in any way.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate the importance of the National Children's Board which has been set up to oversee and review the implementation, to find out what the gaps are, whether work is going on as scheduled, whether it can be intensified or not etc. This National Children's Board is under the chairmanship of our Prime Minister herself. The House would recall that in 1969 the Prime Minister made a special reference to a charter for children. Even before that her public activities started with the care of children. The Indian Council of Child Welfare owes so much to the initiative which the Prime Minister herself has taken in this particular matter, under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister is naturally a very important step, but the particular interest of our Prime Minister in children's welfare gives it added strength, and I am sure that her vision would be available to guide the functioning of the National Children's Board. State Boards have similarly been established in a number of States under the chairmanship of the Chief Ministers concerned, and I am trying to see that in the rest of the States where such Boards have not been established, it is done soon so that there is full co-ordination between the National Board and the State Boards. After all we have to remember the fact that ours is a federal set-up and that the State Governments have to be the implementing agencies of all these programmes. The executive machinery is with them, and rightly so, and the Centre cannot hope to make any scheme successful unless the State Governments offer their fullest support and co-operation.

I would like to conclude by again expressing my gratitude to all sections of the House for the support they have given to the National Policy for Children.