

**ALL INDIA CONGRESS COMMITTEE
24, AKBAR ROAD, NEW DELHI.**

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PRESS NOTE

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Randeep Singh Surjewala, MLA & Spokesperson, All India Congress Committee has issued the following statement to the press today:-

“Pursuant to its defiant – business centred decision to deny benefit of unprecedented fall in the international crude oil prices (from a high of \$115 per barrel to \$45 per barrel) to 125 crore Indians, Modi government is now proposing to cruelly deprive 2/3rd Indians of their ‘*Right to Food*’ guaranteed to them by the previous Congress Government by enacting the historical ‘**National Food Security Act, 2013**’. Congress-led UPA government had enacted the Food Security Act to guarantee 5 kg food grains per person per month at a price of Rs.2/- per kg to 67% (75% in rural areas and 50% in urban areas) of India’s population besides making special provisions for lactating mothers.

BJP government is preparing to kill the purpose and intent as also soul and spirit of Food Security Act by reducing the number of eligible beneficiaries from 67% to 40%. This recommendation has been made by a Committee constituted by Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi to examine the Food Security Act as also reconstitution of Food Corporation of India and headed by senior BJP leader – Shri Shanta Kumar. Coming on the heels of the unilateral anti-farmer amendment made to the ‘Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition Act, 2013’ by way of an ordinance by Modi government, it unequivocally exposes the anti-poor and anti-farmer face of ruling dispensation.

Statement of the Chairman of Committee and senior BJP leader – Shri Shanta Kumar to the effect that Congress had enacted a ‘Vote Security Bill’ and not a ‘Food Security Bill’ is a crude attempt to make a mockery of the crores of toiling poor of India by Bhartiya Janata Party.

What is more shocking is the statement by Shri Shanta Kumar stating that BJP did not oppose the Food Security Bill of UPA in 2013 as it feared an adverse reaction during the Parliamentary polls. He further stated that, “We knew we were going to form the government. Our government will be formed and we shall change the law”. This is the worst case of political opportunism and concerted – premeditated deceit of the common man by BJP and Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi. People of India must now understand that BJP had supported various social welfare measures of Congress-led UPA government giving them the shape of statutory rights prior to the last Parliamentary polls purely with a view to avoid criticism with a clear agenda and intent to deceive the people after the elections by undoing the same by changing the law. Such a destructive, deceitful and anti-poor hidden agenda could only be expected of BJP.

Modi government is preparing to deny the ‘Right to Food’ to 27% of India’s population in order to save a subsidy of 30,000 crores as against expected revenue collection of nearly 80,000 crores from people of India through imposition of additional excise/customs duty four occasions in seven months on the petroleum products.

On behalf of people of India and poor of country, we want to ask seven questions from Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi and BJP, who gained power by promising ‘Acchhe Din’:-

1. Whether political opportunism and electoral expediency were the sole foundation of BJP’s support to the ‘Food Security Act, 2013’ in Parliament? Whether intent and motive of Shri Narendra Modi and BJP behind supporting the ‘Food Security Act, 2013’ was to subsequently kill its soul and spirit on formation of the BJP government? Whether this premeditated deceit reflects the anti-poor character of BJP government?

2. Whether subsidy of 30,000 crores is bigger than food security and nourishment of 27% of India's population, more so when government is collecting 80,000 crores from an increase in excise/customs duty on petroleum products on four occasions? Whether Modi government considers reduction in subsidy as a goal higher than social welfare responsibilities of his government?
3. Shanta Kumar Committee has also proposed 'Direct Cash Transfer' of food subsidy even to remaining 40% beneficiaries instead of providing food grains over next three years. Whether Prime Minister and BJP government have examined as to how will the poor buy food grain at prevailing market prices with the small portions of subsidy amount?
4. Whether government will stop procuring wheat, paddy (rice) and other crops at 'Minimum Support Price' (MSP) to maintain its existing well-defined food stocks after the commencement of 'Direct Cash Transfer'? If not, what will happen to the guarantee of 'Minimum Support Price' (MSP) to the entire farming community of India already facing extreme distress?
5. Whether Central government is attempting to slow down, rather than expediting, the process of implementation of 'Food Security Act' in the States which have not implemented the Act as yet? Whether excuses like lack of computerization of records, lack of constitution of vigilance committees in the villages or defect in existing PDS are being cited as examples by Central government officials in interaction with these States? Whether it is the responsibility of Prime Minister and BJP government to ensure time bound implementation of 'Food Security Act' in the entire country or to encourage excuses to delay the implementation of the Act? Whether Prime Minister and BJP government will state a deadline for implementation of 'Food Security Act' across all States immediately?
6. Whether Central government is proposing to curb the right of respective States to grant bonus on procured crops over and above MSP in garb of report of Shanta Kumar Committee?

Shanta Kumar Committee has clearly restricted the quota of procurement in States giving bonus above MSP as equivalent to the quota required for distribution through Public Distribution System (PDS). Whether it will be possible to ensure grant of Minimum Support Price (MSP) to farmers in these States in absence of Central agencies withdrawing from procurement over and above the PDS quota? Whether this move will not lead to distress sale of crop by the farming community?

7. Presently, 'Food Security Act' has been implemented only by nine States and two Union Territories.

What is the long-term policy of Shri Narendra Modi and BJP government qua guaranting food security to crores of countrymen? Whether Shri Narendra Modi and BJP government is preparing a devious design to abrogate this statutory right and principal responsibility of the government to fight hunger in garb of reduction of subsidy?

These are questions that are connected to the daily lives of India's poor, labourers and farmers. We demand that Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi and BJP government to clarify their stand on this most important issue of hunger, food security and nourishment of millions of Indians. We also appeal to the wisdom of Delhi's voters to ask these voters from BJP candidates and its leaders.”

Randeep Singh Surjewala