

Speech on Budget Meeting - 1961 Estimates.

Mr. Speaker, I request permission to introduce Heads S50- S54 Under the portfolio of the Minister of Rural Development.

In introducing the Estimates for this Ministry I should like to make it clear to the House that it is not the Government's intention to expand the Ministry of Rural Development into a large organisation which would be responsible for each and every aspect of Rural Development but rather that the main functions of this Ministry is one of co-ordinating all the efforts of Government in the Rural Areas; the detailed needs of the Rural Areas, which are Government's responsibility, such as roads, clinics, schools, drainage and irrigation, etc., etc. Will be fulfilled by the functions of the Ministries and Departments already responsible. I mention this, Mr. Speaker, because I am being continually asked how many millions have been allocated to the Ministry of Rural Development in the Estimates year by year.

The position is this. All Districts prepared a District Rural Development Plan which is generally known now as the "Red Book". These District Plans were co-ordinated and collated into a State Plan and each State Rural Development Plan was then finalised and sent to this Ministry where they were processed and split up into their sectors such as roads, health clinics, drainage schemes, water supplies, etc , etc. And the financial requirements as detailed in each Rural Development Plan were then split up and handed over for inclusion in the Estimates of the Department concerned for their implementation.

The Ministry of Rural Development has, however, an extremely vital and important part to play in the overall co-ordination of the functions and the activities of each and every Ministry and Department concerned with the Development of Rural Areas. I should like to say, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased with the action and energy which each and every officer on the ground at District and State level has contributed during this important period of Rural Development Planning.

Concurrent with this planning, action has been in progress, in almost every District, in implementing many, many projects which have been already completed this year. Such projects are too numerous for me to mention in this speech but I take this opportunity of saying "well done" to each State Government and to each and every District Officer and his Rural Development team for the spirit of service and devotion to duty which has been apparent in the task they have performed for the benefit of the Rural people.

Let me now turn to the various Heads 50 - 54. I should like to point out that in comparing these Heads with the current year's Estimates it will be noticed that there is one Head less, namely, the Department of Kampong and Community Development. This Department has been deleted as a separate Department and now forms a division within this Ministry. The reason for this is that, in practice, the Ministry of Rural Development is in fact performing the functions of a Department of Community Development and it appeared to be an unnecessary duplication to have a separate Department in addition to the Ministry. As I have already said, Mr. Speaker, it is not our intention to build up a large organisation but rather it is our intention to make the utmost use of the existing resources within the Government.

Therefore it seemed expedient, and the correct course to take - to integrate this Department within the Ministry.

I have heard people say, Mr. Speaker, that our Rural Development Policy seems to place the onus of action entirely as the responsibility of Government, and sufficient action has not yet been taken to call upon the people of the Rural Areas to play their part and give their contribution.

I should like to explain our policy on this matter.

It appeared to us that the first and foremost phase in a programme, for the Development of the Rural Areas, the first responsibility was that of Government to lay down the foundation framework on which planned Development would take place and then, having launched our plan for the foundation and structure, Sir, with a clear conscience, we could turn to the people and say "there is the foundation on which you, the people of the Rural Areas, can build".

As I explained very clearly at the time of launching this Rural Development programme that one of the conditions for the success of this programme is that the people must give it their wholehearted co-operation. Our policy is to build a self-reliant people. The Government can only provide the minimum assistance and if the people are to obtain the real benefit from that assistance they must endeavour to do the rest themselves. Now that the first phase of our programme has been launched, it is my intention to launch the second phase early in the new year - to tell the people how they should play their part in this Rural Development programme.

One of the most important aspects of Rural Development apart from providing facilities and public utilities such as roads, schools, water supplies and Electricity, is the alienation of land. Although Land is strictly a State matter, the problem of tackling arrears of land applications and to devise ways and means whereby people can get their land as expeditiously as possible to meet the demand of our growing population is no less the responsibility of Federal Government. Therefore the problem of tackling these arrears of applications for land has been receiving the serious attention of my Ministry and State Governments. The basic problem is that of re-organising land offices and land administration in the States. Hon'ble Members know that nothing much can be done without the co-operation of State Governments. as land is a State subject. It is obvious that reforms in the land administration are necessary but they can only be imposed on the State Governments by decision of the National Land Council.

Now that the State Governments have agreed with the Federal Government policy to accord top priority to land alienation, to close temporarily their application books and freeze the existing applications, half of the problem has been tackled. By decision of National Land Council that future alienation of land shall only be by block or group settlements and with the passage of the land (Group Settlement Areas) Act, no more individual applications will be entertained by the land offices: The erstwhile method whereby people who want land would have to submit their applications to the land office giving the locality and area of their own choice regardless whether the area was of economic unit or not, is no longer suitable and desirable.

This unwieldy and unsatisfactory method of entertaining individual applications of land has caused bottlenecks and chaos in most of the land offices.

Therefore to obviate these difficulties, I am pleased to say that I have the backing and agreement of State Governments to a new land policy of giving "land to the landless" as pronounced in the Rural Development Directive No.2. The method of achieving this aim is to alienate the maximum number of economic smallholdings in the minimum possible time. This method will necessitate the re-organisation of land offices by the creation of a separate division to deal solely with alienation and development of land, thus leaving the general administration and normal land office routine work to another division. I am convinced that this is the only way where we can alienate land as quickly as possible. The Directive has laid special emphasis on concentrated effort by the land and survey Departments to alienating:-

- (a) Large areas divided into economic holdings to landless families or families owing less than 2 acres;
- (b) Fringe areas: In standard size lots to supplement existing uneconomic holdings.

In regard to planning, all Government Departments connected with the land development have been instructed to give their full co-operation in the selection of areas. To avoid unnecessary work in the future, all areas selected for group settlement will be surveyed and demarcated by the Survey Department.

Now to give effect to the group settlement policy the National Land Council has recently passed resolutions whereby State Governments have agreed to the creation of these 2 types of group settlement area. Alienation of land for these group settlement areas will be given priority. It has been agreed that subsidies will be provided from both State and Federal resources. The State contribution will be in the form of

- (a) Deferment of premium for the first 9 years,
- (b) Deferment of annual rents for the same period.

The Federal contribution will be of two distinct kinds:-

- (a) Advances of loan to cover survey fees and costs of felling and clearing;
- (b) Outright grants for cost of planting materials and fertilizers.

The Federal loans will be recovered over a period of 15 years.

Sir, I beg to move that Head S50 -S54 be approved.