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By the way, what happened to Swaminathan report?

SARBJIT DHALIWAL IN CHANDIGARH

FOR decades, people have been made to listen to a pep talk by respective governments on several rural schemes. So, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's new initiative of 'gram uday' comes as no big surprise, that's a perception shared by political parties and experts.

Under this programme, launched on April 14 as a part of 125th birth anniversary celebrations of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, officials from various departments of the Centre Government have been sent to villages across the country to interact and propagate the schemes launched by the Modi Government.

However, what makes the latest campaign ironical is the fact that the BJP has chickened out from the promise of implementing the Swaminathan Commission report, described as panacea for all the ills bedeviling the rural economy. Moreover, when one-third of India is facing drought-like situation and farmers are committing suicide under economic and farming distress, the high-sounding campaign appears meaningless and bereft of realities.

One of the highlights of this Abhiyan is to tell the ruralists about the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. The Punjab government has already rejected the scheme declaring it unsuitable for the peasantry. The farming sector in Punjab is in such a deep crisis that the cases of suicide have become daily news. The Haryana Government too does not want to implement the scheme. But

On the eve of the Last Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had declared that it would implement the Swaminathan Commission Report. But now it has stopped talking about it. The National Commission on Farmers headed by eminent farm scientist MS Swaminathan worked for years to prepare a

voluminous report for pulling the rural economy out of crises. The most talked-about recommendation of the Commission is to ensure prices at least 50% above the production cost of the food grains produced by farmers. There are several other recommendations which, if implemented, could change the face of the rural India and could help in modernizing its rural economy.

No politician talks about the land reforms, which are over-due across the country. Except Rajasthan Government, no other state government has taken any worthwhile initiative to streamline various aspects of revenue sector. In the absence of land reforms in states like Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, often violent clashes take place over land disputes among farmers in the villages. In Punjab, courts are overburdened by land disputes and other revenue-related cases. Swaminathan talks about land reforms, quantity and quality of water, technology fatigue and upgrading the farm sector, adequacy and timeliness of institutional credit.

In his report, Swaminathan offers solutions for distressed small and marginal farmers, tenants, share croppers, landless and agriculture labour, tribal farmers and women. He recommends convergence and synergy in programmes of rural development and farm sector under the umbrella of National Federation of Farm Technology Missions, which the Commission had proposed.

For small and marginal farmers, his recommendations include setting up of the self help groups, contract farming based on code of conduct, setting up of small and marginal estates to do collective cotton, horticulture and poultry farming. The Commission favours setting up farm schools to be run by successful farmers, who can guide their fellow farmers in the use of improved farm practices.

Is Modi Government interested?

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