

**Shri T. K. Chaudhuri:** May I ask if there is any information whether the flood water has receded?

**Dr. P. S. Deshmukh:** It has receded in many places.

**Shri Kidwai:** It is natural for it to recede.

**Prof. S. N. Mishra:** May I know whether any other part of India which has been flood-affected has got some assistance from the Government of India and whether it is a fact that Bihar's case is being delayed?

**Shri Kidwai:** The report from Bihar Government was received on the 1st of September, that is, two days ago. To say that it has been delayed is not justified. If there has been any delay, it has been on the part of the Bihar Government who took so much time to send the report.

**Shri Nageshwar Prasad Sinha:** I find from the statement that more than 5,000 villages have been washed away causing displacement to millions of people who have been reduced to penury. May I know what immediate steps have been taken to give them shelter, food and drinking water?

**Shri Kidwai:** I hope the hon. Member will realise that there is a local Government there in that State functioning very efficiently and very effectively and they are discharging their duties. Would the Members from Bihar like us to take over the administration and do all that is needed?

Some Hon. Members rose—

**Mr. Deputy-Speaker:** Next question. I am sorry; enough has been asked.

#### HIGH PRICES OF RICE IN WEST BENGAL

**II. Shrimati Renu Chakravarty:** (a) Will the Minister of Food and Agriculture be pleased to refer to the reply given to starred question No. 91 asked on the 4th August, 1953 regarding Modified Rationing in West Bengal and

state whether Government are aware of the acute distress prevailing in West Bengal due to high prices of rice even after the reversal of gradual decontrol policy?

(b) Have any representations been received from the West Bengal Government on this subject?

(c) Are Government contemplating any measures to provide relief in the form of reduction in the price of rice?

**The Deputy Minister of Food and Agriculture (Shri M. V. Krishnappa):**

(a) There is no widespread distress in West Bengal owing to high prices of rice. During this part of the year, which is the lean period for rice, there is always a seasonal rise in the prices of rice. The modified rationing has been introduced in various districts with a view to checking the prices, rising unduly high, and the fact that only 14.8 per cent. of the eligible population are taking advantage of the modified rationing, as against 30.7 per cent. during the corresponding period of 1952, clearly indicates that there is no widespread distress in West Bengal.

It may be added that after the removal of district cordons, while the prices in the surplus districts have gone up to some extent, there has been a substantial fall in the prices in the deficit districts, as compared to the prices prevailing in 1952.

(b) No Sir.

(c) The introduction of modified rationing in deficit pockets ensures supply of rice to population with lower income at control price. This also has a salutary effect on the general market prices as demand of a certain section of the population, who are served through modified rationing, is withdrawn from the open market.

**Shrimati Renu Chakravarty:** May I know if the Government have been informed that in many areas of Sunderbans 40 per cent. of the people are unable to draw their rations and that is the reason for the lowering of

the off-take as reported by the hon. Deputy-Minister?

**Shri M. V. Krishnappa:** It is not a question of the lowering of off-take. What I have said in reply to this question is that though we are prepared to give, they are not making use of that concession.

**Shrimati Renu Chakravartty:** Is not that off-take? He has given us figures which show that the off-take has come down. Has the Government been informed that it is because of the lower purchasing power of the people that this has come about?

**The Minister of Food and Agriculture (Shri Kidwai):** I think the hon. Member is not correct. Last year, on account of distress in that area, modified rationing was introduced. The people using these modified rationing shops were about 30 per cent. of the population. This year, the same system has been introduced. We find that the number coming to these shops has come down as compared with last year because the prices in the open market this year are much lower than they were last year.

**Shri T. K. Chaudhuri:** What is the trend of prices during the second, third and fourth weeks of August that have just passed?

**Shri Kidwai:** I have got information up to the 3rd week. In Basirhat the prices were : on 22nd August last year Rs. 30/- a maund; this year Rs. 24-8-0 a maund.

**Shrimati Renu Chakravartty:** May I quote the figures given by the West Bengal Government communique? Basirhat: August, 1952—Rs. 30/-; August 5th 1953—Rs. 30/-; August 12, 1953—Rs. 30/-.

**Shri Kidwai:** I do not know where the Bengal Government got those figures. The figures that we get are supplied by the Bengal Government and are published in the market reports. I have taken the reports both for last year and this year published

in the press and the report supplied by the Bengal Government.

**Shrimati Renu Chakravartty:** Are there two sets of figures?

**Mr. Deputy-Speaker:** There are.

**Shri T. K. Chaudhuri:** In view of the strong views lately held by the hon. Minister about Government statistics, will he kindly check up the figures?

**Shri Kidwai:** I have not taken these figures from the Government statistics, but from the market reports.

**Shrimati Renu Chakravartty:** Have any representations been received by the Government to reduce the modified rationing rates to Rs. 15 a maund, in place of the prevailing price of Rs. 19-6-0 per maund?

**Shri Kidwai:** I think the hon. Member is not correctly informed there. In the modified rationing shops wheat is being sold not at Rs. 15/- but at Rs. 14-6-0 per maund.

**Shri S. C. Samanta:** The hon. Deputy Minister said that there is no such distress in West Bengal. The hon. Minister said that modified rationing and subsidised modified rationing has been introduced in distress areas in Bengal. From the statement supplied by the West Bengal Government, I find that in all the districts subsidised rationing as well as modified rationing has been introduced. From the statement I find that modified rations to 35 lakhs and subsidised modified rations to 25 lakhs have been issued in the whole State. Over and above this...

**Mr. Deputy-Speaker:** What is the question, I am yet to find out.

**Shri S. C. Samanta:** I want to contradict the statement of the hon. Minister.

**Mr. Deputy-Speaker:** He can take his own time for that.

**Shri S. C. Samanta:** I want to know whether Government is aware

that last year on account of diseases, there was loss of crops in the whole State and whether Government is ready to admit that there is distress. This should be taken up either by the State Government or by the Central Government.

**Shri Kidwai:** It is the function of the State Government to deal with distress. The State Government was at first alarmed by some statements made in the Press that there is wide-spread distress. Therefore, they hurriedly introduced modified rationing. Now, they find that the people utilising or availing themselves of these concessions from the modified rationing shops are not as great this year as they were last year. That is all that has been said. The absence of distress has not been stressed.

**Shrimati Renu Chakravartty**  
rose—

**Mr. Deputy-Speaker:** I have allowed a number of questions.

**Shrimati Renu Chakravartty:** One question, Sir.

**Mr. Deputy-Speaker:** No, no.

**Shrimati Renu Chakravartty:** Every question has not been properly answered. I have a number of questions.

**Mr. Deputy-Speaker:** Yes; Shrimati Renu Chakravartty.

**Shrimati Renu Chakravartty:** Since the Government is not aware of all the editorials that have come up in every paper, may I ask whether the Government is now prepared to give any relief in the form of lowering the prices in West Bengal?

**Shri Kidwai:** I know that the hon. Member knows as much of the value of the editorials as I do, because recently some of the papers had confessed that these editorials bring them higher sales. But, leaving that apart, I said that the Bengal Government is doing whatever is possible. But, when they find that the people are not availing themselves of the

concessions, what could the Government do?

**Shrimati Renu Chakravartty:** Lower the prices further because of the lower purchasing power.

**Shri Kidwai:** The Bengal Government has not made any such recommendation.

**Shri H. N. Mukerjee:** The Deputy Minister said that there is no distress in West Bengal.

**Shri M. V. Krishnappa:** I did not say so.

**Shri H. N. Mukerjee:** The hon. Minister has said umpteen times that there is lack of purchasing power. Is it the Government's view that lack of purchasing power does not indicate the presence of distress?

**Mr. Deputy-Speaker:** He did not admit there was lack of purchasing power.

**Shri Kidwai:** I think the hon. Member must not try to say what the Deputy Minister has not said. He did not say that there is no distress. He said that the views that came first were alarming, and when really modified rationing at concession rate was started, then they found the people were not availing themselves of this concession in as large number as they were availing last year. I have also got before me figures to show that today the prices in Bengal are much lower than what they were last year. Therefore, people are not making use of the concession.

#### WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

##### STRIKE IN PRINCE'S DOCKS

\*981. **Shri Vittal Rao:** (a) Will the Minister of Labour be pleased to state whether it is a fact that 300 workers of the Prince's Docks went on strike from the 30th May, 1953?

(b) If so, what are the demands of the strikers?