

diverting any troops to West Ir. n. They are just three or four, or six altogether, relatively junior officers. They asked whether we could send them and we agreed.

Import of Sodium Nitrate

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*780. { **Shri Subodh Hansda:**
 Shri S. C. Samanta:
 Shri B. K. Das:

Will the Minister of Commerce and Industry be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the present import of Sodium Nitrate is not enough to meet the country's demand;

(b) if so, what steps Government are taking to meet the demand; and

(c) what is the total demand in the country?

The Minister of International Trade in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (Shri Manubhai Shah): (a) and (b). Our imports of sodium nitrate are sufficient to meet our present requirements.

(c) Around 25,000 tons per annum.

Shri Subodh Hansda: The hon. Minister stated that we are still importing sodium nitrate. May I know for how long we propose to import this sodium nitrate from outside and whether any time limit has been fixed for stopping this import by making the country self-sufficient?

Shri Manubhai Shah: Well, Sir, this is a natural product. It is not produced synthetically. We are trying to reduce this import. As I have already answered, at one stage we were importing 40,000 to 45,000 tons, and now we are importing only 25,000 tons. In Bihar and certain areas of Uttar Pradesh more natural sodium nitrate is now being produced. As the indigenous production goes up, we shall try to reduce our import of sodium nitrate.

Shri S. C. Samanta: May I know whether any attempt has been made to have substitutes for this sodium nitrate?

Shri Manubhai Shah: Yes; by ammonium sulphat and urea. As a matter of fact, there are two aspects of the matter. One is that it is used in fertilisers. There we are trying to replace it by ammonium salt and nitrogenous salt, as the hon. Member is fully aware. Regarding the industrial use, we are trying to produce chemical sodium nitrate and potassium nitrate, and thereby we will be replacing the imported stuff by them.

Shri Bhagwat Jha Azad: May I know what percentage of the present consumption is being met by indigenous production, and could the hon. Minister tell us by what time we can have a substantial reduction in our import of this stuff?

Shri Manubhai Shah: 33 per cent of our demand is currently being met by indigenous production and 67 per cent by import. We hope that gradual substitution of sodium nitrate by ammonium salt and urea would make us self-sufficient very soon. But here, Sir, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the fact that Chile, from whom we have to import this traditional item, is a very friendly country and some import, therefore, becomes inescapable.

Shri Vishram Prasad: Everybody knows that nitrate is very much required for nitrogenous fertilisers, and it is an every-day need for agricultural development. May I know how the Government is going to meet the shortage of Nitrate in the form of nitrogenous fertilisers in this country?

Shri Manubhai Shah: This is a much wider question. I have already told the House that sodium nitrate by no chance is a good fertiliser; on the contrary, agricultural experts do not want it.