

Thursday, 16th March, 1944

COUNCIL OF STATE DEBATES

(OFFICIAL REPORT)

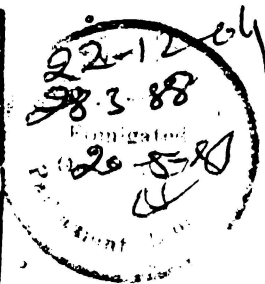
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(15th February to 6th April, 1944)

SIXTEENTH SESSION

OF THE

FOURTH COUNCIL OF STATE, 1944



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COUNCIL OF STATE

Thursday, 16th March, 1944.

The Council met in the Council Chamber of the Council House at Eleven of the Clock, the Honourable the President in the Chair.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

MARGIN OF PROFITS ALLOWED TO TEXTILE MILLS.

172. **THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL:** Will Government state what margin of profits Government have allowed to the textile mills in British India in fixing prices for sale of their yarn and cloth?

THE HONOURABLE MR. M. S. A. HYDARI: No definite margin of profits has been allowed for in fixing the ceiling prices of cloth and yarn. There is great variation in the efficiency of mills, and since in the circumstances of to-day all mills must be kept in production ceiling prices have necessarily to be fixed with reference to the least efficient mill. It is expected that efficient mills will fix their prices below the ceilings prescribed and a number of such mills have in fact done so. The standard adopted in judging the reasonableness of the ceiling prices is a comparison with prices prevailing at the outbreak of war which were broadly speaking unusually low prices; these are adjusted with reference to increases in the various elements of cost, such as wages, cotton, millstones, fuel and dyes and chemicals, etc. Government further reviews these ceiling prices each quarter, with the aim not merely of passing to the consumer the benefit of any reduction in the principal elements of costs but also of satisfying itself that the basic prices cannot at the time be reduced further. This policy of effecting reduction in prices by gradual stages is most calculated to achieve the object in view, namely, to reduce the prices of piecegoods to a satisfactory level within a reasonable measure of time.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Could the Honourable Member indicate whether the prices now are the same as in January, 1943, or lower?

THE HONOURABLE MR. M. S. A. HYDARI: They are lower.

DIVERTING OF LAND FROM SHORT STAPLE COTTON TO FOOD CROPS.

173. **THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL:** Will Government state the amounts of grant sanctioned by them from the fund for the benefit of cotton-growers to assist the latter for diverting lands from short staple cotton to food crops during each of the last two years? How much area from short staple cotton has been diverted to food crops during each of the last two years?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JOGENDRA SINGH: Grants amounting to Rs. 28,83,721 and Rs. 14,84,706 were sanctioned by the Government of India during 1942-43 and 1943-44, respectively to assist cultivators in diverting land from short staple cotton to food crops. A reduction of 6.1 million acres under short staple cotton occurred during 1942-43 and a further reduction of 0.3 million acres occurred during 1943-44. The bulk of this area has been diverted to food crops.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Could the Honourable Member indicate the area under cotton now?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JOGENDRA SINGH: I require notice of the question, Sir.

ASSURANCES GIVEN TO CULTIVATORS OF FOODGRAINS.

174. **THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL:** Will Government state what definite assurances were given to the cultivators of foodgrains for protection against an undue fall in the level of prices? In what form they were given?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: Copies of Press Notes issued on the 25th May, 1942 and the 3rd April, 1943 are placed upon the table. An assurance has been given that if, during the war and for one year thereafter the prices of foodgrains tend, as a result of the Food Production Drive, to fall below a level which would give a reasonable return to the cultivators, the Government of

India will be prepared to intervene and buy at fair prices all foodgrains offered to them in the open market.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Has the Government of India fixed any fair price?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: The fixation of fair prices will depend upon various circumstances: for instance, the prices of consumer goods at the time when the demand is made.

THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL: When will they be fixed?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: When the situation demands it.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: When will the situation demand it?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: The Honourable Member is not in order.

THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL: May I know what sort of situation Government have in mind, because otherwise there will be no fixation at all? What are the circumstances which they have in mind?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: If I may give an example, in the month of December there was a tendency for prices to fall precipitately. At that time a demand was made; but within a week or so the prices went up, and the matter was not taken up.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Now, for instance, cotton has gone down; do Government think that a situation has arisen in which to consider the matter?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: Cotton is not a foodgrain.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Will the Honourable Member indicate the price in December, 1943, which called for action? What was the price then?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: Prices of rice ranged from Rs. 5-8-0 to Rs. 8 at that time in Bengal

PRESS NOTE.

GOVERNMENT ASSURANCE TO CULTIVATORS. FALL IN PRICES WILL BE PREVENTED. SCHEME TO BUY FOODSTUFFS IN CONTINGENCY. APPEAL FOR NO SLACKENING OF PRODUCTION DRIVE.

In connection with the Food Production Drive inaugurated by the Government of India, the question has been raised whether the position of the cultivator may not be seriously affected if a nationwide effort towards increased food production leads to such an augmentation of outputs as to affect the saleability of the crops. It has been suggested that in the event of a sudden termination of hostilities, the demand for foodstuffs may fall off, leading to a deterioration in prices.

The Government of India regard the possibility of any such developments as remote. They would, therefore, ask the cultivators to be on their guard against any exaggeration of these fears and to ahead with their plans for increased food productions to meet the proved need of the hour. With the growing demand for foodstuffs on all sides, there is little chance of any serious fall in prices in the immediate future.

Even after the cessation of hostilities, the demand for foodstuffs from countries now devastated by war, is likely to increase rather than decrease. India herself with her growing population needs more food than she grows at present.

Apprehensions.

It is, however, likely that genuine apprehensions may be felt about the transport situation and certain temporary difficulties in the marketing of crops on that account, and it was to counter such apprehensions that it was recommended at the Food Production Conference held in New Delhi on April 6, 1942, that "the Government of India should undertake, should such a contingency threaten, to buy such quantities of foodstuffs in the open markets as would prevent any serious deterioration in the level of prices".

The Government of India have accepted the principle of this recommendation, and the details of a scheme for giving effect to it are now being worked out in consultation with the interests concerned. Meanwhile, the Government of India desire to convey this assurance to the cultivators that, should any developments take place which affect the saleability of the food crops, they will buy such quantities of foodstuffs in the open market, whether in British India or in the Indian States, as are calculated to prevent a serious fall in the prices. The Government of India are anxious to see that those who respond to their appeal for increased food production in this emergency do not suffer thereby.

New Delhi:
May 25, 1943.

PRESS NOTE.

THE PRICE OF FOODGRAINS : GOVERNMENT ASSURANCE TO CULTIVATORS.

The "Grow More Food" Campaign which was launched last year resulted in the increase of the area cultivated with foodgrains by over eight million acres. The Campaign is being pursued with the same vigour in the current year also and it is hoped to secure a still further increase in the area producing foodgrains by two million acres.

Apprehensions have been expressed that this increased production of food, coupled with the scheme for a Government monopoly of the export of major foodgrains beyond Provincial and State boundaries, may depress the prices of such grains to an unremunerative level. The Government of India, however, repeat the assurance which they gave to cultivators in May 1942.

The Government do not consider that there is any likelihood of a serious fall in prices resulting from the increased output of foodgrains which the "Grow More Food" Campaign aims at achieving. Even after the cessation of hostilities the demand for certain food-stuffs from countries whose normal sources of supply have been interrupted by war conditions or enemy occupation is likely to be greater rather than less than it was before the War. Nor does Government control of the export of foodgrains mean that they will use their position to force down prices to the lowest possible level.

Further the Government of India desire to make it clear that if during the War and for one year thereafter the prices of foodgrains tend, as a result of the Food Production drive, to fall below a level which would give a reasonable return to the cultivator, the Government of India will be prepared to intervene and buy at fair prices all foodgrains offered to them in the open market.

FOOD DEPARTMENT
New Delhi, April 3, 1943.

IMPORTS OF COAL.

175. THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL: Will Government state (a) how much coal has been imported and exported during the last twelve months? To what countries is it being exported?

(b) Is there any control over the export of coal?

THE HONOURABLE SIR SATYENDRA NATH ROY: (a) For security reasons it is not desirable to publish the figure for the whole of the last 12 months at present, but I would refer the Honourable Member to the speech of the Honourable the War Transport Member on the 26th February on Mr. Essak Sait's cut Motion on the Railway budget, in which figures of exports for a period of six months were given.

(b) Yes.

THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL: What are those figures?

THE HONOURABLE SIR SATYENDRA NATH ROY: I refer the Honourable Member to the answer that was given by the Honourable the War Transport Member.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Can the Honourable Member give those figures now?

THE HONOURABLE SIR SATYENDRA NATH ROY: No, Sir.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Is the Honourable Member aware that the Official Report has not been published yet?

THE HONOURABLE SIR SATYENDRA NATH ROY: It will be in the hands of the Honourable Member in a day or two, I hope.

THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL: Will it be after the session is over?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: He said "in a day or two". His reply is quite definite.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: He has given no assurance; he merely expressed the hope.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: If he refuses to give an assurance, I cannot help.

LAND BROUGHT UNDER CULTIVATION AS A RESULT OF THE "GROW MORE FOOD" CAMPAIGN.

176. THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: (a) How much land not cultivated previously has been brought under cultivation as a result of the "Grow More Food" campaign?

(b) How much of the land under (i) cotton and (ii) jute has been diverted to the production of cereals?

(c) What is the proportion of the acreage under food crops to that under non-food crops ?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JOGENDRA SINGH: (a) No figures are available.

(b) In comparison with 1941-42 the total reduction in the area under cotton brought about during 1942-43 and 1943-44 amounted to 57,55,000 acres. The area under jute was reduced by 7,31,000 acres during 1943. It is believed that the bulk of the reduction in the areas under these crops was taken up with food crops.

(c) The proportion of acreage under the principal food crops to that under the principal non-food crops during 1942-43 was nine to two in favour of food crops. Complete information for 1943-44 is not yet available.

THE HONOURABLE MR. V. V. KALIKAR: Do not the Provincial Governments supply to the Government of India figures about the acreage that has come under cultivation?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JOGENDRA SINGH: They do but the final figures come after the crops are over.

THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL: What are the forecast figures which are published by the Government of India?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JOGENDRA SINGH: The forecast figures for 1944 are not at present available.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: Has any estimate been made of the proportion of the acreage under food crops to that under non-food crops for the year 1943-44?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JOGENDRA SINGH: Not yet, Sir.

FACILITIES GIVEN TO CULTIVATORS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF MORE FOODGRAINS.

177. THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: What are the facilities including subsidies given by Government to the cultivator for the production of more foodgrains ?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JOGENDRA SINGH: A statement is laid on the table.

Statement showing the facilities given to the cultivator for the production of more food grains.

The Government of India are assisting the Provincial and State Governments in giving facilities to cultivators for—

- (a) increasing the output of crops from the existing cultivated areas;
- (b) the diversion of cultivated area to food crops, and
- (c) bringing cultivatable but uncultivated land under cultivation.

The assistance is usually in the form of financial aid as loans or grants in respect of specific schemes which can be broadly classified under seven heads. The description of each class of scheme together with the share of the expenditure, which the Government of India have sanctioned is given below:—

	Loan. Rs.	Grants. Rs.
(1) Multiplication of improved seeds and their distribution to cultivators at concessional rates	1,30,35,967	44,86,291
(2) Distribution of manures to cultivators at concessional rates.	51,28,400	25,08,544
(3) Encouragement of the production and utilization of compost from village waste and town refuse	..	2,78,650
(4) Extension of facilities for irrigation e.g., by tube wells, tanks, wells etc. and drainage schemes	30,73,500	48,10,220
(5) Land clearance and improvement	26,22,000	14,45,950
(6) Bonus to cultivators for growing food crops instead of short staple cotton	..	4,72,528
(7) Tillage facilities e.g. purchase of ploughs and bullocks	48,000	..

The expenditure shown above does not include grants to Provincial and State Governments for strengthening their agricultural staffs.

Arrangements are also being made to import chemical fertilisers, vegetable seeds and agricultural machinery from abroad and to supply iron and steel to the Provinces and States for the manufacture of agricultural implements and their distribution to cultivators at controlled prices.

PENSION EARNED BY PEONS AND DUFFRIES ON RETIREMENT.

178. THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: (a) Will Government state whether it is a fact that peons and duffries of the Government of India Secretariat who have put in more than 20 years and less than 30 years' service are given a fixed sum Rs. 8 as monthly pension on their retirement ?

(b) If the reply to the first part is in the affirmative, will they state the reasons why dufftries, whose scale of pay is higher than that of peons are treated in the same way as peons and given Rs. 8 as monthly pension which is half of the pay of the peons but not of dufftries ?

(c) Will they state further whether it is a fact that ministerial staff of the Government of India Secretariat when they retire are given pension in proportion to their length of service or get half pay as pension if they have put in 30 years' service? Why dufftries are denied the rate of pension in proportion to their length of service and why discrimination is made in their case only?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: (a) and (b). The position is that both peons and dufftries get, after service of 20 years and above but less than 30 years, a pension based on a fraction of their pay, subject to a maximum of Rs. 8 per mensem. This maximum does not operate in the case of peons, as their pay does not exceed Rs. 16 per mensem, but it does operate in the case of dufftries. The grant of a pension to inferior servants for service of less than 30 years is in itself a concession, and the Government of India do not consider that it would be justifiable to remove the limit of Rs. 8 per mensem in the case of dufftries.

(c) The answer to the first part of this question is in the affirmative. As regards the second part, the discrimination between ministerial servants with less than 30 years service and dufftries with similar service is not confined to dufftries of the Government of India Secretariat but extends to all dufftries, jamadars, etc., employed under the Central Government, and is based mainly on financial grounds. I may add that considerable improvements have been made in recent years in the pensionary conditions of all classes of inferior servants.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Will the Honourable Member indicate what are the improvements that have been made?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: The new pension rules for inferior servants were issued in 1936 and have been liberalised on two occasions since then, first in 1940 when the period for retiring pension was reduced from 40 years to 35 years and again in September, 1942, when the period for retiring pension was further reduced from 35 years to 30 years and the period after which a pension as distinct from a gratuity could be earned was reduced from 25 to 20 years.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Will the Honourable Member indicate why the dufftries and peons have been jumbled together? Their pays are different.

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: Because both come under the general classification of inferior servants.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Would it involve a large financial outlay if justice were done to these people?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: The Government do not accept the implication in that question, Sir.

ALLOWANCES DRAWN BY THE MINISTERIAL STAFF WHEN ON TOUR.

179. THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Is it a fact that the members of the ministerial staff of the Government of India Secretariat are paid only one and a half fares of the class to which they are entitled while going on tour, covering the incidental expenses ?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: Yes.

ALLOWANCES DRAWN BY INFERIOR SERVANTS WHEN ON TOUR.

180. THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: (a) Is it a fact that the inferior servants of the Government of India Secretariat while going on tour are paid only one third class fare and they are not paid anything for the incidental expenses, why ?

(b) If so, what concessions are Government giving them in lieu of incidental expenses ?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: No, Sir. In addition to mileage allowance, i.e., a single railway fare by the lowest class, an inferior servant is permitted to draw daily allowance. The latter allowance is intended to cover the incidental expenses of the journey.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: What is the allowance, Sir?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: Prior to the 1st May, 1943, it was four annas. On that date it was raised to six annas.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Do Government consider six annas to be sufficient to cover the incidental expenses?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: The question of a further increase is already under their consideration, Sir.

SUPPLY OF LIVERIES TO TEMPORARY INFERIOR SERVANTS.

181. THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: (a) Will Government state as to what articles of livery are given to temporary inferior servants and whether these are given to temporary duffries also, if not, why?

(b) Is it a fact that temporary duffries had always been getting liveries in the past and Government have now discontinued the supply of liveries and concessions are given to them in lieu thereof. If so, why?

THE HONOURABLE MR. E. CONRAN-SMITH: I lay on the table a statement showing scales of liveries admissible to the various categories of temporary inferior servants.

Temporary duffries, except those engaged for less than a year; were given liveries for the first time in 1937 at the scales admissible to permanent employees, i.e., one warm coat and two drill pyjamas. This concession was withdrawn in 1940 when the livery orders were revised; but now they are given one warm jacket in Delhi and one warm coat in Simla.

With reference to clause 2 of the question I would observe that liveries are given to the inferior servants not for the purpose of supplementing their wages by supplying clothes, but with a view to ensuring for them a distinctive and neat appearance essential for the efficient discharge of their duties while in attendance on officers. The supply of full scales of liveries to temporary duffries was discontinued in 1940 in the interests of war economy. The question of giving any concessions in lieu of liveries, therefore, does not arise.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Has this been done in the Departments created for war needs or in the permanent Departments as well?

THE HONOURABLE MR. E. CONRAN-SMITH: In all Departments, Sir.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: How does war economy arise in these permanent Departments?

THE HONOURABLE MR. E. CONRAN-SMITH: I think war economy arises in all Departments.

Statement showing the scales of liveries admissible to temporary inferior servants under the existing orders.

* DELHI.									
Jemadars class I and II.	1 chapkan serge scarlet.	2 chapkans drill khaki.	3 pyjamas drill khaki.	3 puggrees white muslin.	1 water-proof coat.	1 blanket	1 umbrella		
Daffadars and peons.	1 jersey woollen, 1 warm jacket.	2 chapkans drill khaki.	3 pyjamas drill khaki.	3 puggrees white muslin or khaki.	1 water-proof coat to daffadars and to peons in attendance on gazetted officers. 1 water-proof cape for office peons.	1 blanket	1 umbrella	Supplied to those employed for not less than 1 year. Those employed for less get only 1 khaki drill chapkan or coat 1 khaki drill pyjama, 1 khaki puggree and 1 woollen jersey.	
Farashes and chaukidars (including durbans and night watchman) Dufftries and record sorters.	1 jersey woollen, 1 warm jacket. 1 warm jacket.	2 coats drill khaki.	2 pyjamas drill khaki.	2 puggrees khaki.	1 water-proof cape for farashes only.	1 blanket	1 umbrella to farashes and chaukidars only.	Do. Supplied only to those employed for not less than one year.	

* SIMLA.

Jamadars class I and II.	1 chap- kan serge scarlet.	2 chap- kans drill khaki.	2 pyja- mas drill khaki. 1 pyjama khaki serge.	3 pugrees white muslin.	1 water- proof coat.	2 blankets.	1 umbrella.	
Daffadars and peons.	1 chap- kan khaki serge.	2 chap- kans drill khaki.	2 pyja- mas drill khaki. 1 pyjama khaki serge.	3 pugrees white muslin or khaki.	1 water- proof coat for daffadars and peons in attendance on gazetted officers ; and 1 water- proof cape for office peons.	2 blankets	1 umbrella	Supplied to those employed for not less than 1 year. Those employed for less get only 1 khaki drill chapkan or coat, 1 khaki drill pyjama, 1 khaki pugree and one wool- len je sey.
Farashes and chan- hidars (including durwans and night watch- man).	1 coat khaki serge.	2 coats drill khaki.	1 pyjama khaki drill, 1 pyjama khaki serge.	2 pugrees khaki.	1 water- proof cape for farashes only.	2 blankets.	1 umbrella.	Do.
Duftaries and record sorters.	1 coat khaki serge.							Supplied only to those employed for not less than one year.

* No livery is supplied to temporary or part time sweepers and bhistles.

NOTE.—Except for temporary duftaries and record sorters, all other temporary inferior servants shown in the statement, appointed against vacancies likely to last for a year or more receive the same scales of liveries as permanent ones do.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE INITIAL PAY OF A TEMPORARY DUFTRY AND A TEMPORARY PEON.

182. THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: (a) Will Government state the difference between the initial pay of a temporary duftry and a temporary peon?

(b) Is it a fact that duftries, employed in the Government of India Secretariat on the new scale of pay, do not get their annual increment of 0-8-0 unless their monthly pay is Rs. 20?

(c) Is it a fact that this 0-8-0 increment is not given to them after they have put in one year's service, but Re. 1 is given to them after 2 years service? If so, why?

(d) Will Government state why such a meagre increment has been fixed for them?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: (a) Re. 1.

(b) and (c). The revised scale of pay for duftries of the Government of India Secretariat is Rs. 15—1/2—20—1—30, i.e., they get a biennial increment of Re. 1 till they reach the stage of Rs. 20 in the scale when the increment of Re. 1 becomes annual. The scale is designed to provide a prospect of regular increments for a period of 20 years.

(d) Government are satisfied that this scale of pay is adequate to attract persons capable of discharging the duties of the post of duftry.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Are Government aware that the duftries have some literacy as well?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: The scale of pay of a post is fixed with reference to the duties of the post and not with respect to the qualifications of the person who may be holding it from time to time.

GRANT OF COMPENSATORY ALLOWANCE TO TEMPORARY DAFTRIES AT SIMLA.

183. THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Is it a fact that duftries employed on the new scale of pay get compensatory allowance at Simla but not at Delhi? If so, why?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: The answer is in the affirmative. The allowance has been granted on account of the expensiveness of Simla relative to Delhi.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Is not Delhi, too, expensive nowadays?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: It is expensive enough but Simla is still more expensive.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Would Government consider giving the same grant to them because of the high prices prevailing now?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: A grant is being given in the form of dearness allowance in addition to pay.

THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL: May I ask what is the dearness allowance that is being given?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: I cannot say straight off, Sir.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Is it lower than the Bombay scale of dearness allowance?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: He says he cannot say at present.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: I am asking whether it is lower than the Bombay scale?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: If he does not know anything at present how can he tell you whether it is lower or higher than the Bombay scale?

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Will the Honourable Member consider the advisability of raising it to the Bombay scale?

THE HONOURABLE MR. R. H. PARKER: Or reducing it as the case may be.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: It is almost the same question. If he does not know, how can he give you an assurance that it will be raised to the Bombay scale?

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: I wanted to know, Sir,—

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: I rule your question out of order.

LEAVE RULES APPLICABLE TO INFERIOR SERVANTS.

184. THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Is it a fact that the inferior staff employed on the new scale of pay is entitled to have leave on average pay only for fifteen days in a year, whereas other members of the ministerial staff get the same leave for a period of one month? If so, why?

THE HONOURABLE MR. C. E. JONES: Under the Revised Leave Rules, 1933, which are applicable to persons who entered Government service after the 15th July, 1931, the earned leave admissible to an officer in superior service is one-eleventh and to an officer in inferior service one-twenty-seconds of the period spent on duty. The reason for the differentiation is that the duties of the latter are routine and mechanical and involve no mental strain or fatigue.

REQUISITIONING OF HOUSES IN CALCUTTA FOR MILITARY USE.

185. THE HONOURABLE MR. KUMAR SANKAR RAY CHAUDHURY: Will Government state:—

(a) The designation and address of the officer, if any, under whose order and control houses are being requisitioned at Calcutta for military use?

(b) What arrangements are being made for keeping these houses in a state of repairs and by whom?

HIS EXCELLENCY THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: (a) Houses in Calcutta are requisitioned under the orders and control of the Government of Bengal.

(b) The arrangements made depend upon negotiations between Government and the owner of the requisitioned property.

NUMBER OF INDIANS HOLDING THE RANK OF LIEUTENANT-COLONEL.

186. THE HONOURABLE PANDIT H. N. KUNZRU: Will Government state the number of Indian Lieutenant Colonels? How many of them are commanding battalions?

HIS EXCELLENCY THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: There are 53 Indian Lieutenant-Colonels, of whom 20 are commanding battalions, I may add that there are 87 Indian Lieutenant-Colonels in the Indian Army Medical Corps.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Does this figure include I.M.S. officers?

HIS EXCELLENCY THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: I said, Sir, that in the Indian Army Medical Corps there are 87 Lieutenant-Colonels.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: It appears from the answer given by His Excellency that more than half of the Indian Lieutenant-Colonels are not commanding battalions. I should like to know why there is such a small number of Indian Lieutenant-Colonels in charge of battalions.

HIS EXCELLENCY THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: I think there is a very large number myself. There are very many other appointments which are held by Lieutenant-Colonels and I can give their occupations. One of them is commanding a cavalry regiment, which is equivalent to the command of a battalion. Eight more are commanding regiments or training centres of the Royal Indian Army Service Corps. Two are commanding Indian Pioneer Corps Groups and two more are commanding Indian Engineering Transportation Groups. They are all equivalent appointments; and of the balance there are nine holding first grade staff appointments, two are holding other staff appointments and three have Royal Indian Army Service Corps appointments and so on. All the appointments are equivalent to the command of a battalion. That was the question that was asked.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: Is any effort being made to increase the number of Indian Lieutenant-Colonels commanding either battalions or cavalry units?

HIS EXCELLENCY THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: As Indian officers become qualified to take up Lieutenant-Colonel's appointment or commands they are appointed just as much as any British officer is appointed. There is no discrimination in the selection of officers for command because they are British or Indian. It is a question of qualification and seniority also comes into it.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: Is it a fact that some Indian commanding officers have been transferred to staff posts and those staff posts are not really of a very important character?

HIS EXCELLENCY THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: I do not agree with that, Sir.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: It is a fact all the same, as His Excellency doubtless knows.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: His Excellency has given you a definite reply.

NUMBER OF INDIAN OFFICERS IN G. H. Q. (I.)

187. THE HONOURABLE PANDIT H. N. KUNZRU: Will Government state the number of Indian officers in the G. H. Q., excluding the attached offices?

HIS EXCELLENCY THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: I am unable to give the exact figures in the interest of security, but the percentage of Indian officers to the total number of officers in General Headquarters is about 10.5.

PURCHASE OF JUTE BY THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT.

188. THE HONOURABLE MR. KUMAR SANKAR RAY CHAUDHURY: Will Government state:—

(a) Whether the Central Government have agreed to purchase all the jute produced in Bengal?

(b) If so, at what price?

(c) What price, if any, has been fixed for the actual producer?

THE HONOURABLE MR. N. R. PILLAI: Parts (a), (b) and (c).—The Honourable Member's attention is invited to a Press Note, of which I lay a copy on the table, issued by the Government of Bengal on the 7th February, 1944, on the subject.

Press Note issued by the Government of Bengal on the 7th February, 1944.

The question of acreage to be sown with jute this year and its probable effect on prices has been under consideration of the Government of Bengal for some time. The matter was recently discussed in a Conference with representatives of the Government of India at New Delhi and as a result of certain decisions have been reached which are now announced for information of those concerned.

(a) The Government of Bengal will issue orders for licensing of an acreage of 8 annas of the basic acreage of 1940 and will advise and encourage the agriculturists to plant fully up to this acreage in their own interests.

(b) The Government of India will guarantee a minimum price of raw jute on the basis of Rs. 15 per maund of Indian Jat Middles at Calcutta (other qualities or grades of raw jute to be in parity with this price).

(c) The Government of India will undertake to buy all crop offering, old and new up-country or at Calcutta in order to maintain prices at the above level at Calcutta and at parity levels up-country.

(d) A maximum price of raw jute will be fixed on the basis of Rs. 17 for Indian Jat Middles at Calcutta (other qualities or grades of raw jute to be in parity with this price) with the right of the Government of India to requisition on the basis of the maximum price. The Government of Bengal will assist in such requisitioning from middlemen if necessary.

(e) Both the minimum and the maximum prices will be fixed under statutory orders to be issued by the Government of India. The Government of India will also under statutory orders simultaneously fix the maximum prices for manufactured goods.

2. The prices so fixed come into operation from a date to be notified shortly and will remain in force up to and including June 1945.

3. The Government of Bengal are taking the necessary steps to give the growers the full benefit of these arrangements and to ensure to the cultivator the highest price possible in parity with the prices so fixed.

DISPOSAL OF CIVIL DEFENCE STORES.

189. THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Will Government state whether the Civil Defence Stores like cars, lorries, buckets, pumps, etc., are being disposed of by Provinces? If so, in what manner? Will the proceeds go to the Provinces or the Centre?

THE HONOURABLE SIR FIROZ KHAN NOON: (a) All items of Civil Defence Stores not required by a Province for its Civil Defence purposes are being disposed of in the following manner:—

(i) by transferring to Provinces and States which need them for Civil Defence purposes;

(ii) by transferring to the Army;

(iii) by utilizing them for purposes other than Civil Defence either by the Provinces themselves or by the disposals organisation of the Supply Department.

Items not disposed of as above, including those whose removal for use elsewhere is uneconomical, are being disposed of by local sale.

(b) The proceeds of disposal of Civil Defence Stores will be shared between the Central Government and the Provincial Government concerned in the overall proportion in which each has contributed to the total civil defence expenditure of the Province.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Will the Honourable Member state if credits will be taken for transfer to the army?

THE HONOURABLE SIR FIROZ KHAN NOON: By whom? For the transfer of what to the army?

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Will it be shown in the Budget?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: I do not think it arises out of the question at all.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: He stated that part of the stocks will be transferred to the army. I want to know whether they will be debited to the army account as coming from Civil Defence or not. How will the matter be accounted for in the papers?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: They will adopt the usual procedure.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Will it be shown as credit accruing from Civil Defence or as appropriation in aid?

THE HONOURABLE SIR FIROZ KHAN NOON: That is a matter which we can safely leave in the hands of the people who are responsible for keeping accounts correctly for the Government of India.

PRIOR PER POUND OF LEOPARD CLOTH, ETC.

190. THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Will Government lay on the table a statement of the price per pound of Leopard Cloth, 10 and 20 counts single yarn at Bombay in January, July and December, 1943?

THE HONOURABLE MR. M. S. A. HYDARI: I lay on the table a statement showing the prices of Leopard Cloth and 10 and 20 counts single yarn at Bombay in January, July and December 1943, as desired by the Honourable Member.

I would point out however that the months in respect of which the Honourable Member has asked for this information are less significant in this regard than certain other months of the year 1943. Control over cloth and yarn was imposed in the second half of June, and it was in the period immediately preceding the application of this control that peak prices were reached. Thus at the end of May and beginning of June Leopard Cloth was selling at from Rs. 3-14-0 to Rs. 4 per lb., and 20's yarn in the middle of May touched a peak of from Rs. 28 to Rs. 30 per bundle of 10 lbs. I have therefore included in the statement which I lay on the table some comparative figures which, though not asked for by the Honourable Member, help to bring into true perspective the vagaries of cloth and yarn prices last year.

Statement showing the Prices of Leopard Cloth and 10 and 20 counts single yarn at Bombay in January, July and December 1943.

Leopard Cloth.			
	Ex-mill per lb. Rs.	Wholesale Market per lb. Rs.	Retail per lb. Rs.
January 1943	2 2 0	2 5 0 to 2 8 0	2 7 0 to 2 10
Peak period in May-June	3 14 0 to 4 0
July 1943	2 8 0	2 14 0 to 3 1 0	3 0 0 to 3 6
December 1943	2 1 3	2 3 0 to 2 5 0	2 7 0 to 2 8
Yarn.			
	Ex-mill per 10 lbs. Rs.	Wholesale market per 10 lbs. Rs.	
10's			
January 1943	9 12 6	11 0 6	
July 1943	13 7 0	13 11 0	
December 1943	10 10 0	10 14 0	
20's			
January 1943	15 10 0	15 14 0	
Peak period in May	28 0 0	to
		30 0 0	
July 1943	22 3 0	22 7 0	
December 1943	15 0 0	15 4 0	

PUBLICATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY MESSRS. R. H. HUTCHINGS AND A. K. CHANDA ON EVACUATION OF REFUGEES FROM BURMA.

191. THE HONOURABLE PANDIT H. N. KUNZRU: (a) Will Government state whether it is a fact that Mr. R. H. Hutchings, who was the Agent of the Government of India in Burma submitted his report on the evacuation of Indians from Burma, to Government in July, 1942?

(b) Did Government receive Mr. A. K. Chanda's report on the evacuation of Indians from Burma?

(c) Will Government state (i) why these reports have not been placed before the Emigration Committee and the Legislature yet? (ii) when they will be laid before these Bodies and made public?

THE HONOURABLE MR. R. N. BANERJEE: (a) and (b). Yes.

(c) (i). When Mr. Chanda's work of preparing a consolidated report on the basis of the various individual reports, neared completion, it became apparent that it would be impossible to present a clear picture of the whole evacuation without including matter that might be of great value to the enemy. The question of publishing a report was therefore re-examined in the light of the existing military situation and after detailed consideration the Government of India have decided that it would not be expedient to publish any report for the present.

(c) (ii) In view of this position, I regret I am unable to say at present.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: Does the Honourable Member think it is possible to place the report confidentially before the Emigration Committee?

THE HONOURABLE MR. R. N. BANERJEE: I could not say at this stage, Sir.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: It is part of the question. We want to know whether they have been placed before the Emigration Committee? I asked the same question in November last. Why is not the Honourable Member still in a position to answer it?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: The question has been put. Please do not argue it.

THE HONOURABLE MR. R. N. BANERJEE: I have given an answer to (c) (ii) which enquires when they will be laid before those bodies and made public. My answer is that in view of the position explained in my answer to (c) (i) I regret I am unable to say at present.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: You have answered that question.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: Does the Honourable Member think that if the report were placed before the Emigration Committee that would be tantamount to making it public?

THE HONOURABLE MR. R. N. BANERJEE: Well, Sir, as I have indicated, on grounds of security and other considerations Government have decided not to publish it now.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: I quite understand your position.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: What are the other considerations apart from those of security?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT (to the Honourable Mr. R. N. Banerjee): May I inform the Honourable Member, who is a new member, that if he does not wish to answer any question the best thing for him is to remain quiet!

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: May I point out to you, if you don't mind, Sir, that members of the Emigration Committee are members of the Legislature?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: You are discussing matters. I am not prepared to allow a discussion unless you put a definite question.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: The question is, Sir: Will Government consider the advisability of taking the members of the Emigration Committee into confidence?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: But he has already answered that question.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Is the Honourable Member aware that the Garran Tribunal report, which was a confidential document, was made available for study of the Honourable Members by the courtesy of His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief of that day? Will the Honourable Member extend the same privilege in this case?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Order, order. You are going into comparisons and comparisons are not allowed in the House. You say that on a particular occasion, in respect of another matter, His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief was prepared to allow a confidential document available and it is necessary that you should have the same privilege in this case also.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: I am asking him whether he will consider the possibility of following the example of the Commander-in-Chief of 1935?

THE HONOURABLE MR. R. N. BANERJEE: I will consider that, Sir.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: Sir, you have told the Honourable Member, who is a new member, that he can always sit quiet and not reply to a question if Government do not consider it necessary to answer it.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Yes, so he may remain quiet!

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: Does not that mean that he does not wish to reply?

DEFENCE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE.

HIS EXCELLENCY THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: Sir, I move:—
“That this Council do proceed to elect, in such manner as the Honourable the President may direct, four non-official members to serve on the Defence Consultative Committee for the financial year 1944-45.”
The Motion was adopted.

CENTRAL ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RAILWAYS.

THE HONOURABLE SIR SATYENDRA NATH ROY: Sir, I move:—
“That this Council do proceed to elect, in such manner as may be approved by the Honourable the President, six non-official members from the Council, who shall be required to serve on the Central Advisory Council for Railways for the year commencing 1st April, 1944.”

The Motion was adopted.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, with reference to the Motions which have just been adopted by the Council, I have to announce that nominations to the Committees will be received by the Secretary up to 11 A.M. on Wednesday, the 22nd March, 1944, and the date of election, if necessary, will be announced later.

STANDING COMMITTEE FOR THE LABOUR DEPARTMENT.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, with reference to the announcement made by me on the 13th March, 1944, regarding nominations to the Standing Committee to advise on subjects with which the Labour Department is concerned, I have to announce that the following Honourable Members have been nominated for election to that Committee:—

1. The Honourable Mr. N. K. Das.
2. The Honourable Mr. M. L. Das.
3. The Honourable Maulvi Ali Asgar Khan.

There are three candidates for three seats and I declare them duly elected.

MOTION RE FOOD SITUATION.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the Council will now proceed to discuss the food situation in India. I may inform Honourable Members that I have fixed 20 minutes for individual members to speak on this occasion and I hope Honourable Members will strictly adhere to that time limit.

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN (Nominated Official): Sir, I beg to move:—
“That the food situation in India be taken into consideration.”

Sir, before I address myself to the subject-matter of the Resolution I would like with your leave to refer to one matter which must be near to the heart of every member of this House. Since the House last met famine and pestilence, which for months past had been gathering strength, had swept over Bengal taking a heavy toll in suffering and death. May I on behalf of the House express our deep sense of sorrow for those hundreds of thousands of our men, women and children who suffered and lost their lives and sympathy for those who suffered but have remained alive waiting to be brought back to health and normal security of life. May I also express our gratefulness to all our friends across the seas in distant lands whose active sympathy in our hour of trial, in the midst of their own anxious preoccupations has been a source of solace and strength to our people.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: I think you have already provided a statement and it is in the hands of every member; so you need not dilate on that.

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: I do not want to dilate on that. I shall only refer to one or two points in that statement which I think would be of some interest to members of this House.

During the last Food Debate in this House a desire was expressed by several members that at the beginning of each session, the members should be

[Mr. B. R. Sen.]

provided with a statement in the nature of a review of the progress made by the Government of India in the implementation of their general Food Policy. I have circulated to the members such a statement at the beginning of the session. Today I propose to refer only to some of the important points dealt with in the statement which I feel may be of special interest to the members of the House.

The basic responsibilities of any Government in the administration of food in the conditions that obtain today are procurement and distribution. It is the view of the Government of India that in present conditions the problem of procurement cannot be solved by reversion to free trade. Nor do we consider establishment of a Central Foodgrains Monopoly immediately a practical proposition from the administrative point of view, though we hold that in principle it is the only completely satisfactory solution of the problem. We have, therefore, agreed to the Provinces continuing to shoulder the responsibility of procurement both on their own behalf, whether for their own consumption or for export to deficit areas, or on behalf of the Central Government for Central Government needs, including the Defence Services. At the same time, in view of our responsibility for the success of Food administration in India as a whole we feel it incumbent on us to exercise that degree of direction, superintendence and control necessary to secure the effective discharge of that function. What, therefore, we are doing now is to guide the Provinces to so improve their procurement machinery as to secure more and more effective control over the marketable surplus of foodgrains within their areas, aiming at building up in this way first a provincial, then a regional pattern of Government monopoly and ultimately a monopoly to be exercised from the centre. The points to which Food Department have directed their attention most in the various local schemes are elimination of competitive buying; control of movement and transport; employment of the trade under official supervision, prescription of purchasing areas and prohibition of private trade for purchasing agents; and the proper use of the Foodgrains Control Order as the most effective supporting instrument. There has been considerable progress in these directions in the Provinces since the House last met. Government monopoly purchase has already been established, for all practical purposes, in the Central Provinces and Orissa. In Madras and Bihar official grain purchase officers make direct purchases both for licensed traders and for other large consuming interests, and movements between districts are strictly controlled. The United Provinces have localised purchases and movements, and have largely eliminated competitive buying. The Bombay plan which has just been announced, imposing on substantial growers a graded levy in produce and making it obligatory to sell the balance of their crops, except what is needed for their own use or for consumption within the village, only to Government authorised purchasing agents, is even a step further than in the Central Provinces and Madras in Government monopoly. We have lately addressed all Provinces and State Governments to review their machinery for procurement and to see all possible steps are taken in the immediate future to proceed further in the direction of Government monopoly.

The problem of procurement involves two other factors which are no less important, namely, storage and movement. Indeed, for successful procurement the three factors, purchase, storage and movement are inseparable. Lack of storage arrangements in some of the main supplying Provinces proved a serious handicap last year in procurement operations. Steps are now being taken in collaboration with the Provincial Governments to arrange for storage, so as to ensure an even flow of rail movement throughout the crop period, and permit the unimpeded continuance of procurement operations by eliminating checks on marketing and outward movements resulting from temporary limitations on rail bookings or inability on the part of railways to move the full quantity procured. A senior officer of the Department is proposed to be put on to whole-time duty to deal with the problem of storage alone.

Similarly, lack of co-ordination between purchases and despatches proved another serious handicap last year in making supplies available to the deficit areas. A senior Railway official has been appointed Director of Movements in the Food Department to advise on all questions of transport policy affecting foodstuffs and to assist in removal of practical difficulties. Transport by coastal shipping, country craft and river transport is also being increasingly used, particularly in the movement of foodgrains. The War Transport Department have recently entered into an arrangement with the Bombay Steam Navigation Co. to run and organise country craft services between Karachi and Bombay, Marmagou, Cochin, Alleppy and Trivandrum at fixed rates. It is gratifying to note that while in previous months clearance from Karachi Port by country craft did not on the average exceed 1,600 tons, in February the clearance amounted to over 6,584 tons. The War Transport Department have also addressed various Provincial Governments with regard to inland water transport though it is a provincial responsibility, and this method is now being increasingly used for local carriage of foodgrains, for instance, a large country boat service has been organised for movement of foodgrains between West Bengal and East Bengal. Arrangements have also been made by the War Transport Department for the special supply of motor vehicles to those producing areas where they can use and greatly assist the extraction of practicable surpluses. The use of army motor transport has proved invaluable in the distribution of foodgrains in Bengal.

Distribution has two main aspects: distribution of grains from surplus Provinces and States to deficit Provinces and States and distribution in a Province or State for internal consumption. The House is aware that distribution of grains from surplus areas is now done according to a basic plan drawn up by the Food Department. The plan is based upon the idea that the deficiencies all over India should be so distributed that the surplus Provinces may take their share on an all-India basis and the deficit Provinces may not be left to face their shortages alone. It will interest the House to know that the total surplus moved to deficit areas under this plan last year amounted to over two million tons. Of this, the areas which got the largest shares were: Bengal 8.2 lakh tons; Travancore/Cochin 2.5 lakh tons; Bombay 4.5 lakh tons and Madras 1.1 lakh tons.

As to internal distribution, the Government of India, as the House knows, view the introduction of food rationing in all large cities and towns in India as fundamental to a co-ordinated food plan. Considerable progress has been made in the introduction of rationing since the House last met. It can be said that there is no province in India whether surplus or deficit, where rationing of urban areas is not being actively pursued. Rationing schemes covering one or more of the staple foodstuffs are now in force in 20 towns or municipal areas with population of one lakh and over; in 17 towns with a population of half a lakh or over, and in 66 smaller towns 103 in all. Of these, 82 are in British India and 21 in Indian States. Over 25 million people are now rationed. Bombay City has provided a model for most rationing schemes, and the most rapid development has been in Madras where 59 municipal areas and taluks have already been rationed. In Travancore an ambitious extension of rationing to the whole State has been undertaken. There is State-wide rationing in Cochin already. In addition to the figures given above, the United Provinces Government has partially rationed 20 of its largest towns, and proposes to extend this to 50 more towns in the near future. Combined with strict movement control, the United Provinces scheme provides individual rations for 60 to 75 per cent. of the population within the rationed area and allows the trade to look after the rest. The Government of India, however, do not regard limited rationing schemes or provisioning schemes as final, at best they regard such schemes as the basis for the introduction of full rationing. Rationing has been introduced in Calcutta with effect from the 31st January and in Karachi from the middle of February. Undoubtedly the rationing organisation covering Greater Calcutta, with a very mixed population of nearly 4,00,000 and the large areas of industrial concerns.

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has proved a most difficult operation, but latest reports state that generally speaking, rationing in Calcutta is now functioning smoothly. The Punjab proposes to ration Lahore, Amritsar and Rawalpindi by March. Preparations for rationing in Delhi are in full swing and plans for the rationing of Hyderabad (Sind), Hyderabad (Deccan), Nagpur, Jubbulpore and numerous other smaller towns, are well advanced. Partial rationing or provisioning has also been introduced in Patna and Bhagalpur in Bihar. It will be extended to full rationing at an early date. On the introduction of rationing we have allowed some latitude to Provincial Governments in fixing the size and composition of the ration with reference to their supply position. Sufficient data are now being received to enable us to review the actual offtake under rationing in relation to the size of the ration and this may lead us to suggest adjustments to Provinces and States in respect of the size of the ration. There has been a good deal of controversy lately regarding the policy of the Government of India in the matter of employment of the normal machinery of the retail trade in rationing schemes. The view of the Government of India is that in the administration of urban rationing every use should be made under Government control of the normal machinery of the retail trade. It is undesirable to put large sections of the community out of business when it is not altogether necessary to do so. Retail distribution is a heavy administrative responsibility and a Government should not assume this responsibility, in addition to its already heavy responsibilities, except to the extent absolutely necessary.

A good deal of controversy has also recently been raised over the question of quality of foodgrains supplied to deficit Provinces from surplus areas. Who is responsible for ensuring the quality of the foodgrains—the supplying Administration, the receiving Administration or the Central Government? It seems necessary to restate clearly the position with regard to the responsibilities for inspection, though I have already given some information in reply to a question put in the session by the Honourable Mr. Kumarsankar Ray Chaudhury. Under the present system, the responsibility of arranging for inspection before despatch of grains from the supplying areas with a view to ensure quality is that of the receiving Provincial Government and not of the Central Government. The supplying and receiving administrations are in the position of ordinary sellers and buyers making direct transactions, but subject to the limitation that the transactions must be within the quotas allotted by the Central Government and in consonance with their general price policy. We have, however, no desire to minimise the difficulties of the receiving Administrations in the matter of inspection under the present scheme. Their main difficulties derive from the fact that they receive their supplies from a very large number of stations of the supplying Provinces and States. The supplying Administrations had in the past insisted on inspection at the points of despatch on the ground that part payment for the foodgrains at the time of despatch followed by a final adjustment *after* assessment of quality and weights at destination must entail considerable delay in the finalisation of accounts, resulting in serious inconvenience to all concerned. On the other hand, inspection at destination ensures (a) a free flow of foodgrains without the risk of inspection delays and of loss of opportunities to secure wagon facilities and (b) a more consistent standard of inspection. We have felt it incumbent on us to intervene to remedy the defects of the present system which experience has revealed and what we have to evolve, is a procedure which will provide firstly, full payment at the point of despatch on the basis of weights as shown in the railway receipts or bills of lading; secondly, inspection, on the basis of a standard schedule of allowances, at the destination by a competent independent authority and prompt issue of valuations to the supplying Administration; and thirdly, acceptance by the supplying Administration of an appropriate adjustment in the price based upon these valuations. The Government of India have drafted such a procedure which is now before the Provincial Governments for early submission of their views. If the procedure evolved is found acceptable

and workable, it is proposed to give effect to it with the new *rabi* basic plan, that is, from May this year.

I will now refer to the problem of price control. I need hardly emphasise the fundamental importance of price control in the scheme of food administration and its place in the whole economy of the country at the present time. Apart from its value in our general offensive against the inflationary position in the country, it is clear that there is a large section of people in India who will go short of food unless the prices are brought down to a reasonable level. There may be, what can be termed, a "sectional famine" because of high prices in the midst of plenty. The Government of India have, therefore, accepted the policy of instituting statutory price control for all major foodgrains and the corollary that similar control in respect of an increasing number of non-agricultural commodities, particularly those necessary to the cultivator. We have accordingly been directing our efforts to bringing provincial and regional prices of foodgrains into parity with each other, with a view to eliminating the wide local variations which now exist and, eventually, to establishing All-India statutory control of foodgrain prices, which would be prices fixed for the respective crop season, based on a fair return to the cultivator and related to the prices of other commodities. In December last, discussions were held with the main wheat-producing Provinces and the decision was announced that statutory control of wheat prices would be introduced with the next *rabi* harvest at levels which will be determined before the harvest commences. In January, another conference was held in respect of the prices of principal *kharif* grains, e.g., rice and millets. On the basis of the discussions of this conference, the Government of India decided to fix by statute the prices of *jowar* and *bajra* in primary wholesale markets throughout British India at Rs. 7 and Rs. 7-8-0, respectively. In the case of rice, though there was a considerable measure of agreement as regards the proper level for price control in the Provinces and States of Southern and Central India, in Northern India price differences were regarded to be still too wide to admit of immediate fixation of statutory maximum prices in parity with each other. A general agreement was, however, reached on the appropriate levels at which the wholesale price of coarse rice should be stabilized in the various producing areas and it was agreed that the Provinces would take necessary steps to reduce prices to those levels preparatory to fixation of statutory maximum prices. I may mention here that the Price Advisory Committee which we recently set up, is now sitting at Delhi to consider some important matters which have been referred to them.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Will the Honourable Member give the personnel of that Advisory Committee?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: I shall give the names in the course of my reply.

Simultaneously with the price control which is being exercised by the Food Department, the Industries and Civil Supplies Department have been extending their control over the prices of non-agricultural commodities. The Hoarding and Profiteering Prevention Ordinance, 1943, which makes it an offence to charge more than 20 per cent. profits on the cost of production, or landed cost in case of imported articles, has already brought down the prices of many essential articles, like leather, cigarettes, cycles, razor blades, etc.

From what I have said the House will see that we have steadily followed the policy which we have laid down for ourselves, viz., to mobilise the food resources of India on an all-India basis and in the discharge of that responsibility to exercise whatever degree of superintendence and control at every stage over the administration of the Provinces as may be necessary and to invoke whatever powers are essential to ensure success. Criticisms have been voiced that the Government of India have not always been unfaltering in their enforcement of their policy on the Provinces. I would like to state the position clearly. We have assumed responsibility for exercising superintendence and control over the Provinces. The superintendence and control must be exercised with judgment

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and discretion. We have not and cannot assume direct responsibility for the details of the day-to-day administration in every Province. Whenever a difference of opinion on policy or method arises, or a defect in the administration manifests itself, we have to consider firstly whether our active intervention is essential; secondly, what manner of intervention is most suitable and likely to achieve the purpose in view; and thirdly, the extent to which it must be pressed. In a constitution of a federal nature, the constituent units, especially where a popular Ministry is involved must be allowed due scope in the exercise of the responsibilities with which they are charged. It must be remembered also that we depend upon the administrative machinery, which the Provinces, and not we, possess to carry the policy into effect. There have been occasions when we have felt bound to press our view to the extent of issuing a direction, and there have been, and will doubtless be, others in which, though not fully satisfied, we have not felt justified in pressing our opinion to such lengths.

I will now state for the information of the House the conditions in some of the heavily deficit areas in India which have been the cause of public anxiety for some time past. I shall first refer to Malabar, Travancore and Cochin. In Malabar there is a rough and ready system of rationing in the deficit areas. Owing to short supply the rations have varied from village to village, the ration of rice being generally below a quantity which is regarded as sufficient for the people.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: May I interrupt the Honourable Member? Does he mean to say that rationing has been introduced in rural areas in Malabar?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: In the northern parts of the Malabar district rationing has been introduced, though it is not rationing of the full-fledged type.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: What is it like, this partial rationing?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: They are given certain supplies and they have to distribute those supplies to the best advantage and in the northern parts of Malabar the ration has been very much below what it should be.

THE HONOURABLE SIR GOPALASWAMI AYYANGAR: There is nothing like rationing in rural areas?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: It is a very inadequate system of rationing. I am using the word "rationing" very generally.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: This is an important point. I should like to understand fully what the Honourable Member means. Does he mean to say that a definite quantity of foodgrains is sent to the rural areas and that it is then left to the Divisional Officers to decide how much quantity each purchaser will be allowed to purchase?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: The best thing will be for the Honourable Member to listen to what I have to say. Then if he raises any point I shall reply.

Proper rationing, however, has now been introduced in three towns, namely, Calicut, Tellicherry and Cannanore, where the rate is one lb. per adult per day. It is proposed to introduce rationing at the same rate in the towns of Palghat and Cochin shortly. In the deficit areas, where rice is in such short supply, people depend on tapioca and green gram. The position was particularly unsatisfactory a few weeks ago, when the Honourable Pandit Kunzru was probably there. The reason was that the quota usually sent to the Malabar district was reduced along with the quotas of similar districts for the reason that at the end of last year rice from the surplus areas in the Province was not forthcoming freely. The position was further aggravated by the temporary necessity of building up reserves at the commencement of rationing the three towns at the rate of one lb. the quotas available to the rural areas for a period were correspondingly less. The quota of rice allowed up to November, 1943 was 14,000 tons a month. This was reduced to 10,000 tons in December

and January. The January quota was, however, subsequently raised a bit and from February, 15,000 tons a month have been ordered. If this quota of 15,000 tons a month is regularly received every month, the position would be more satisfactory than it was a few weeks back. I have seen a suggestion made that in view of the present inequalities of ration in different areas in the district and in view of the over-all deficit in the district, the entire district should be rationed. It is agreed that the adjoining Cochin State is fully rationed and the scale of ration allowed to the individual is uniform throughout the State; in Travancore also, it is proposed very soon to introduce State-wide rationing; that conditions in Malabar are similar to those in Travancore and Cochin; that the system of card rationing, which is already in force in the northern parts of the district, might, with advantage, be extended to the rest of the district. I shall bring this suggestion to the notice of the Madras Government.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: What is the ration in Cochin?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: The ration is supposed to be one lb. per adult per day.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: Does the Honourable Member mean to say that the ration in Cochin is one lb. per adult per day?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: The ration which we recommend is one lb. per adult per day.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: What is the ration in force, whatever you might recommend?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: At present it is very much below one lb. I think it is 10 ounces a day.

Under the present arrangement, Travancore/Cochin are given joint quotas by the Government of India which they divide between themselves in the proportion of 4:1. In actual distribution of their food reserves, however, the two States have pursued somewhat different policies. Over a year ago, Cochin introduced State-wide rationing as they felt that the immediate need was to ensure to everyone in the State a fair share of what was available even if it meant using up all the stocks they had. As the quotas of grain allotted under the first basic plan did not arrive regularly, the Cochin Government were only able to maintain their rationing scheme by frequent reductions, borrowings and adjustments. In Travancore, on the other hand, the State authorities felt that unless minimum reserve stocks was built up, it would not be possible to introduce State-wide rationing which they had in view. The State authorities, therefore, stinted and scraped as far as they could without causing actual starvation, and have gradually been able to build up the necessary reserves and will extend rationing all over the State very shortly. The Government of India feel that the position in Cochin cannot be stabilised unless the State authorities are provided with a sufficient reserve. We have accordingly decided to send 4,000 tons immediately to Cochin for the purpose in addition to the quotas which have been or will be allotted to Travancore and Cochin jointly under the basic plan.

The pre-war imports to Travancore/Cochin were 4,48,000 tons of rice and 14,000 tons of wheat. In the Preliminary *Kharif* Plan the Government of India allotted 150,000 tons of rice. It has since been possible to increase the quotas of rice to 204,000 tons including 4,000 tons for Cochin's reserve. Travancore/Cochin have also been assured of 100,000 tons of wheat and 68,000 tons of other grains in 1944. The Government of India will make every attempt, provided imports from overseas are forthcoming in adequate quantities, to make up the balance of 100,000 tons by wheat and other grains.

The House will no doubt expect me to refer to the conditions in Bengal in a little more detail. In October the Government of Bengal indicated that if 250,000 tons of foodgrains could be delivered to Bengal in three months October to December, Bengal would be able to turn the corner. Actually over 400,000 tons of foodgrains were sent to Bengal during the period. Out of this, over 140,000 tons were despatched by the Provincial Government to the districts

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in Bengal. Lately we have come across some very irresponsible statement made in Bengal regarding the scale of assistance rendered to Bengal by the Government of India. It may interest the House to know that out of a total despatch of 10.1 lakh tons to deficit areas under the basic plan from January to the middle of July last year 2.6 lakhs, i.e., 26 per cent. went to Bengal, and out of a total despatch of 10.8 lakhs from the middle of July to December, 5.6 lakhs, i.e., 52 per cent. went to Bengal. It is true that in spite of whatever help we gave lives were lost. The only consolation that we can feel—a very poor consolation in the circumstances—is that but for the supreme effort we made from the Centre with the willing co-operation of the surplus Administrations and the magnificent help rendered by the army, the calamity in Bengal would have been yet more grave.

The Bengal Government have now published their mortality statistics. According to their Report, the total number of deaths in Bengal in 1943 from all causes was 1,873,749 which is 688,846 or 58 per cent. above the average number of deaths in the Province during the last five years. Deaths from cholera, malaria, and small pox accounted for an increase of 460,776. Mortality from causes not attributed to any of the above three epidemic diseases amounted to 228,070. These statistics were collected by the normal machinery of the Bengal Government, the primary source of information being the *chowkidar*. The Honourable Members of the House may have some questions to ask about the accuracy of these statistics. The Honourable Member for Education, Health and Lands will deal with this point. He will also deal with the present public health position in Bengal. I shall pass on to another important problem, viz., rehabilitation of the famine destitutes in Bengal. In reply to a question during the session, I have said that the Bengal Government have already taken up this problem in all earnestness. Their proposals include opening and continuing hospitals, dispensaries, children's homes, orphanages' homes for unattached women and other destitutes. Milk canteens, employment of destitutes at work centres and at their homes in cottage industries, special assistance to fishermen, potters and other artisans, and loans for the purchase of cattle, house building, and redemption of lands sold in all seriously distressed areas. Work is already going on along these lines though the scheme as a whole is yet awaiting financial sanction by Government.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIA HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: Not put into execution yet?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: I have got some figures which I shall give in the course of my reply.

I may mention here the scheme of repair of boats which were removed from the coastal areas under the Denial Policy. One of the communities which have suffered most from this denial has been the fishermen class. The Government of Bengal now propose to return a considerable number of the 10,000 boats which they are reconditioning to distressed fishermen.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: I do not know whether the Honourable Member would refer to this matter again. May I ask a question? Will the fishermen get their boats without paying anything?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: When you address the House you should ask him that question. The Honourable Member has already said that he does not like to be disturbed. He loses the thread of his speech.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: It is a written speech. He cannot forget anything.

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: The Honourable Members of the House will probably ask what view we hold of the present position in Bengal. I shall try to give it. The average annual consumption of rice in Bengal before the war including 135,000 tons of net imports from Burma was about 8.2. If to this we add a carry over of 10 per cent. which must have largely been consumed last year owing to the pressure of famine conditions, the net surplus

after meeting all her requirements should be at least two million tons. There is, therefore, no intrinsic scarcity in Bengal as a whole this year. The problem is essentially one of distribution within the Province. During the last Food Debate both the Honourable Member and I gave some details of the scheme of *aman* procurement which we were then contemplating. That scheme with certain modifications is now in operation since January. The basic features of the scheme are:

(a) limitation of competition in the market by the elimination of all large consumers such as essential services and industries; control over movement from surplus to deficit areas, and rationing of urban and industrial areas.

(b) re-establishment of confidence in the countryside by reducing the impact of procurement by the Government agency to a minimum and with that object taking the demand of Calcutta off the market by arranging equivalent supplies from other surplus areas outside the Province; and

(c) bringing down prices to a reasonable level by the regulation of purchase operations.

The operations of the last two and a half months have brought out some interesting facts. The cultivators appear to be holding on to their crop—unlike last year it is yet the cultivators who hold the crop this year and not the traders or middlemen—as they have never done before. It is estimated that in spite of the weight of the crop in the surplus areas and the Government procurement agency proceeding cautiously and slowly with a view not to disturb public confidence, in no district have they brought into the market more than 50 per cent. of what they would normally bring up to this time of the year. In several districts it is very much less than 25 per cent. The explanation seems to be three-fold: public confidence has not yet returned to the extent necessary; secondly, the value that they are receiving for their crop is now so much more than in normal times that they can afford to meet their fixed obligatory charges, their past dues and their current requirements by disposing of a lesser quantity of their crop; and thirdly, they are waiting in expectation of higher prices as last year. We have, therefore, to proceed in a way which adequately meets these tendencies. We shall have to persevere in helping the return of public confidence. We shall have to take steps to make the cultivators release their stocks by providing them with consumer goods, by enforcing legal measures to realise from them arrear rents and agricultural loans—though making sure that only those who after last year's famine are now in a position to pay are made to pay. And finally, we shall have to deal drastically with those anti-social persons who for personal gain would not hesitate to see their people die of starvation. The other outstanding problem which faces the procurement operations in Bengal is the problem of movement. I have found apprehensions being expressed that our transportation arrangements are quite inadequate to meet the situation. I have no desire to minimise the difficulties. I will, however, say this that unlike last year, a comprehensive programme of movement of the *aman* crop has been drawn up in consultation with the Army and Transport authorities by Major-General Wakeley, now Director of Movement in Bengal, whose services have been made available to the Bengal Government by His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief. I will confess that for various reasons we have not been able to keep up to the programme. But I can assure the House that every one concerned is conscious that movement, not less than purchase, will be a determining factor in the success of the procurement scheme. I have already referred to the scheme of the Bengal Government to recondition boats which were removed from the coastal areas last year under the Denial policy. The removal of these boats had very considerably affected trade movements in that area. The Bengal Government have taken in hand the repair of about 10,000 of these boats and military assistance to expedite repair has already been made available. These boats are expected to be ready before the rains.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: What was the total number of the boats?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: It was in the region of 35,000.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRÜ: The Food Member stated last year that it was only 25,000.

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: So far as I am aware, the latest figures with which we have been supplied show that the number of boats removed was about 35,000.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRÜ: How many of them were totally destroyed?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: Some were destroyed by storm and some fell into disrepair.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRÜ: How many were destroyed by the Military authorities themselves or sold as fuel?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: So far as I am aware it is not the Military authorities who removed the boats. It is the district civil authorities and it is possible that in the course of removal some of the boats were damaged or destroyed but the number was very small.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRÜ: They were sold as fuel.

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: Well, the Honourable Member knows more than I do.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRÜ: This happened in the Dacca district.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Will you please not interrupt the Honourable Member but let him proceed?

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: What then is the food prospect of India as a whole in the coming year. I have described to you the administrative measures which we are stimulating and constantly improving throughout the country. They represent I submit the measure of Government's increasing power and steadfast determination to eliminate the profit motive from the people's food. Last year, we have a record *rabi* crop and this year we can look forward with some confidence to at least a good average crop and some carry-over from the previous harvest. Complete figures for the 1943-44 *Kharif* crop are not yet available. The *kharif* harvest was on the whole good throughout the country and it is estimated that millets and maize will approximate to last year's record level. We have been blessed with a very bountiful rice harvest although that harvest follows on a period of shortage and distress in which the normal carry-over has been consumed. We have imported substantial quantities of foodgrains and are in almost daily touch with His Majesty's Government on the subject of future importation programme. These are our assets and we have much to be thankful for. I recite them in no spirit of easy optimism or complacency but we are entitled to recognise them and then again to the task with fresh courage and determination. Honourable Members will have realised how much depends on my own Province and its people, the people of Bengal. The forecast shows that of the total excess over normal of 4.1 million tons Bengal's share is 3.6 millions. If that great volume of grain can be brought in due proportion to the market it will not only stabilise the position in Bengal but also in other deficit areas which are suffering from the loss of Burma rice such as Bombay, Travancore and Cochin. I have already referred to the procurement operations in Bengal. I have explained that the issues on which the "Battle of Bengal" is largely being fought are restoration of public confidence and awakening of public conscience. But restoration of public confidence and awakening of public conscience cannot be regarded as the sole concern of Government. Indeed it is the public leaders of the country and Press, not only Bengal but all over India, in whose hands the outcome of these issues largely lies. It is they who can and who must, irrespective of their party affiliations or of their political commitments, help to build back that public confidence and to awaken that social conscience—not as a concession to Government but as their over-riding duty in this hour of need of their and our own people. (Applause.)

THE HONOURABLE RAI BAHADUR SRI NARAIN MAHTHA (Bihar: Non-Muhammadan): Mr. President, the Honourable Mr. Sen, Director General of Food, has presented this House with one side of the picture, which is the official side.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: You are never satisfied by anything that is said by Government members.

THE HONOURABLE RAI BAHADUR SRI NARAIN MAHTHA: He has spoken in a very sympathetic tone, I admit. But Mr. Sen suffered from the disadvantage of being the advocate of a Government that is never tired of parading its own benevolence and preaching its own super-efficiency.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: He has done nothing of the sort. He has spoken today in a very sober manner and given the whole history of the case properly, correctly and in a very temperate manner. You cannot say he has paraded his own knowledge.

THE HONOURABLE RAI BAHADUR SRI NARAIN MAHTHA: My views on this question differ from yours.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Very well, The Honourable Member may proceed. But the 20 minutes will expire if he wastes time.

THE HONOURABLE RAI BAHADUR SRI NARAIN MAHTHA: Sir, my difficulty is that I cannot ignore what you say and shall have to sit down whenever you ask me to do so.

Mr. Sen, I was going to say, appeared to be speaking like a conscientious person. He was willing to throw the searchlight on himself and to reveal weaknesses and faults. But I found him apparently in the same position as an accused whose case was being argued before certain judges who felt convinced of the innocence of the accused because the advocates engaged by the accused had presented such documents and reports, such graphs, and charts, as showed to the judges that the accused was innocent. The accused himself was a conscientious person—perhaps as conscientious as Mr. Sen himself—and when he was asked what he thought about his guilt, he said: "I knew that it was true, but now, after the presentation of the case by my advocates, I also feel that perhaps I was not guilty". I think I may not be far wrong if Mr. Sen has arrived at his conclusions and convictions in the same manner.

Sir, when the food situation was reviewed in this House last time, the famine in Bengal naturally loomed large before our eyes. On that occasion, on the basis of such information and material as was available to me I tried to fix the responsibility for the Bengal famine on the Government of India. I also made a historical examination of the various famines and severe food scarcities that had been the lot of Indians since the advent of the British in this country. During the last 100 years famines have been no uncommon experience of the people of India. In fact a great majority of the people live perpetually on the verge of starvation. On the last occasion I gave to this House a picture of the chronic poverty of the people of India which to my mind was the result of a wrong fiscal and industrial policy and a wrong policy of imports and exports. I shall not go into that line of argument this time. The stern fact is that in spite of all what the Honourable Mr. Sen has said and in spite of the fact that he asserted that there was no scarcity of foodgrains in Bengal, actually there is famine in Bengal and the apprehension is that it threatens to spread all over the country. At many a time before also it was said that the position was being over-dramatized by Indian politicians. In the same manner as the Honourable Member has stated today, Lord Linlithgow, in December, 1942, giving expression to the official view before the Associated Chambers of Commerce in Calcutta, said:—

"A close study of the apparent shortages and the high prices which are evident in many centres suggests that though India has of course been deprived of its accustomed rice imports from Burma, the difficulties of the present situation are due less to any real deficiency of supplies than to the mental reactions of a great section of the community to the abnormal times in which we are living".

The Honourable Mr. Sen wanted to throw the same illusion on us today. This gave us the indication at that time and Mr. Sen's assertion again gives us

[Rai Bahadur Sri Narain Mahtha.]

a real insight today into the complacency of the Government of India on the question of food scarcity. They thought in December, 1942 that the scarcity was artificial: they think now that it is a hallucination in Bengal. But the real fact, as was shown even then by Dr. Radha Kamal Mukerjee is, that India was in 1942-43 deficit to the extent of 480,000 tons of wheat and 3.24 million tons of rice. He said so soon after the Viceroy had spoken. He said that India was deficient in her food supply for about sixty-three million people. But the Government of India continued to hold a different view. The assertion of "no shortage" continued to be made by the Government of India, even as it is being made today. It was made repeatedly till as late as May, 1943. Sir Aziz-ul-Huque, then on a visit to Calcutta, said that there was no rice shortage. For full three years after the war began, the Government of India had not even thought of opening a Food Department. In the thirty-ninth month of the war, a Food Section was added to the Department of Commerce and Industry. There was not, and there is not even today, a separate Ministry for Agriculture in the Government of India. Strange but significant is the fact that in a country like India, with agriculture as its most important industry, there is no separate Department in the Government of India for Agriculture. The Member for Education, Health and Lands is Chairman of the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, two of whose officials are now accorded the privilege of being housed in the main Secretariat. The rest of the staff is at New Pusa or in Simla, while the bulk of the Marketing section has been sent away to Ajmer!

Sir, the Government of India have from beginning to end dealt with the food question not at all in a serious way. Any one who has watched the progress of a famine in India cannot but feel ashamed of our reckless stupidity in allowing foodgrains and cattle to be openly exported. Any race with less of an ox-like patience of the Indian would have rebelled and yet we pretend that the Indians are a troublesome people to govern. Is this one of the reasons why we dare not let them have arms? Do we fear that if they had the arms, they would guard their cattle? These are harsh words indeed, but these, Sir, are not my words. These are the words of a British Army Doctor, Lieut.-Col. Arnold Osborn, D. S. O., who said that to govern the lesser breeds of men without the law, a different code of conduct was called for.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: May I remind the Honourable Member that we are discussing the food situation in India today and nothing else?

THE HONOURABLE RAI BAHADUR SRI NARAIN MAHTHA: I am discussing, Sir, the manner in which the Government of India are dealing with the food situation. The Government of India do not produce food; they spirit it away. My difficulty, as perhaps the difficulty of all non-official members, in dealing with the problem of production, procurement and distribution of food is that we have no reliable statistics. That is what I find was the difficulty of even those who were members of the Foodgrains Policy Committee appointed by Government. I do not know if Government themselves are in any better position even now. Whatever figures there are, are at best clever guesses. Reference was made by the Honourable Mr. Sen to the basic plan. The Foodgrains Policy Committee have dealt with the subject. But I find, Sir, that the way in which areas have been declared surplus or deficit does not appear to be sound. The Minister for Agriculture, Bengal who represented the Bengal Government on the Foodgrains Policy Committee, has protested against the formula adopted for this purpose and the result of my inquiries about several districts in Bihar goes to confirm his view. How dangerous, therefore, it may turn out to be, to base a plan of distribution on misleading figures. Besides, howsoever anxious we may be to find out the real state of things in a particular district,—other than the one which we may live in,—the condition of its inhabitants, the food available to them and the prospect of their requirements being met, the only means of obtaining knowledge is newspapers which are now more

or less valueless for the purpose, because they appear to have been precluded from commenting on or publishing comments on the way officials are dealing with the question of procurement and distribution of foodgrains. Sir, I have been supplied with a copy of the instructions issued by the Government of Bengal to newspapers. I do not know if these instructions were issued under instructions from the Government of India to restore confidence,—which, I agree with Honourable Mr. Sen to be necessary,—and I do not know whether these instructions have also been issued by other Provincial Governments or not. But the effect of the circular is noticeable on all newspapers of India. We find practically no comments in any papers, no critical examination of the methods or the manner in which food regulations are formulated or worked in various areas. The first instruction in the circular is: "Refrain from making further charges of muddle and inefficiency". The circular further says that newspapers should not publish all that has even been passed by the Press Advisers. This is a very tall demand and reveals nervousness and bad conscience. Small wonder, therefore, if what we know about official bungling and corruption is so little. The agents on whom we depend for the purpose of procurement have in many cases been found to have used their position for personal aggrandizement. I shall read out a report published in the *Statesman*. The news is dated Bareilly, January 24th. I shall read it out without giving names.

"The agent of a firm of rice dealers was today sentenced to six months' R. I. and a fine of Rs 500 or three months' further R. I. and his servant to three months' R. I. under the Defence of India Rules for contravening the United Provinces Foodgrains Control Order, 1943. The prosecution alleged that between June 18 and August 18, 1943, accused bought 3,923 bags of rice in Bareilly and kept them without the District Magistrate's permission. The entire stock of rice, estimated to cost about Rs. 1,63,000 was ordered to be forfeited. Accused said that he had bought the rice with the humanitarian object of saving the starving population of Bengal. The Magistrate remarked"—

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Then you support hoarding?

THE HONOURABLE RAI BAHADUR SRI NARAIN MAHTHA: No, Sir. The boot is on the other leg. I am putting this case forward on account of the fact that this man had indirectly the sanction of Government behind him. He was an officer of an agent of Government for procuring rice and I do not know if that agent is still in the employment of Government or holding his position.

"The Magistrate remarked that the plea of humanitarianism need deceive no one. Operators like him are responsible for keeping back big stocks out of circulation, thus causing great hardship to the public. They believe in making a fortune by selling only at place where they can get prices according to their wish, thus holding the public to ransom. Nothing but a deterrent sentence will meet the ends of justice".

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: You have got one minute more. Please finish.

THE HONOURABLE RAI BAHADUR SRI NARAIN MAHTHA: Yesterday, Sir, we discussed the question of fertilisers. I had not with me the figures then but when I have been able to get them, I realise how sad is our plight. According to statistics available at the commencement of the war, I find, that Belgium consumed 600 lbs. of artificial fertilisers per square mile, Japan 410, Germany 310, Denmark 226, Britain 178, France 141, and India 0.6. I suspect that even this small quota India has not got today. Against this background and the destruction of cattle which is necessary for agriculture, how hollow and meaningless sounds the "Grow More Food" slogan, which, in reality remains good enough only as a slogan. I have only one minute more, Sir, and I must conclude. I should have liked to have said something about rationing. I have made some inquiries in my own town where partial rationing is to be introduced, but evidently there is no time. I should have liked to say something about inflation and its effect on prices. I shall seek an occasion for that on the Finance Bill day. The paradoxical theories of the Finance Member have to my mind particularly contributed to our present condition. When I remember him my mind travels to Thomas Payne and the phrase he used about a British politician a century and a half ago. He said "He pities the plumage but he forgets the dying bird".

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM (East Bengal: Muhammadan): Sir, I am grateful to you for extending to me the privilege of speaking at an early stage. I feel it is one of those subjects in which I am interested, being representative of that area which admittedly is the worst affected by the food condition in this country. (An Honourable Member: "No, Cochin and Travancore.") I shall take off my hat to those who want to claim more distress in their locality. But we have been suffering very badly. I do not like to minimise the sufferings of others. It is admitted that when there is a war the food situation in war areas or even in distant parts will be affected to a certain extent. But the manner in which the food situation has deteriorated in India without being the actual battle-ground is indeed very serious. I respectfully differ from my Honourable friend who has just previously spoken and I do not think that the attitude of the Honourable Mr. Sen has been really to minimise the situation. I frankly concede that in many points we agree with him. But there are one or two matters where we have to disagree. I will first, before I go into the details, refer you, Sir, to the circumstances that led to the serious condition of affairs in this country. I do not know whether you perceived that even as early as July, 1941 there was perceptible rise in the price of rice in Northern India much before the price of rice went up even in Bengal—

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: We may probably agree that three or four years ago Government committed some sins and we did not support them. But is that a reason for not supporting them now?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: We are not going very much into the part, but only to those which will be relevant to understand the situation. As a matter of fact it has got to be admitted that simultaneously at that time a large quantity of wheat was being exported out of India and in order to fill up the gap in the food situation rice came in and the price of rice gradually flared up and for the first time it had its reaction in Bengal. Some rice used to go from Northern India into Bengal for various reasons. In December of the same year the Japs came into the war. In the early part of 1942 things started taking a very ugly shape in Bengal. You know that a certain policy was enunciated covering the southern and the south eastern districts of Bengal which was called the Denial Area. A line was drawn across the breast of Bengal called the Wavell line, named after the then Commander-in-Chief. It meant that the foodstuffs in that area had to be removed at very short notice by various sources. It is very apparent to those who know Bengal that the area south of the Wavell line is indeed the most productive area and is probably more or less the surplus area from which rice came for supplying the needs of generally the eastern and portions of northern Bengal. It so happens, Sir, that when the policy of denial was introduced Government directly and indirectly somehow or other started removing rice and in order to do it quickly they offered a price far higher than the ordinary price available at that time. The result was that for the first time in the history of Bengal the price of rice inflated up to a certain degree which we are now trying to lower down. Secondly, Sir, most of the Honourable Members of this House know as much as you do that almost all the big boats in the deltaic regions of Bengal were removed. I have got a very great dispute with regard to the figure of these boats. The Honourable Member who spoke today on behalf of the Government gave the figure at about 36,000. I do not think they should have any difficulty at all in giving accurate figure, because most of these boats were purchased—whether for adequate price or not is not the question—they were purchased and Government has got the statistics to show what number of boats were actually removed.

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: I gave the number and that was the number that was given by the Bengal Government after proper inquiry.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: Further, I find that even small boats which were left out of this purchase these boats were also controlled in its movements. The result was this. I will give a very typical case. A man going ten miles from Barisal the headquarters of the Bakarganj district

could not go without crossing two or three permit stations and those who have lived in the southern portions of Bengal know very well that going by boat is entirely dependent on the condition of tidal flows. If a man has to go and come back and to renew his permit he cannot go and possibly come back at all. The result was that even within 10 or 15 miles there was no boat traffic possible, even in a small craft which was only a few cubits long. You will be surprised to hear that at about this time a senior member of the Civil Service who was entrusted with the work of carrying out this denial policy went so far as to cut away all the plantain trees in that district lest they should be used as flotillas by the Japs who were expected to come to that area at any time. Ruthlessly the denial policy was followed in the richest rice-producing area. All available rice by artificial and unnatural methods were removed to the remotest parts of the province or even outside and various agencies were used—Government themselves and the industrialists. The industrialists near about Calcutta were allowed to send their agents to purchase in any manner they liked. They purchased stocks covering supply of one or two years. Military contractors were carrying out large undertakings in Eastern Bengal. They were also under the protection of Government purchasing large stocks of rice and hoarding them. As a matter of fact it was Government which allowed hoarding. It is the Government which is responsible for making hoarding possible in a circumstance which they very well know which with a little better control they could have avoided. Even when they knew that the result of removing all this rice from that area and placing it into the unnatural hands like those of the industrialist, the profiteer or for the matter of that the military contractor would ultimately react on the food problem of the Province they did not take any care to see that the rice that was being removed from the Denial Area was put in proper hands. They never did that. Although Government statistics show that so much of rice was removed through their agents they never arrived at accurate figures with the effect that the whole of the rice lying in Bakarganj, in 24-Parganas and Khulna was removed to distant places. Now, Sir, that is the beginning of the trouble there. You know it very well that it is not possible for any country to tally the year's produce with one year's need but it is necessary to carry forward the surplus, if any, in order to accommodate the supply of the next year. Now unfortunately, Sir, what has happened is this: that the rice which fell into unscrupulous hands was sold by them at a much higher price in the black market. That is how the price of rice rose to such a tremendous figure that I feel ashamed to mention the figure in this House. That is how, Sir, famine came out. There was no dearth of people to point out to Government—

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: I do not agree with you that the Bengal Government has made no mistakes in the past. Will you now make some constructive suggestions to avoid those mistakes?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: I am sorry that it is not the Bengal Government's fault. The Government of India is responsible for it. You will be mistaken if you think that only the Bengal Government is responsible for it.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: There I disagree with you.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: Because the Bengal Government had very little to do with it. The Bengal Government had to carry out every word that was communicated to it by the Government of India through the Governor or the Military authorities. There used to be continuous conflicts between the Governor and his Cabinet which resulted in the various catastrophic conditions later on. Therefore, it was primarily and fundamentally the responsibility of the Government of India and the Government of India is responsible for the famine in that country. I know that there are a lot of people in England even who have tried to make capital out of this famine by saying that Indians are unfit to administer their own affairs and that this is shown by the famine in Bengal where the Provincial Government has failed to do anything to prevent it. I would like to say that the Bengal Government was absolutely a puppet.

[Mr. A. Z. M. Rezai Karim.]

They could do nothing in the matter and it is the Government of India who is responsible for inauguration of the policy of denial. Was the Bengal Government responsible for controlling transport and railway arrangements? Was the Bengal Government responsible for purchasing of the boats and for allowing hoarders to hoard in the name of industrialists, military contractors, Government agents, etc.? Did they do it under the Bengal Government's instructions or of the Government of India or of His Majesty's Government? The ultimate responsibility for this famine must lie therefore either with His Majesty's Government or the Government of India. No one can get out of that and we who have been suffering from that know it very well. We were fighting the battles of others. People living in distant countries, as Mr. Sen has pointed out, have been very sympathetic to us, but I regret that the Government of India has treated us in a most step-motherly way in giving relief to us.

I am sorry, Sir, that I have to differ from Mr. Sen with regard to the statement made by him that very inaccurate statements have been made, and irresponsible statements have been made. I will only draw Mr. Sen's attention to a statement made by the Premier of Bengal as early as November, 1943 in the open session of the All-India Muslim League. That statement has been published in the Press and in *The Bengal Weekly*. I have not up to now heard any repudiation of that statement at all.

THE HONOURABLE SIR SATYENDRA NATH ROY: What is the statement?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: The statement runs like this:—

"We took office on April 24"—

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: What are you reading?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: I am reading a copy of the statement.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: From where?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: From *The Bengal Weekly*, which is published by the Bengal Government.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: I cannot allow you to read from a newspaper. You can repeat those arguments in your own words.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: I will repeat what he said in my own way then. Sir Nazimuddin said in November, 1943, while addressing the Council of the Muslim League, that after they took charge of the Administration a basic plan was formulated by the Bengal Government, under which 793,000 tons of foodgrains were to be procured by the Government of India from the neighbouring Provinces and States, but that it became evident after some time that the Government of India were not in a position to implement their promise since the Bengal Government actually received 73,494 tons instead of 793,000 tons. You will, Sir, appreciate the difference between the two figures. The stipulation was that they would get 793,000 tons and actually they were supplied only 73,494 tons.

THE HONOURABLE SIR SATYENDRA NATH ROY: Over what period?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: Over a period of three months.

THE HONOURABLE SIR SATYENDRA NATH ROY: Between what months?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: The Government of India had announced their basic plan to which my friend Mr. Sen has referred. Under that basic plan the Bengal Government were to receive:—

Rice	Tons.
Wheat	350,000
Millet	224,000
Gram	200,000
	19,000
Total	793,000

These foodgrains were to be procured by the Government of India.

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: May I ask one question? My Honourable friend has repeated the figure of 793,000 tons. Is that for the whole year?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: Well, most likely it was for the period till the next *aman* crop.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: What evidence have you got that these figures are accurate?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: These figures have been supplied by a very responsible authority—by the Premier of Bengal.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: In a speech which was made before a political meeting?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: All politicians are going to be the leaders of the Government of tomorrow and if politicians are not to be believed—

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: That may be, but you know very well that when politicians go out and speak at political meetings all their figures and statements are not always correct. They have to do some propaganda and they say many things in support of that propaganda. You know that very well.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: If I am to agree with you, Sir, I shall be one of those persons who must kick off constitutional government in this country. I shall have to kick-off constitutional government if I am to agree that those who have any connection with any political party cannot be leaders.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: I did not say that at all. It is your version.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: When statements are made on public platforms or at political meetings, they are supposed to be made with all responsibility.

THE HONOURABLE SIR SATYENDRA NATH ROY: May I ask one question, Sir? 793,000 tons has been given as the figure which the Bengal Government was promised, and 73,494 tons as the figure which were actually delivered. Over what period was this quantity supposed to be delivered, and over what period was the quantity actually delivered?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: It was supposed to be delivered over the period till the next crop came in, but after supplying 73,000 tons they again indicated in the next conference that they could not carry it out.

THE HONOURABLE MR. B. R. SEN: May I point out that actually last year 820,000 tons of foodgrains were delivered to Bengal?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: That is what I am trying to impress upon him—that those figures are never accepted as final.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: They themselves changed the basic plan after convening the next conference. The Government of India did not stick to the original plan.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: The Honourable Member is exceeding his time limit. There are many other Honourable Members wishing to speak, and I have to hear them all.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: I crave your indulgence and request you not to allow further interruptions.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Who interrupts the Honourable Member? He need not reply to interruptions.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: The Premier goes on—after the basic plan had been drawn up and they had failed to supply the promised quantity of foodgrains—after that, according to the Premier:—

“A series of conferences were held early in May with Major General Wood and Messrs. Vigor and Braund, to discuss ways and means to meet the situation.

The Honourable Minister for Civil Supplies, Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy, made it quite clear that if the situation in Bengal was to be adequately met, it was essential that the quotas promised under the basic plan should be sent to Bengal within the next few months; that Bengal's needs were immediate and

[Mr. A. Z. M. Rezai Karim.]

pressing, and that it was no use if supplies reached us later in the year. He asked the Government of India whether they were in a position to give a categorical assurance that adequate supplies under the basic plan would be made available within the next two to three months. The Government of India's representatives were unable to give any such assurance. After protracted discussions, the following alternative proposals were put to the Government of Bengal for consideration:—

(a) modified form of free trade within the Eastern Zone based on wagon movements from each province;

(b) full free trade within the Eastern Zone and the abrogation of the basic plan with a promise, as an emergency measure of relief, until conditions under the free trade settled down, of 45,000 tons of foodgrains within a month".

The Government of Bengal, Sir, chose the second alternative. Now, what happened is this:—

"They chose the latter alternative. It is necessary to point out in this connection that while making their choice they were under no illusion as regards the reactions of the neighbouring Provinces to the free trade scheme. The Honourable Minister for Civil Supplies, the Honourable Mr. H. S. Suhrawardy, left no doubt in the minds of the Government of India's representatives that these provinces would all go out to frustrate the scheme by placing every obstacle in the way".

The Premier says that the Central Government, however, assured them that whatever the obstacles were, they would somehow implement the promise to supply 45,000 tons. But, Sir, if you go a little further, at another conference, held, on the 8th May, 1943, Major General Wood on behalf of the Government of India laid down further conditions. Those conditions were as follows:—

(1) The fact that there was a sufficiency of food for Bengal should be proved statistically and given the widest publicity by advertising and repeating *ad nauseam*.

That is, of course, important, from the point of view of morale and so far as the question of the psychology of the people is concerned. It was from that point of view that this condition was made by the Government of India. The second condition was:—

(2) No price control in Bengal until Government acquire physical control of supplies of rice. Meanwhile, forget prices and concentrate on ensuring free flow of rice into the market and exercise restraining influence on prices through Government agencies at regulated prices.

Then, Sir, in July the Government of India called another All-India Food Conference, and the most interesting part therein is this. Sir Nazimuddin says that the Government of India could not supply 45,000 tons in one month as promised under the previous scheme. As a result of the July Conference, the Government of India informed the Bengal Government that they could not supply 45,000 tons and they offered a new arrangement by which they said Bengal would receive, between July and March, the following foodgrains:—

	Tons.
Rice	15,000
Wheat	340,000
Millets	40,000
Gram	46,000

The Government of Bengal naturally submitted their protest, saying that this was no good, and that unless and until foodgrains actually reached them within a month or so, they would be of no use because people would have died by that time. What I am driving at is this, that as a matter of fact the Government of India itself had no policy. They did not know their own mind. The Government of India's whole difficulty has been this. I do not think any Honourable Member on this side will deny it when I say that when they wanted to acquire rice from neighbouring Provinces and States they were faced with very great difficulties and they could not get it. If they knew that they could not get it, it was much better to have left the province to its own fate.

Therefore, Sir, the position is this. The responsibility for the famine which broke out after July in a very awful and awkward way is the entire responsibility of the Government of India; it is due to the vacillating policy of the Government of India and their want of foresight. When they knew that they were going to war, when they knew that the Japs had actually declared war, when they had removed rice and other foodgrains, they should have anticipated the difficulties and set up an organisation. Sir, living in another province, one does not really feel the pinch as we in Bengal feel it, although Bengal is not a battleground—

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Everybody feels for Bengal.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: We feel more because everybody in every-day life, from travelling in trains right up to eating morsels, does feel it in Eastern Bengal where the Japs are within 300 or 400 miles of ourselves. So, the position is that the responsibility of keeping us alive and giving us protection is the entire responsibility of the Government of India.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: You blame the Government of India for the Denial Policy.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: When they decided upon the Denial Policy, they should have had the foresight to set up an organisation—

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Will you conclude now?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: Yes, Sir.

What I say is this. The responsibility for this is the Government of India's vacillating policy. Furthermore, what appears to me far more important is that proper assistance should have been given when famine actually broke out and when relief measures were called for. I do not know if the Government of India has given any amount of money for famine relief in Bengal excepting as loans. If they have not done it, or even if they have given small amounts towards relief, they should consider the crores of rupees that has been spent in giving relief to famine-stricken people in Bengal—starving and diseased people—for which the Government of India are really responsible. Should not the Government of Bengal get the whole of the amount, for which the Government of that province has no responsibility whatsoever?

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Will you please conclude your remarks now? I will have to allow other Honourable Members to speak also. There are 20 other speakers.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: I conclude by saying that I personally feel that the Government of India are entirely responsible for the whole thing. The responsibility for this famine and for this mortality in the Province will lie on their head.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: You have said enough. I will allow the Bengal members precedence in speaking. They are more aggrieved and therefore on this occasion I will allow them precedence.

THE HONOURABLE KUMAR NRIPENDRA NARAYAN SINHA (West Bengal: Non-Muhammadan): Sir, at the outset I will say that I do not want to occupy more than just a few minutes of the time of the House. I must explain that I am one of those zamindars who spend most of their time amongst their own tenants; and so I may fairly claim to be somewhat well acquainted with the conditions prevailing in rural areas at least in my side of the country.

Sir, it is a strange irony of the situation that in India which is preponderantly an agricultural country, of almost limitless resources, with fertile soil and fairly favourable weather conditions, with a cheap and readily available labour supply in normal conditions, it should be necessary to resort to food rationing. But the abnormal situation created by the war calls for exceptional remedies. I will, however, briefly summarise my points as follows:

With regard to the "Grow More Food" campaign, proper facilities should be provided to the agriculturist where necessary, in the way of supplying improved seeds, manure, irrigation facilities at cheap rates and cheap agricultural implements. There seems to be a lurking suspicion in the minds of the agriculturist:

[Kumar Nripendra Narayan Sinha.]

generally that Government might attach the standing crops and commandeer them for army use. They should be disabused of this impression and Government should publicly proclaim that they have no such intention. This will naturally restore confidence and give added impetus to the "Grow More Food" campaign.

Hoarding, profiteering and black markets must be ruthlessly suppressed.

Sir, the food requirements of the army have, I think, been overemphasized in the past to the neglect of the civilian population, but I am glad to know that His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief has declared that the armed forces arriving in this country will not be allowed to be a drain on this country's resources of foodgrain. This should not be a mere pious hope but a *fait accompli*.

Other remedies are the complete elimination of competitive buying so as to avoid the profits of the middleman. Monopolies like those given to Ispahanis in Bengal must be rigorously excluded. Prices of commodities should also be brought down so as to be within the reach of the common people. The Central Government have accepted the introduction of a system of individual rationing in all large cities and towns as a fundamental policy; Local Governments have been called upon to adhere to this policy. There are undoubtedly serious practical difficulties in giving effect to this plan, but such difficulties are to a large extent inherent in the situation and should be overcome as far as possible. The supply of food should be adequate, of good quality and readily available, as the homely proverb says that the "belly does not accept bail". The quality and quantity of food should be such to which no reasonable exception could be undertaken, but I am sorry to say that complaints have been pouring in from those places in which food rationing has been introduced and standard shops have been opened and that the food supply is generally mixed up with other ingredients and is otherwise so bad and rotten that it is unfit for human consumption and constitutes a positive source of danger to public health. Government seems callous and indifferent, the contractors and middlemen make their ill-gotten pile, while the public suffer in silence. This state of things calls for speedy remedy, otherwise the woeful picture of famine and pestilence in Bengal will be reproduced on the broad canvas of India, which will have its inevitable repercussions not only on the economic but the political situation of the country.

Sir, I must now stop and I will only say this in conclusion that no debate on the food situation will be complete without a word of reference to the depletion of India's milch and draught cattle. There has been a great increase in the slaughter of cows and bullocks in recent years for the supply of food to the foreign armies in India. Restrictions on slaughter of certain categories of cattle have no doubt been issued, but I am afraid they are not adequate and besides they have not been strictly complied with by the local authorities. Indiscriminate slaughter will result in permanent danger to the cattle wealth of the country. Even now the agricultural operations are seriously hampered by the growing scarcity of bullocks and their soaring prices; Government must take effective measures early to restore the normal supply of cattle to the agricultural requirements of the country in the interest of food and milk production, national economy and well being. Sir, coming as I do from Bengal, I will only say this that the present Ministry in my Province has signally failed to tackle the situation and I suggest the means may be found to replace the present Ministry by one formed out of all the principal political elements in the Province which will command popular confidence and thereby strengthen the hands of the new Governor of Bengal.

THE HONOURABLE MR. M. N. DALAL (Bombay: Non-Muhammadan): Sir, in spite of all that has been said it cannot be denied that the razor blade edge of famine conditions in this country has been considerably blunted, and there has been a considerable amount of reduction in deaths in Bengal since the worst days.

During the current year the yield of rice has been 30 million tons, which is the second largest in the whole of this century. The excess of rice production

has been 2.3 million tons as compared with the average of the last two years. According to a report issued by the A. P. I. on the 10th March, 1944, and as confirmed by the Honourable the Food Secretary today, the number of deaths in Bengal in 1943 has been 58 per cent. more than the average of the last five years. I am not for a moment suggesting, Mr. President, that this number is small. I am not suggesting that the Provincial Governments and the Central Government should be self-complacent and pat themselves on the back. Their sins of commission and omission have been many, but, at the same time, it cannot be denied that the number of deaths in Bengal have been controlled and reduced to a microscopic proportion.

Along with rice production, Sir, the production of wheat, bajra, and several other foodgrains has also gone up. It is true that the increased demands on account of army purchases and inflation in the country has made things a little more difficult, especially when the Burma rice has been cut off, and there is plenty of misery in the country when the price of rice has gone up three to four times its pre-war basic rate even at controlled rates whereas the purchasing power of the man-in-the-street has not increased proportionately.

I have, Sir, on an earlier occasion dealt with the effects of inflation on the prices of foodgrains, both in this country and in the United Kingdom and I shall not dwell on it today. But the Food Department seems to have taken reasonable action on the recommendations of the Gregory Committee, as shown by the issue of a pamphlet given to us recently. So far as supplies are concerned, Government must go on concentrating on more and more imports into this country. Government have up to now imported 386,000 tons of foodgrains. The inadequacy of this amount has been revealed from the fact that the average pre-war excess of imports over exports was about one million tons. We have categorical statements from responsible Members of Parliament in Canada and in Australia that there is plenty of wheat available in those Dominions if only shipping space could be made available. If the United Kingdom and the United States of America expect India to give her full share and real efforts in this war, it is their primary and immediate duty to supply shipping space to bring in foodstuffs into this country.

Sir, much has been said by one of the members who preceded me on the "Grow More Food" campaign. I shall not dilate on it, except to add that a little more pep and effort should be put into it to make the scheme a success.

Another immediate suggestion to meet the scarcity of foodstuffs would be to develop root crops, like potatoes, sweet potatoes, onions, beetroot, radishes, etc. These, Sir, as we know from experts, contain a lot of alkalies, vitamins and iron and the development of these would certainly help the food situation in the country.

According to a statement made on the 24th February last by the Member in charge of Education, Health and Lands Department, during the last three months the quantity of chemical fertilisers imported into India was 1,090 tons. At this rate Government would agree that the import is not sufficient, taking into consideration the vast area of this country.

India's crop yield per acre is the worst among all the civilised countries of the world. To prove this I shall give a few statistics before I sit down and I shall not take more than five minutes. Sir, the world yield per acre in regard to rice crop is 1,440 pounds, that of U. S. A. 1,680 pounds, that of China 2,433 pounds, that of Japan 3,070 pounds, while that of India is only 988 pounds per acre. Similarly the world yield per acre of wheat crop is 840 pounds, that of U. S. A. 990 pounds, that of China 989 pounds, that of Japan 1,350 pounds and that of India only 811 pounds per acre. The above figures showing the lowest position which India occupies could be easily understood by the very fact that artificial fertilisers are not much used in this country.

It has been estimated that artificial fertilisers used per square mile in France amounts to 141 pounds, in Britain 178 pounds, in Denmark 276 pounds, in Germany 310 pounds, in Japan 410 pounds and in Belgium 600 pounds, while in India it is 0.6 pound per square mile. I would therefore suggest very

[Mr. M. N. Dalal.]

strongly that provision should be made for manufacturing artificial fertilisers in this country and for the importation of machinery to build such factories. I would request Government again, Sir, to immediately devise means by which subsidies on a very large scale could be given to agriculturists as in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Finally I would request Government to have a co-ordinated agricultural policy so as to give to the agriculturist more seeds and improved seeds, and improved implements at attractive rates and at the same time give them the knowledge to produce more and give them the knowledge to learn the art of the rotation of crops, so as to improve the agricultural position and thereby the food situation in this country.

THE HONOURABLE MR. KUMARSANKAR RAY CHAUDHURY (East Bengal: Non-Muhammadan): I am sorry, Sir, the Government is looking at the situation in Bengal with a wrong perspective. There has no doubt been some alleviation of the condition of the agriculturists who form the bulk of the Indian population. This is true in the case of other Provinces, but on account of the failure of crops through flood, cyclone and famine in Bengal last year, where holdings on account of being split up into small doles through the law of succession prevailing there and low prices for many many years had almost become quite uneconomic, a large number of people were brought to the verge of destitution and compelled to sell away their lands and cattle. Their number was further swelled by the artisans and other classes of people not employed on land being also compelled on account of high prices, to sell away all their belongings. What the Government should have done was to find employment for these people by adopting the construction of various public works as provided in the Famine Code. They did not do so. They fought shy or purposely refrained from declaring famine and when people were brought to their last extreme, were forced to grant some doles which they have since withdrawn and some loans to rehabilitate the people in their old ways of uneconomic life, loans which have been spent away by them as soon as they were obtained for maintaining themselves. Uneconomic holdings which had passed into richer hands and were being gradually consolidated are again, by enacting special laws, being forced on to the poorer classes instead of an attempt being made to secure for them employment in other ways of life by the opening out of relief works and new industries. What little money has come into the hands of the comparatively small number of richer agriculturists by the subsequent good outturn of crops is also, instead of being allowed to remain in their hands to be employed for bettering their condition, sought to be realised by Government through compelling them to buy War Loans by all means, fair and foul.

A cry has also been raised that this money is lying idle in their hands and although people are in dire need of various necessities of life, such as salt, kerosene, fuel, cloth and medicines, no serious attempt is made by Government to supply these wants by adopting any method of rationing for them, while they are keen on importing wine, bicycles and other articles of luxury from abroad and trying to force them on the people and have even employed a foreign concern like the Bata Company to induce people to wear more shoes.

The after effects of the last famine have been severe in the shape of deaths due to starvation and illness. We do not know its exact extent having to rely on the report of the village *chowkidar* and no one beginning from the Secretary of State down to the Provincial Government seems to know the exact position and it is high time that a census should be taken about it in order to forewarn and forearm us for the coming still more greater famine during the rains of which the Government has already given us the warning and which the failure of the *rabi* crops in Bengal portend. Dealing with the failure of the *rabi* crops, I take opportunity to mention that the failure of raising the onion crop in Bengal is entirely due to the failure of Government in affording proper transport facilities for bringing onion seeds from Madras and other Provinces from which they used to come before.

I shall now conclude my remarks by saying a few words about the price of rice now prevailing in Bengal. It is as the Government stated in the other House Rs. 18 in surplus districts and Rs. 15 in deficit districts, but the actual price is far higher in many places and there is still a deficit of rice in many places. This is also due to the policy adopted by Government; for in their zeal that the cultivators should get better prices they are encouraging them to hold their stock in the hope that Government will ultimately purchase them which the Government has already declared to be their objective. Instead of this the Government should, if they intend to afford relief to people in distress, arrange for the immediate purchase of good stocks at a fair price and sell them to the people in distress at a comparatively low price.

I am also surprised to learn from the Food Secretary, in reply to a question of mine, that although they have adopted rationing in Calcutta and the mufassil through their own agencies mainly, none of the retail dealers in food materials has been thrown out of employment at all.

The Council then adjourned for Lunch till Three of the Clock.

The Council re-assembled after Lunch at Three of the Clock, the Honourable the President in the Chair.

THE HONOURABLE MR. SUSIL KUMAR ROY CHOWDHURY (West Bengal: Non-Muhammadan): Sir, this is the third time we are having a discussion in this House about the food situation in the country. The question is: Has there been a material improvement in the food situation? I am constrained to say "No". There may have been some improvement, but not substantial and material improvement. The little improvement that is now noticed in Bengal is due to the time of the year, when the *aman* crop has just been harvested. The situation is bound to deteriorate after a few months as most of the small cultivators and landless labourers will have no foodgrains left with them owing to their being forced to sell all the foodgrains in their possession for the bare necessities these poor agriculturists require for themselves and their families. In spite of high promises, the consumer goods have not been made available to them in the villages at cheap and reasonable rates. The Government of Bengal, I am afraid, are not doing what they should do in this respect. They are too busy suppressing news and facts about the food situation in the country. They have recently issued a circular to all the newspapers in the Province of Bengal asking them not to publish any news or facts about the food situation which are likely to show up the inefficiency and incompetency of the Government.

Sir, people are asked to have confidence in the Government. How can the people have confidence in a Government like the Government of Bengal, when they find that the firm of Messrs. Ispahani, Ltd., which has got intimate connections with the Government of Bengal, has been appointed one of the chief agents for the procurement of the *aman* crop in the Province, while an agent of the said firm has been convicted by a Court in the United Provinces in connection with the procurement of rice in that province?

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: Is that correct?

THE HONOURABLE MR. SUSIL KUMAR ROY CHOWDHURY: Yes. Mr. Mirza, an agent of Messrs. Ispahani, was convicted.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: There was an item of news only yesterday that one of the military officers had admitted that it was on behalf of a Department of the Government of India that the purchase was made. It was not for the Government of Bengal.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: The Honourable Member is in possession of the House. Let him proceed.

THE HONOURABLE MR. SUSIL KUMAR ROY CHOWDHURY: He was an agent of Ispahani and he admitted it.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: That is correct, but the purchase was not for the Government of Bengal.

THE HONOURABLE MR. SUSIL KUMAR ROY CHOWDHURY: I did not say it was for the Government of Bengal. I said he was an agent of Ispahanis and these Ispahanis have been appointed chief agents.

Then, again, Sir, in Assam, it has been admitted by the Chief Minister there, that a brother of a Minister of the Province living in joint family with him, has been appointed agent for the procurement of foodgrains in the said Province. Sir, the Government of India is looking with equanimity and complacence at these instances of bribery and corruption and still wants the people to have confidence in the said Government.

Sir, as regards the supply of very bad quality of foodstuffs in the ration shops in Calcutta, my suspicion is that these have come out from the hoarded stock of some of the agents of the Government of Bengal and now the Government of Bengal is trying to shift its responsibility elsewhere.

If you really want a lasting improvement in the food situation and want to avert a greater calamity this year, the Government of India through the Provincial Governors should take steps to remove these corrupt Provincial Governments and bring in Governments representing all parties in their stead.

Sir, finally I would appeal to the Honourable the Food Member and the Honourable Member who is doing so much for the "Grow More Food" campaign that if foodgrains are requisitioned from the agriculturists and rationing is introduced in the rural areas, a little more foodgrains should be allowed to each member of an agriculturist's family and not half a pound a day only as was done by the District Magistrate of 24-Parganas last year.

THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL (Bombay: Non-Muhammadan): Mr. President, we had, as the member who has preceded me said, two discussions in this House on this very subject, and are having a third discussion today. I am sure this third discussion will be as useful as the two previous discussions have been. I am not here concerned with political issues or with communal issues.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: There is no communal issue before us.

THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL: True, there is no communal issue: but one of the speakers here gave me the impression that, he atleast was concerned, if not a part of the House, with defending or attacking any ministry or Government, whether Central or Provincial for communal reasons. On an issue like this, a paramount issue which affects the vital interests of the people, Sir, I for one will not hesitate for a moment to kick out any ministry, whether it is a Congress ministry or a Hindu ministry, if that ministry fails to discharge its duty in the matter of food. Any country which desires self-government, a representative form of government, must also know how to exercise powers and turn out the government, if that government fails to discharge its duty. My contention is that, whether it is the Bengal Government or the Government of India, even if the Government should consist entirely of Britishers, if they discharge their duty well, I for one will give them credit for discharging their duty properly in this matter. But should they fail, I would certainly criticise them, and I feel that should be the attitude of my Honourable friend Mr. Parker. He comes from a country which knows well its mind as regards the discharge of their duties by the Ministers. If the people find that a Minister has not carried out his duties, they simply turn him out. I have the same sentiment in this matter. So, Sir, such kind of Ministries should be turned out.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: Including the Honourable Members of the Government of India.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: We have very limited time. Let there be no interruptions. I may tell the Honourable Member that a Minister was turned out two or three years ago.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: In Bengal also the Ministry changed in April.

THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL: I do not say that this particular Ministry should be turned out. It is for the people of the Province to say that. What I urge is that they should, irrespective of any other consideration, turn out the Ministry if that Ministry has not discharged its duties as it should have done.

With these preliminary remarks, I shall, without going into the history of the past so far as this question is concerned, offer a few remarks with regard to the present situation. We have had the Foodgrains Policy Committee Report, and the relevant question which I ask of my Honourable friend is, how many recommendations of that Committee have been accepted by Government and if any of them have not been accepted, what are the reasons for rejecting those recommendations? I shall refer in this connection to the note furnished by the Government of India as regards their views on the Foodgrains Policy Committee's Report. They say that the Foodgrains Policy Committee's Report contains 56 recommendations for action—a very large number of recommendations, no doubt, but also very necessary recommendations—and 37 conclusions or statements of facts or opinions. The Government of India have accepted all the recommendations, except No. 91 relating to the Export Arbitration Committee; and conclusion No. 66 regarding the food prices is not accepted. I shall come to this a little later.

First I shall deal with the statistical position. The Foodgrains Policy Committee bitterly complained, as we have all been complaining for a number of years, about the inadequacy of the statistical data in this country. With regard to this what the Government say is: "Improvement of agricultural statistics involves the setting up of machinery for the collection of reliable figures of actual acreage and yield of principal crops from year to year in the permanently settled areas, similar to the revenue machinery in the regional tracts". This collection of statistics has been neglected far too long. In areas which are under Permanent Settlement, this is the responsibility, at present, of the responsible Ministry in Bengal. I hope responsible Ministries will take, if they have not already taken, necessary steps in the matter and that the Government of India will exert every pressure they can on these Ministries not to delay taking measures for the collection of statistics. Again coming to statistics, instead of our having better and improved statistics, whatever had been available before have now been cut down very much. The latest report on agricultural produce which used to be published annually—which is now in my hands and in the hands of the Honourable Member in charge of the Department, is the one relating to 1940-41; we are now in the year 1944. Instead of having better statistics, I say we are now worse off than ever before in this respect. I realise, Sir, there is a war on. But, Sir, the Statistical Department also is there. All the reports which they had been getting are there. I do not, therefore, see any reason why there should be this dislocation in the Statistical Department. This is, to my mind, something which ought to be explained by the Government.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Was it due to paper economy?

THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL: They have not given any reason. They do not publish many statistics now, and when they are published, they are useless. I used to receive some of them month to month, and some from year to year. Now, they are published so late that the material becomes stale. It is just like taking stale food. One no longer takes the same interest in reading them. To mention one example. *The Monthly Survey of Business Conditions in India* used to be published every month. But the latest copy I have been able to get is dated June, 1943. We will soon be in June, 1944. Statistical improvements during the war the Government say "is not possible". I am not prepared to accept this plea. The Government say in the Note that "the forecasts improved in some respects". Now, India produces not only wheat and rice, but also in a large quantity what are known as Indian millets, i.e., bajra and jowar. You do not have their crop forecasts. The Government of India have not got any kind of forecasts for these while we have forecasts

[Mr. G. S. Motilal.]

of other crops, that is, the commercial crops. I do not see why Indian millet crop forecasts should not be given. They are useful data. Therefore, forecasts of crops like bajra and jowar should also be provided.

The Government Note tells us something about the distribution of improved seed. While I appreciate whatever steps Government have taken in this respect, I feel they should be continued and our interest not get slackened in this respect.

I now come to the question of compost, of town refuse, its proper utilization. All that we are told in this connection is that the Government are "taking steps". I admit it takes time for schemes of this kind to materialise, but I hope the Government will expedite these schemes, for, it looks as though after all, we must rely upon our own resources in the matter of food supply. After hearing the reply during yesterday's discussion of the Resolution I moved on the subject of fertilizers, I have come to the conclusion that it is no use relying upon imports from outside India. Whatever be our resources, we must develop them. It is only in that direction, our hope lies, because, whatever request we make to the United States Government and to the United Kingdom, they trot out their difficulties in meeting the request. They do not appreciate, or cannot, our point of view. They do not see how much India is suffering. They only think of their own problems. Sir, we have a proverb, as you know: "Apne dadhi pahle bujhajati hai" which means "You first look after your own beard". They are looking after their own beards there and therefore I will say to my friends, "Let us look after our own beards". (*An Honourable Member*: "We have not got any.") You can grow one if you like. What I was told yesterday was that as a business man I should know that if I want to purchase fertilisers, there should be a seller. Where is the seller, I was asked. The plain meaning of all this is that we are not going to get the fertilizers. So I would not waste my time over it. Let us get our own town compost as quickly as we can and give it to the farmers and growers.

Sir, I listened very carefully to the speech of the Honourable Mr. Sen and I was looking anxiously as to what he would say with regard to the importation of one million tons of grains. This is what he said. "We have imported substantial quantities of foodgrains and are in almost daily touch with His Majesty's Government on the subject of future importation programme". Sir, language is given to man to communicate his ideas but man is cleverer than the one who has given him the language. Here this language has lent itself to the Honourable Member to conceal his own thoughts and ideas. He has done it very cleverly. It will give one the impression that we are getting all the supplies we want which the Foodgrains Committee suggested. Even my Honourable friend Mr. Parker, whose language English is, will probably, unless he reads it very carefully, think that lots of supplies are pouring down and we have imported substantial quantities of foodstuffs.

Sir, in answer to some of the questions and in his speech also the Honourable Member has told us what supplies of foodgrains we have so far been able to get. They are nothing like the supplies that are required. It is diplomatic language that is being used in this House. It was said "The Government are in almost daily touch". That means that they have not got a definite reply from His Majesty's Government. If daily touch is of no avail, you should be in hourly touch and even if the hourly touch does not succeed, tell this House and this country plainly that His Majesty's Government are not able to spare the shipping space which we require. This is the hard fact. Whether we like it or not we shall have to face it. Then within your own means, within your own resources you should so adjust your economy that there will be plenty of food. We shall not waste our time asking Government to press upon His Majesty's Government to get this or that amount of food or fertilisers. After the war we should be careful and look after ourselves in such matters. However, it is but right that we should insist upon this Government taking such measures as may be necessary

in view of the hardships to which we are exposed during this war. Let us not be kept under any delusion in this. Let not the Government also be under any delusion. Let them say boldly to Britain and America, as a businessman would say "We have asked you once, twice, thrice. We are not going to ask you again. Please tell us definitely. Are you in a position to deliver or not, are you in a position to spare shipping or not? If not, we are not going to quarrel with you like children. We shall see what we can do ourselves and we shall manage from our own resources".

I wish to offer one or two observations before I close. It is satisfying to be told that the Government of India have stopped exports of foodgrains except to Ceylon to a limited extent and for meeting certain other requirements of Indians overseas and the Indian personnel of the fighting forces. Another satisfactory assurance is that of Commander-in-Chief who has said that so far as supplies are concerned for the forces from outside India (that is, American and other forces), they will not put that burden upon India. I hope the Government of India will keep a very strict eye in the matter.

I now come to rationing. I think rationing is a very good device. It should be persisted in. Rationing will mitigate the hardships which are being experienced as a result of the war. I am in agreement with the proposal that rationing should be through individual cards. In Bombay we had "family cards". The head of the family was given one card for the whole family. Now they have introduced the individual cards system in place of the "family cards" system. This is an improvement and I hope that Government will follow this system in other places also where they propose to introduce rationing. (*An Honourable Member*: "It is individual.") I am glad it is going to be the individual system in every Province after the experience of Bombay.

One thing I would like to add. In this matter of foodgrains and supply, while we want to criticise Government for their shortcomings, we are prepared to give rationing our wholehearted support so that our people may get the food they require.

With these remarks, Sir, I resume my seat.

THE HONOURABLE MR. R. H. PARKER (Bombay Chamber of Commerce): Sir, I would like to start by expressing appreciation of the lucid, interesting and informative statement made by the Honourable Mr. Sen this morning. I would also like to express appreciation of the efforts made by General Stuart and the Army in Bengal to assist in the situation which existed there towards the end of last year and the beginning of this year. I welcome various suggestions that have been made today. In particular I would like to see Agriculture under one Minister as his sole work. Agriculture, after all is said and done, is 80 or 90 per cent. of the life of this great country and I think there is quite enough work for one Minister. The Honourable Member from Eastern Bengal referred to the strain, the mental and nervous strain, of living within a few hundred miles of the front. That is undoubtedly a truism. Anybody who has lived through bombing knows it. My wife knows it. For nearly a year she was nursing in Chittagong and she told me something of the strain through which the people of that part of Bengal were going. But you still have to retain an amount of perspective in these matters. You have to remember that the fact that you are a little nearer does not make you quite in the same position as the people who are in it. The Honourable Mr. Motilal was supporting a view which I hold very strongly and have always held that to a very large extent we must rely on our own resources in this country and that we should certainly do all we can to try and make use of them. One thing, however, has puzzled me and I do not know why I have not asked members privately about it. Why is it that the ordinary villager will continue to use the most valuable natural manure as fuel? I cannot understand it. I think we ought to use our best influences to discourage that habit. Then the Honourable Mr. Motilal referred to the necessity for being in constant touch with His Majesty or rather I think with His Majesty's Government—or rather he suggested that we were wasting time

[Mr. R. H. Parker.]

by being in constant touch. I would like him to bear in mind that the position does change and if you are not in constant touch you may not be able to take advantage of the change and get the benefit which may come to you.

THE HONOURABLE RAI BAHADUR SATYENDRA KUMAR DAS (Nominated Non-Official): Sir, I have great pleasure in voicing the grateful sentiments of the people of Bengal to His Excellency the Viceroy. For the first time in our annals, he employed the military to minister to civilian needs. He thus laid the foundation for the popularity of the Forces among the masses of the people of Bengal. There is, however, need for the jealous watch, by higher military officers, over the conduct of the troops in the villages. Then alone can the present gulf, between the military and the civilian population of India, be bridged.

Sir N. N. Sircar, an ex-member of the Governor General's Executive Council, published his thoughts, in the papers, on the Bengal famine. He stated that even the "Haves", or the well-to-do people wondered if, under State Socialism, rice could sell at Rs. 80 a maund. In his view, the people would favour Communism, unless the Government reassured them of their economic well being. The Government should, therefore, make the people contented and happy.

This task is not easy to perform. Major-General Sir John Megaw, a former Director of the Indian Medical Service, observed in 1933 that 78 per cent. of the people of Bengal were under-nourished, and an official report of the Director of Health remarked that "the peasantry of Bengal, in large portion, is taking a dietary on which even rats could not live for more than a few weeks." Conditions in Bengal have not improved since then. On the other hand, many persons die for sheer lack of food.

The unsatisfactory distribution, in the interior of Bengal, of foodstuffs is responsible for the presence of destitutes in Calcutta and other cities. The rice, that is distributed, is of so poor a quality that it is unfit for human consumption. I know these things from my own experience in my district of Dacca. These matters were brought to the notice of the authorities times without number, but I am glad to find that the Honourable Mr. Sen has reported to us that he has taken steps to remedy the defects.

Sir, Dacca and Mymensingh are deficit districts.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: Not Mymensingh. Mymensingh is a surplus district.

THE HONOURABLE RAI BAHADUR SATYENDRA KUMAR DAS: Take then Dacca. Dacca is a deficit district. It is also well known that pulses are not cultivated in Bengal. Bihar or Madras supply these, in normal times. Movement of foodstuffs by rail is stopped, in view of the vigorous prosecution of the war in Arakan. Rivercraft has to bring pulses from Bihar. This method is not suited to the present emergency. Some relaxation of the stoppage of rail transport should be made, at least in the case of East Bengal.

It is understood that Madras has a surplus in pulses; but its transport to stations outside the Province is banned by the Government of Madras. The Government of India should plead with that of Madras to treat Bengal as an exceptional case for special consideration.

All this is mere patchwork for tiding over the present crisis, which should impel the Government into vigorous activity in the matter of a country-wide food drive. Else, food crises would occur at shorter intervals than ever.

For the duration of the war, Government should also declare the subject of food as a war activity, in emulation of Australia. Such a step would secure, for food matters, facilities of priority and so forth. The Australian example of availing of the presence of American troops for strengthening its agricultural staff, may be copied here.

There are many expert fishermen among both the British and American troops, now in India. The Defence Department would, I hope, be glad to release a good number of them to train Indians in deep-sea fishery. Fish is the staple

food of Bengal, next only to rice. These experts can have the services of officers in the Fishery Departments of various Provinces in India.

Sea water is a rich source of many a profitable industry. Certain areas of the sea abound in banks of organic manure. The exploitation of the sea does not call for imports of heavy machinery, at any rate, for the duration of the war. For this purpose, the Government should, on the analogy of its proprietorship of railways, build and own a fleet of 1,000-ton sailing ships, equipped with motors for fast cruise, when necessary.

Sir, leaving aside the question of food and pulses, I would like to draw the attention of the authorities to other items. I mean the most essential diet—milk. In our part of the country, before the advent of the soldiers or the establishment of convalescent depots at Dacca, milk used to be sold at eight seers per rupee. Now it cannot be had even at one seer per rupee. Same is the case with vegetables too. This can be remedied if the Central Government moves the military authorities to use tinned milk for soldiers.

Now, leaving aside the question of food I come to a relevant subject, which though not concerned in the food debate is very important. You may be able to get food in raw form but how to cook it. With the restriction on booking of coal, and in the absence of fuel, our people, I mean the people of Eastern Bengal, cannot get coal, I mean soft coke, used for fuel purposes. Even the firewood which used to be sold at our locality at five annas a maund is now being sold at Rs. 2-8-0 a maund, with the result that, although they have got provisions in their house people cannot find fuel to cook them.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: We are now discussing the food situation. We are not discussing the coal situation.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Coal is a relevant thing, Sir. You cannot cook your food without coal.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: In villages and other places people do not use coal.

THE HONOURABLE RAI BAHADUR SATYENDRA KUMAR DAS: Lastly, all the land, ready for the plough should be put under food crops, and jungle waste lands should also be cleared for purposes of cultivation. Hundreds of millions of acres should thus be available for raising more and more foodstuffs. Proper manuring should double or treble the yield per acre, as in China and other countries.

Sir, in conclusion I would also submit that there are a good many virgin lands in the Province of Assam and also in the district of Mymensingh. These virgin lands are best worked by the Agricultural Departments as commercial concerns, on the same lines as Railways. Such a course will come in handy for employing large numbers of able-bodied men, released from military duty, sooner or later, on attractive terms. Only then, and not until then, can India bid fair to become easy in the matter of food supplies for her fast multiplying population.

THE HONOURABLE SARDAR BAHADUR SOBHA SINGH (Nominated Official): Mr. President, Sir, while I agree that the food situation today is undoubtedly somewhat better than what it was a few months back, it is indeed a tragedy that with her vast resources in man-power, area of the land, acreage under cultivation and with one of the best and highly civilised Government to run it, India should have suffered the great crisis of the food famine. Nearly 262 million acres of land are under plough. People are by no means lacking in energy or initiative. And yet the miseries that we witnessed last year, on account of food shortage, is something to make one rub his eyes. Instead of this country being a pillar of strength to the British Commonwealth, we had to go with a begging bowl in our hands for foodgrains to other countries. I am not exaggerating when I say that in 1943 the brightest jewel in the crown of British Empire was very much tarnished and its scintillating rays all but dimmed.

It is needless for me, Sir, to go into the causes of the great famine, which affected this country and the after-effects of which are felt now and would be

[Sardar Bahadur Sobha Singh.]

felt for a long time to come. That has been treated at length by quite a number of eminent men both here and elsewhere.

The famine has revealed the one great weakness which ought not to have been allowed to develop at all. The inadequacy of the transport system to cater to the needs of the country has, in my opinion, contributed very largely to the sufferings of the people. I am not by any chance criticising the Transport Department of the Government. They did their best under the existing circumstances. If they could not do more, it was because the existing facilities were not sufficient to transport and move foodgrains from surplus to deficit areas. The great necessity, therefore, is to improve and expand our transport system to the maximum extent it is possible. While I am fully conscious that India has thousands of miles of railway track, I cannot but remark that they are not sufficient for the needs of this great country. Over and above the inadequacy of railway facilities, the insufficiency of proper roadways is the greatest stumbling block in the path of our agricultural progress and prosperity. It is the lack of sufficient roads and road vehicles that put the greatest difficulties in times of stress and scarcity. I am glad to find, in this connection, that the Technical Sub-Committee on the Future of Road Transport and Road Regulations of the Post-War Reconstruction Committee of the Viceroy's Council has found the correct remedy for the rural ills of India. I am happy to find that it is at last realised that the picture of the future of rural India is one in which motor transport will penetrate to the remotest villages connecting them with the main transport system and will contribute an increasing share in marketing between village and market town and in distribution between village and town. Only when road traffic is developed on sound happy lines, the millions of our agriculturists will have at their disposal not only modern means of transport and communication to the advanced urban areas but also social services such as medical relief, schools and other facilities.

I would suggest to the Government of India that they should take early action on the recommendations emanating from the Chief Engineers' Conference at Nagpur in December last, which have now been published by the Posts and Air Department of the Government. The Conference has suggested a twenty-year programme for building 400,000 miles of roads at a total cost of Rs. 450 crores. If and when these 400,000 miles of road have been completed, I am sure the agricultural progress would not be a thing of the distant future, and our food problem also solved to a considerable extent. Of course, my greater emphasis on roads does not mean that our canals and other waterways are to be neglected. Every possible method of transport facilities must be expanded if the great crisis, which occurred recently, is to be avoided.

Turning to the future, in my opinion, Sir, the most important thing that should be done is to make all land, which is not now put under plough and which can be brought under cultivation available to the cultivators and all those who are prepared to follow agriculture as their avocation. We are informed that there are still 150 million acres of land, which can be brought under cultivation. If a systematic plan is adopted, I am sure, in the course of a decade, a very considerable part of these 150 million acres could be utilised by our agriculturists, to make this country once again brim with plenty.

It is no use only making the land available. It is also very important that better irrigational facilities, imports and manufactures of fertilisers are very essential. These must be made available at rates within the means of fairly well-to-do cultivators or small zamindars, while improved implements must also be sold at conveniently placed Government or semi-Government depots.

The Central Government should also, in my opinion, have a uniform policy and insist on the Provinces carrying out that policy in regard to their agricultural departments. They should be further strengthened and more researches into the urgent questions be carried out. The Veterinary Departments, in my opinion, should be reorganised in order to make them really useful to the average

cultivator. In this connection, I must mention, the Punjab Government have set a good example. The agricultural policy pursued by the Punjab Government has really benefited the Punjabi peasants. I do wish that the other provinces take the good points of the Punjab Government in this connection.

While I agree that rationing and control of prices are quite necessary in war-time and that it is to the interest of all to have the distribution arranged by such means, I must sound a note of caution that these different controls—provincial, district, tehsil and sub-tehsil—have created chaos, and they are really responsible for creating difficulties for the poor man. Government should see that these sub-divisional controls are not allowed. There should be one central body to control the whole system and provinces should follow that guide. In normal times such methods are unnecessary and harmful. The best and cheapest channels of distribution in peace-time is through normal trade and business. I am only saying this so that the success of the schemes during war-time may not lead the Government to adopt the same even after the war necessity has gone by.

THE HONOURABLE SIR DAVID DEVADOSS (Nominated Non-Official): Sir, it is no good trying to apportion blame between the Centre and the Provinces. We have to see what we can do now to improve the situation. I do not intend to make a long speech. I would only offer one or two suggestions.

The first is that Government must make it a definite policy to get all that is necessary for the military from outside. Whether it be foodgrains or meat or other things, they should get these from outside India. This for two reasons. One is, if you buy locally, you reduce the quantity that is available for civilian consumption, and the second is that the Army contractors go and offer an exorbitant price for ordinary foodgrains and that is the reason why the price of foodgrains has gone up so high. I need not go into particulars, but I am speaking from knowledge of the situation. These contractors are paid handsomely,—out of all proportion to the rates prevailing in the country,—and they go and offer anything they like to the cultivator or the trader who has got the thing, and naturally the price of foodgrains goes up and the civilians suffer. Therefore I say that in order to prevent a reduction of the quantity available for civilian use, you must import all that is necessary for the army from outside. It is part of the war effort. It is part of the steps we have to undertake on account of the war that is going on. I say this for this reason. The war is not going to end, according to the Military authorities, in a year or two. If Colonel Knox can be trusted, he says it won't be over, so far as the war in the East is concerned, till 1949. I do not know whether that estimate is correct or not. The war will go on for some years and therefore the Government should seek every opportunity and make every effort to see that India does not suffer on account of the presence of the army, because if India suffers, the war effort will, to that extent, be prejudiced. Unless you have the people of this country in good health, they will not be able to help the war effort in many ways.

The second suggestion that I offer is this. Government are offering subsidies, money, to the cultivator to grow more food. I want Government to see that the money that is offered by the Government really reaches the farmer, the cultivator. We all know, Sir, how much leakage there is between the office which distributes the money and the actual cultivator who gets the money. I do know whether even 75 per cent. of the money that is granted to him reaches him. Suppose a man applies for a certain loan. It takes at least three months for him to get it, because the usual channel is, it goes to the Collector, the Collector sends it to the Divisional Officer, the Divisional Officer to the Tahsildar, the Tahsildar to the Revenue Inspector, the Revenue Inspector to the Karnam and unless the Karnam is satisfied, he does not send his report and all this goes back through the same channel. The Revenue Officer ought to see that that whatever is granted reaches the farmer, so that the farmer may not suffer in any way. I am glad the Honourable Member for Food is here and I would ask him to see that what he is prepared to give really reaches the people for whose benefit it is intended. (An Honourable Member: "The Food Member was here but he is not here now".) Another suggestion that I wish to offer is with

[Sir David Devadoss.]

regard to the want of vegetables: Sir, you might have read in the papers that recently Madras has been suffering from scabies, which has suddenly broken out. The Mayor of Madras called for a conference of medical men and others to try and see how it could be combated. The medical men said they had not enough sulphur preparations to treat the disease, and that Government should supply the necessary medicines. But that is not my point here. The reason for the breaking out of scabies is want green vegetables in the food of the people and the reason why they do not have green vegetables is on account of the exorbitant prices at which vegetables are selling. I need not go into particulars. Everybody has heard of ordinary things like plantains and other things. What was selling for two annas is now selling for 12 annas. You cannot expect the ordinary people to pay that price. That is the reason why this disease has broken out. One of the medical men said—an expert in Madras—that if it reaches the military, it will be very difficult to stamp it out. What I suggest is that the military people should grow their own vegetables. You have got a large number of prisoners scattered in Bangalore and other places. Why should not they work to grow their own vegetables? It will relieve the trouble with regard to the civil population and they will get green vegetables at their own doors.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Will land be available?

THE HONOURABLE SIR DAVID DEVADOSS: There is plenty of land, Sir, only if they will do it.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z.M. REZAI KARIM: If plenty of land will be available, then the "Grow More Food" campaign has failed.

THE HONOURABLE SIR DAVID DEVADOSS: I think in Bangalore, in one of the camps, the Army officer made arrangements for the army people to grow their own vegetables. What I say is, you should have a general rule that whenever they are free, they should do some garden work and raise vegetables.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: That will be in their own compound.

THE HONOURABLE SIR DAVID DEVADOSS: Not necessarily. Even outside. (An Honourable Member: "Parade ground.") Not parade ground. There is plenty of cultivable land. It only means getting water. You can dig a well. You are spending crores of money. You can dig a well or you can have a pump, if you like. An ordinary *picottah* could easily raise water. Gardeners are carrying on agricultural operations in my part of the country—

THE HONOURABLE SIR JOGENDRA SINGH: The Army is trying to grow their vegetables.

THE HONOURABLE SIR DAVID DEVADOSS: Everywhere?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JOGENDRA SINGH: Not everywhere but in many places, particularly in Bombay and in Poona, they have got nearly 12,000 acres under their control. They are trying to grow it in Assam and East Bengal and other places also. The Army are producing their own poultry. They have taken that in hand.

THE HONOURABLE SIR DAVID DEVADOSS: I am very glad to hear that.

THE HONOURABLE MR. G. S. MOTILAL: In Bombay the Army is still purchasing. They are a very large purchaser of vegetables.

THE HONOURABLE SIR JOGENDRA SINGH: It is not enough but still they are growing much.

THE HONOURABLE SIR DAVID DEVADOSS: In Bangalore, in one of the camps, they are growing it. You must make it a rule that they must grow their own vegetables.

With these few remarks, I am very glad to say that the Honourable Mr. Sen has given us a very clear statement of what is happening and what is going to happen.

THE HONOURABLE SIR A. P. PATRO: (Nominated Non-Official): Sir, the motion is to discuss the food situation in India. The food situation is not only confined to Bengal but extends to the whole of India. In several parts of India the

food problem needs serious consideration. In the West Coast we have got the whole country extending from Surat and Bombay right up to Travancore. On the East Coast, we have had a cyclone and rain which devastated the entire crop. We have got the problem there also. In the Deccan the problem is the same as on the East Coast. In Bengal the trouble is very much exaggerated;

4 P.M. long-spun stories are very much advertised very ably and therefore pointed attention has been drawn to Bengal. What happened in 1943 in Bengal happened all along the West Coast and in Southern India, Malabar, Travancore, Cochin. Why was no noise made about it and why was there noise in Bengal only. It was because of the political situation. Political parties were such that they would not sacrifice their interests, that they would not in the least forego their comforts for the sake of the general public. The parties are quarrelling worse than cats and dogs and they would not come to the relief of the poor man. Therefore Bengal received the greatest attention. If the Honourable the Finance Member has budgeted for 1½ crores to be given to Bengal, we do not grudge it. But we want the same treatment to be meted out to Southern India. The masses and the tenants in Southern India are not in a better position than people in Bengal. Why should any relief be denied to them. Supply of food depends on production and distribution. Production of food depends on agricultural progress, agricultural improvement, agricultural development. Distribution depends on various things and one of the most important is transport, transport not only by rail, but by road and canals. All these have been controlled and therefore they have not been working in the ordinary way and hence food from one part of the country where it is in surplus cannot be carried to the other part where there is a deficit. In ordinary times, in peace time and even in the first two years of the war, this transport system was working very well. Then came the crash, scarcity of food and famine. Owing to official interference the things have gone wrong and hoarding has begun. People have become unconscionable to the rights of the neighbour, unconscionable to the rights of the weaker party and so hoarding has started and the desire to make money out of the misfortunes of the people has begun to take hold of men's minds. This has created the black markets. The whole food situation is not due to Government. Government is not responsible for it. It is due to those who hoard, who wanted illegal gain. Rich people have become richer. Middlemen have come in and exploited the situation and they have got the people's blood into their money. In the difficult situation prevailing all over the country you will find the same method of work. The first thing to which our attention should be directed in this connection is the development of agriculture. It is easy to say 'Improve agriculture'. But agriculture cannot be improved on nothing. Agriculture has to be improved by first obtaining scientific knowledge, secondly by finding what sort of crops would suit that locality, thirdly demonstration farms,—and these are necessary in every part of the country, and fourthly we want manure and animal power. Our agriculturists waste a lot of cattle manure in the form of cow dung cakes. We have not been able to stop this waste. This manure wealth is wasted and burnt away. In order to produce more and better food, the ryot should be provided with facilities. The first essential thing to see that his own cattle manure is preserved. Government have got their farms. Have they done anything to give instruction to the ryots? Why should we talk of Grow More Food and all that nonsense, without first teaching the agriculturist the elements of growing food. Secondly, you have got to give him good seeds and better seeds and these should be supplied free. If you do not do this, the result is the same old production—quantity and quality. Distribution depends on how far the market is from his place. He must be able to get information about transport and means of communication and should be able to sell his product profitably. He should get a fair price for his food. Once he gets a fair price and tastes it, then he will himself go in for increased cultivation and increased food production. You say large tracts of land are available and why should not crops be raised on them. Some friends here have said that every land is suitable for cultivation. Not

[Sir A. P. Patro.]

every land is suitable for cultivation, for raising crop. You have got the Lomi soil, pit soil, different kinds of bracken soil, gravel soil. The different kinds of soil should be distinguished from one another; and then irrigation facilities should be given. How to get water? By the use of pumps, but where can poor ryot get pumps from? My Honourable friend suggested *Picottah*. It costs Rs. 10 and the daily wage of the poor man is eight annas. How can he pay even this small sum? How can he buy it and make a profitable production, unless you give him the necessary facilities, namely *Taccavi*? *Taccavi* is what is known as advance payment for improving the land. There are at present five enactments in Madras to help the ryot in the improvement of his land, for the improvement of seed and for the purchase of bullocks. All these are there but then when the ryot applies for it, it requires six months or one year before he gets anything. The whole process and the rules and regulations are such that they will bind the ryot completely to the Government and he is in the hands of the subordinate Government officials and the subordinate revenue officials will not allow things to be done quickly. Therefore, what is the good of asking for legislation. The Acts are already there and if they are properly applied they will put the ryot in a better position than he is in today. All that he requires is *Taccavi* loans or advances to effect improvements in various directions. So, first of all, as I have said for relieving the food situation you should get more and better production. Secondly you should have better distribution. For distribution you have to depend on what is known as rail, road, canal water ways, and thirdly you must first find out the place that is actually in need and there of course Government should give facilities and then notwithstanding the first or the primary necessity of providing for war needs, Government should, if possible, also provide a certain amount of railway facilities and if these facilities are properly utilised then certainly fair distribution could be made. When we have got all this we have to hit the middle man, the profiteer. Unless you catch the profiteer, there can be no improvement, whatever the prices may be. The profiteer, the middle man, is the person who rules the market and here you have got a number of these people who go round and suck the life blood of the people. These are the people who have hoarded paddy and who have grown richer. What is the use of these regulations?

Now you have introduced rationing as a means of providing food for the poor man but rationing will not be a success unless there is adequate supply and how can there be an adequate supply unless you have got transport facilities from one Province to another? I have read the pamphlet which Mr. Sen has circulated. It is all very interesting to know that Government have taken several steps to remedy matters but what has been done to prevent hoarding. Have you got hold of the man. You cannot succeed in rationing unless your supply is plentiful. Therefore, it is all very well to talk plausibly of rationing but what is the use? Will it create more food by itself? My Honourable friend, Mr. Sen, has suggested half a pound of rice per man in Travancore and Cochin. Fancy a man living on half a pound of rice. What have we come to?

Then, again, distribution should be in proper hands, not as has been hinted, in the hands of Party organisations. All Party talk must be forgotten. It must be remembered by every one that the food problem is not party politics but it is a question of life and death—a question of living. It must be realised once and for all that you should forget that you belong to any Party but think of the big family of India. Unless that spirit is created in the mind of exploiters and profiteers there can be no good done at all. What can Government do unless they have the co-operation of the people? What is the use of Government which consists of you and me and other people? Government cannot do anything by itself, but still Government have the organisation in their hands and therefore can assist us in the matter of obtaining food but where is it that food is available when it comes to the cellars of hoarders and profiteers. Only recently a man was discovered having 5,000 bags in his cellars while the taluka was starving. A man of that type sells at the rate

of Rs. 24 a bag of 164 lbs. when grain is ordinarily selling at Rs. 8 a bag. Therefore Government should catch such men—they call themselves honourable men, honourable members of societies, exploiters and profiteers. May I enquire from Mr. Sen what are his regulations for catching these people? No amount of the rules issued under the Defence of India Rules will avail. The real man is the Revenue Inspector, the subordinate officer, who will be able to tell you where the secret lies. The Provinces have got their jurisdiction and the Centre can give advice but cannot force these people. But the real difficulty is of the Provinces being able to get hold of these profiteers and to make them do justice to themselves and to their fellowmen.

Sir, it seems to me that the food problem in the country is gradually showing an improvement. It is not in the same condition as it was this time last year but there are signs of improvement and better condition of things prevailing. They cannot revolutionise agricultural production. They must gradually create in the people the confidence that is necessary, and this object which they are working for will be gradually attained. This therefore must be a problem which must exist for one or two years more. It cannot be solved immediately. It is not just to expect that any Government would solve it. It is through the people themselves coming forward to help each other, it is through mutual aid, that they can solve it at an earlier date than at least two or three years.

THE HONOURABLE MR. MAMENDRA LAL DAS (Nominated Non-Official): Sir, by the perusal of the progress report of the various recommendations of the Foodgrains Policy Committee, I cannot but bring to the notice of Honourable Members of this House, especially to the notice of the Food Member, who has been regulating the food policy of the country, settlement of land in Assam as one of the recommendations for helping in the "Grow More Food" campaign. Sir, in the month of August last the Government of Assam passed a Resolution that lands should be thrown open for cultivation and should be settled with immigrants and indigenous people so that they might grow more food to help the "Grow More Food" campaign. That Resolution was welcomed by the Gregory Committee, and as a result of that the Assam Government have been asked by the Government of India to accelerate the process of settlement in Assam.

Now, Sir, first of all, I will give a brief history of the land settlement in Assam. Assam is divided into two valleys; one is called the Surma Valley through which the River Surma runs, and the other is called the Brahmaputra Valley through which the River Brahmaputra runs. The lands that are available in the Surma Valley are more or less permanently settled areas; they are practically in occupation of zamindars. As such the Surma Valley does not come under the operation of the resolution. In the Brahmaputra Valley, with the exception of the Goalpara district, which has a tenancy of its own, the other five districts, *viz.*, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, have lands which are leased out on a temporary basis. Now, Sir, waste lands were available in Assam about the year 1911, and since then reclamation of jungly waste lands has begun. Immigrants from other parts of India began to pour in in large numbers. So, in course of time the Government of Assam felt the necessity of introducing a colonization scheme so that provision could be made for immigrants. We find from the Report that about the year 1931, nearly 5 lakhs of immigrants had already occupied the lands that were available in the Brahmaputra Valley.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: That is all past history. Why not come to the present day?

THE HONOURABLE MR. MAHENDRA LAL DAS: I am coming to the present day.

Sir, the great economist Radha Kamal Mukerjee, in a small pamphlet entitled *The Food Supply*, says:—

"The immigrant peasantry from Bengal have occupied nearly all the lands which are open for settlement in this tract (the Brahmaputra Valley)"

[Mr. Mahendra Lal Das.]

- Now, Sir, all available cultivable lands having thus been disposed of, and no further lands for settlement becoming available, the Government of Assam in their Resolution, in pursuance of their revised policy and under the plea of improved provision for the process of land settlement, have now come forward as though to help in the matter of the Grow More Food "campaign to enforce settlement of lands even by de-reserving lands reserved for professional graziers and by converting the village grazing grounds into areas for settlement. In the Brahmaputra Valley, Sir, there are some beautiful game reserves; these reserves are the abodes of rhinoceros, elephants, buffaloes, tigers and other wild animals. Sir, we the people of Assam are accustomed to a jungly life, and so we have an affinity to these wild animals.

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: It is most terrible to have affinity between men and animals!

THE HONOURABLE MR. MAHENDRA LAL DAS: All human beings are animals. They are all governed by animal conditions. As such we have an affinity to these wild animals, and we do not like that these animals should be extinct. But the Government of Assam, in pursuance of their policy, have not even hesitated to de-reserve these forests. This being the condition, the indigenous people of the Brahmaputra Valley have been raising a protest. But Assam's voice is so very weak that no authorities care to listen to it. The bulk of the Assamese people, be they Muslim, Hindu or Scheduled Caste men, are a set of loyal people with no defiant spirit in them. They are quite prepared to help the Government and make the "Grow More Food" campaign in Assam a success. But, Sir, at present there are lots of difficulties. Assam is daily growing in importance so far as military activities are concerned. For the purpose of military camps, an enormous quantity of thatching grass and other materials are being daily supplied from the forest reserves. Sir, with the continuation of the war, though we do not like it to be dragged on, the military may be requiring more and more thatching grass and other materials such as reads—

THE HONOURABLE MR. A. Z. M. REZAI KARIM: On a point of order, Sir. Is that also animal food?

THE HONOURABLE MR. MAHENDRA LAL DAS: No, no. Thatching grass is for the military camps, not for the animals.

THE HONOURABLE MR. HOSSAIN IMAM: Is that a monopoly of Assam or does any other Province produce it?

THE HONOURABLE MR. MAHENDRA LAL DAS: There are reserves and thatching grass is available there for the Military authorities. In this part of the country they know only mud. They use mud only. They do not use thatching grass.

THE HONOURABLE MR. SUSIL KUMAR ROY CHOWDHURY: We have got thatching grass in Bengal.

THE HONOURABLE MR. MAHENDRA LAL DAS: My Honourable friend Kumar Sankar Roy Chowdhury was complaining that in the absence of reserves there is scarcity of fodder in Bengal. Sir, in view of these facts and circumstances, if reserves be thrown open and forests be deforested for the purpose of settlement, in time, it will stand as a serious problem for the Government to satisfy the military demand. There is yet another difficulty that will arise as a result, of throwing open the reserves for settlement. There will be dearth of fodder for the cattle population.

Sir, I do not know if I have been able to convince the Government that settlement of land as a measure for carrying on the "Grow More Food" campaign in the Brahmaputra Valley can be adopted only by bringing other needs of the people to the level of secondary importance. Sir, from the humanitarian point of view, the Brahmaputra Valley has so far been liberal enough to make room for nearly 7 lakhs of immigrants from outside and that most ungrudgingly. But now, Sir, our very existence as Assamese people is at stake. Assam as an autonomous Province must look to safeguarding her

own interests. The Government of Assam being an autonomous Government has no justification whatever to invite immigrants from outside by giving them settlement of lands made available by throwing open the reserve lands much to the detriment of the interests of the local people and other local needs.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: I think you have fully represented the case of your Province. I think you have nothing more to say.

THE HONOURABLE MR. MAHENDRA LAL DAS: I will talk about food.

THE HONOURABLE MR. SUSIL KUMAR ROY CHOWDHURY: The Honourable Mr. Ali Asghar Khan, has got a Resolution.

THE HONOURABLE MR. MAHENDRA LAL DAS: He is a big zamindar. He is interested only with the permanent settlement.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: You have got a few minutes more only.

THE HONOURABLE MR. MAHENDRA LAL DAS: If, under these circumstances, the reserves are not opened but are kept intact, so much the better. But, Sir, in case the Government insists upon throwing open these reserves for settlement, in pursuance of the policy of the Government of Assam, in that case there innumerable indigenous people who are ungrudgingly and wholeheartedly prepared to help the "Grow More Food" campaign launched by the Government by taking settlement of lands under *Adhi* system—a system by which they are prepared to part with half the portion of the crops produced in favour of the Government for collection in aid of the "Grow More Food" campaign. There are also people, indigenous people, I assure the Honourable the Food Member, who for the immediate success of the "Grow More Food" campaign are prepared to open up in a large scale collective agricultural farms on a co-operative basis, if lands are given to them, with scientific appliances as far as possible, so that food crops grown may be available in the course of a year. Now, Sir, in the face of the undertaking given by all the people of the Brahmaputra Valley to the Government of Assam to help and co-operate with the Government in the matter of the "Grow More Food" campaign, if fresh immigrants are given fresh settlement, provincial feelings will certainly stand in the way of making the "Grow More Food" campaign a success.

With these words, Sir, I resume my seat.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, you are probably all aware that the Honourable the Leader of the House has given us one more day tomorrow for this debate. The debate will therefore be resumed tomorrow.

The Council then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Friday, the 17th March, 1944.