

9th August 1943

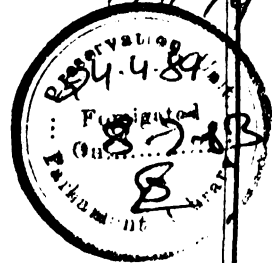
TO  
**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY DEBATES**

**Official Report**

**Volume III, 1943**

*(26th July to 25th August, 1943)*

**EIGHTEENTH SESSION**  
OF THE  
**FIFTH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY,**  
**1943**



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# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

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## *Deputy President:*

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Mr. HOOSEINBOY A. LALLJEE, M.L.A.

Sir HENRY RICHARDSON, M.L.A.

[From 20th August, 1943.]

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Sardar SANT SINGH, M.L.A.

Mr. N. M. JOSHI, M.L.A.

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# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Monday, 9th August, 1943.

The Assembly met in the Assembly Chamber of the Council House at Eleven of the Clock, Mr. President (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim) in the Chair.

## MEMBER SWORN:

Mr. Walter Henry John Christie, O.B.E., M.L.A. (Government of India : Nominated Official).

## STARRED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

### (a) ORAL ANSWERS.

#### GOVERNMENT'S CENTRAL WOOL PURCHASING SCHEME.

**242. \*Seth Yusuf Abdoola Haroon:** Will the Honourable Member representing the Supply Department please state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Government's Central Wool Purchasing Scheme came into force on the 15th October, 1942;

(b) whether it is a fact that Government fixed on or before the 15th October, 1942, rates for the different qualities of wool in India to be purchased by their buying agents under the Government's Central Wool Purchasing Scheme;

(c) whether it is a fact that the Government's buying agents offered lower rates to the dealers than those fixed for the several qualities even after the introduction of the Central Wool Purchasing Scheme; and

(d) if the answer to (c) is in the affirmative, what steps Government have taken to check such unauthorised dealings of their buying agents, and whether any compensation has been granted subsequently by the buying agents to the dealers from whom they purchased goods at prices lower than the rates fixed by Government?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** (a) Yes.

(b) Yes.

(c) So far as the Government are aware it is not a fact that lower rates have been offered.

(d) Does not arise.

**Seth Yusuf Abdoola Haroon:** Does the Honourable Member know that a certain firm in Amritsar has been offering an over-rate to these merchants?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** So far as the Government is aware, it is not so.

**Dr. Sir Zia Uddin Ahmad:** Will Government make an inquiry about it because there is a definite allegation?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** If sufficient particulars are furnished to me, I shall be prepared to go into the question.

**Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** Is it not a fact that the Government has already made an inquiry after the notice of the present question was given and then came to the present conclusion?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** No, there is certainly no time to make inquiries after the question is put, but with the information at the disposal of the Government from time to time that is the information of the Government.

**Seth Yusuf Abdoola Haroon:** I will place before the Honourable Member a statement. Will the Honourable Member kindly look into the question then and make inquiries?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** I shall always be prepared to look into any representation of Honourable Members.

## BUYING WOOL IN INDIA ON THEIR OWN ACCOUNT BY GOVERNMENT BUYING AGENTS.

**243. \*Seth Yusuf Abdoola Haroon:** (a) Is the Honourable Member representing the Supply Department aware of the fact that the Government's buying agents have also bought wool in India on their own account?

(b) Is it a fact that the buying agents have, on several occasions, refused to buy wool offered to them on Government account but, on the other hand, bought the same wool offered to be bought on their own account?

(c) Do Government recognise that buying by the Government's buying agents on their own account places the buying agents in a position most detrimental to other dealers?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** (a) Yes.

(b) Not so far as the Government are aware.

(c) No.

**Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** In clause (a) it is said that they are purchasing on their own account. Were they allowed to do that?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** They must be allowed to do that and they have been allowed to do that. They are carrying on their business and in addition they are the agents to the Government.

## GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE FOR DISPOSAL OF BLACK AND GREY WOOL.

**244. \*Seth Yusuf Abdoola Haroon:** (a) Will the Honourable Member representing the Supply Department please state if it is a fact that Government have prohibited the export of black and grey wool?

(b) Is it a fact that it is the considered policy of Government to buy all black and grey wool offered to them?

(c) Is it a fact that the Government's buying agents have refused to buy certain types of black and grey wool offered to them, the export of which is prohibited by Government?

(d) If the answer is in the affirmative, what assistance have Government provided for the merchants for the disposal of such wool?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** (a) Yes, but arrangements exist for allowing export of wool which is certified to be un-useable in India and for which a definite overseas demand exists.

(b) Government's policy is to buy all the black and grey wool of requisite quality that can be obtained in India. Actually supplies of such quality wool are much below Government's requirements.

(c) Yes, where the wool offered was below the quality required by Government.

(d) The Honourable Member is referred to my answer under (a) above.

## GOVERNMENT BUYING AGENTS' CONTRACT WITH DEALERS IN WOOL.

**245. \*Seth Yusuf Abdoola Haroon:** (a) Is the Honourable Member representing the Supply Department aware of the buying agents' contract with dealers in wool?

(b) Are Government aware that by this contract the buying agents have almost entirely passed on their responsibility in respect of their own contract with the Government to dealers, and that it is for shouldering such responsibility that they are entitled to the Government's commission for the buying agency?

(c) Are Government aware that most of the terms of the buying agents' contract with dealers in respect of the selection of the quality yield tests, payment of freight, arbitration, etc., are hard on the dealers?

(d) Do Government propose to ask the buying agents to revise their contract with dealers so as to make it fair to both the parties concerned?

(e) Are Government aware that there is deep discontent among the Indian wool trade interests in respect of the dealings of the present buying agents with the dealers?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** (a) There is a Central Wool Buying Agency contract between Government and Messrs. Shamji Mal & Co., of Amritsar. Government are not aware of the Buying Agents' contract with dealers in wool.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) Does not arise.

(d) The terms of business between the Buying Agent and the dealers are a matter for mutual negotiation and settlement between the parties concerned primarily.

(e) A deputation of wool merchants from Karachi and Lahore waited on officers of the Supply Department in March this year and complained about unfair methods adopted by the Buying Agent in his transactions with dealers. After investigation, Government were satisfied that the complaints were unfounded.

**Seth Yusuf Abdoola Haroon:** Is it not a fact that those merchants placed before an officer certain evidence which was in the handwriting of Shamji Mal?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** It is after taking that evidence into consideration that the officers of the Government came to the conclusion that I have referred to.

**Dr. Sir Zia Uddin Ahmad:** Have the Government made any rule or rules regulating the negotiations between the dealer and the Government? We have received a good deal of complaint about this matter.

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** It is not the practice of the Government to go into the question of the contracts between their own agent and the sub-contractors. Of course, I am prepared to look into any such question where there is grave impropriety alleged on account of any monopolistic contract given by the Government.

**Dr. Sir Zia Uddin Ahmad:** Is it left to the agents themselves to negotiate in any manner they like without any supervision of higher officers as is the case with wheat?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** Normally, that is so.

**Seth Yusuf Abdoola Haroon:** Does the Honourable Member know that one term of the contract between Shamji Mal and the sellers is that Shamji Mal himself will be the arbitrator in case of dispute?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** I am not aware of any terms of the contract between the buying agent and his own dealers.

**Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** Are his agents selling at the same price fixed by the Government or are they selling at different rates?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** The question is very confusing to me.

**Mr. President (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim):** Next question.

#### NECESSITY OF REVISING THE BUYING AGENCY POLICY RE WOOL.

**246. \*Seth Yusuf Abdoola Haroon:** (a) Will the Honourable Member representing the Supply Department please state if Government recognise that, in view of the Government having fixed prices of the Indian wool, there is no need for buying agents?

(b) Do Government recognise the principle that buying agents should not purchase raw wool on their own account directly or indirectly?

(c) Should Government consider the existence of the buying agency necessary, do they propose to revise their present buying agency policy so as to appoint buying agents for each province or centre in consultation with the wool trade interests of such province or centre?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** (a) Although prices have been fixed for Indian wool, it is essential to have a buying agent to ensure that wool of requisite and consistent quality at controlled prices is obtained. Prior to the appointment of a buying agent, there was considerable competition among different contractors for wool, and considerable variation in the quality of wool offered and utilized, leading to unsatisfactory manufacturing results.

(b) No. Government do not expect an experienced wool buyer to surrender his own established business entirely on account of the need of central purchase for war-time purposes.

(c) No. Government think it desirable to have one central purchaser, as in the past the policy of having a number of buying agents led to undesirable competition between different agents.

**Seth Yusuf Abdoola Haroon:** Does not the Honourable Member think it advisable to form a Syndicate of these agents?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** The present system, I understand, is a variation due to experience from the systems suggested by my Honourable friend.

**Seth Yusuf Abdoola Haroon:** Why should we not have a Syndicate on the lines of the Sugar Syndicate?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** That is a suggestion to which I am unable to commit myself in answer to a question.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNAL AIR SERVICES IN INDIA BY INDIANS.

**247. \*Mr. K. O. Neogy:** (a) Will the Secretary of the Posts and Air Department be pleased to state if it is the policy of Government that the operation of internal air services in India should only be developed by companies owned, controlled and managed by Indians?

(b) If the answer to (a) be in the negative, what are the reasons therefor?

(c) Is it a fact that the Government of India have always demanded and obtained reciprocal concessions in return for the right to operate air services across India? If so, what reciprocal concessions have Government obtained, and to whom has the right to operate air services across India been conceded?

(d) Is it a fact that the Government of India have also maintained the right of India to participate on the basis of a financial contribution in the operation of any air services designed to deal with Indian traffic? Will non-Indian concerns be permitted to operate air services designed to deal with Indian traffic in the internal services of India? If so, on what terms? What is the basis of financial contribution they have adopted in the maintenance of the right of India to participate in these services?

**Sir Gurunath Bewoor:** (a) and (b). Subject to the provisions of Part V, Chapter III of the Government of India Act, 1935, it is the general policy of the Government of India that the operation of internal air services in India should be by Indian companies.

(c) The answer to the first part of the question is in the affirmative. The reciprocal right obtained was for the operation of an air service across the territory of the other State by an Indian company either in association with other British air services or independently. The right to operate air services across India has been given to companies nominated by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and by the Governments of Holland, France, China and Germany (the latter has lapsed now).

(d) The reply to the first part of the question is in the affirmative. As regards the second and third parts, I would refer the Honourable Member to the reply I have given to parts (a) and (b) above. As regards the last part, I would invite the attention of the Honourable Member to—

(1) the proceedings of the Standing Finance Committee of the 13th September, 1933.

(2) the statements made by Government in the debate on a Demand for Supplementary Grant in this House on the 20th September, 1933; and

(3) the proceedings of the Standing Finance Committee of the 27th February, 1937.

#### POST-WAR POSSIBILITY OF AMERICAN AIR LINES OPERATING IN INDIA.

**248. \*Mr. K. O. Neogy:** (a) Has the attention of the Secretary of the Posts and Air Department been drawn to a Press report of a declaration of the post-war policy of the United States of America in the matter of civil aviation made by sixteen major American air lines in the course of which they demand commercial rights in some instances where air-port and other navigational facilities



are being built abroad at the expense of the United States, once these have served the military purpose for which they are constructed?

(b) Has the implication of the above declaration with reference to the future possibility of American air lines operating in India, particularly for running internal services, been examined by the Government?

**Sir Gurunath Bewoor:** (a) Yes.

(b) The whole question of post-war air transport is under the examination of Government. The particular declaration referred to does not appear however to have any bearing on India's internal air services.

**Mr. K. C. Neogy:** Is it not a fact that at the present moment many Air Ports exist in India in regard to which the United States Government might put forward a claim on this basis in so far as these Air Ports might have been constructed at the cost of the United States Government?

**Sir Gurunath Bewoor:** That question should be addressed to the War Department.

**Mr. K. C. Neogy:** It is a question of their claiming rights. The question is that the United States Government might claim rights in regard to civil aviation in future for the purpose of utilising the Air Ports which may have been built in India at the cost of the United States Government.

**Sir Gurunath Bewoor:** The point which the Honourable Member really wants to know is whether there are any Air Ports in India constructed at the cost of the United States Government, because his question follows from that. All I can say is that I am not in a position to answer the question whether there are any Air Ports constructed in India at the cost of the United States Government. That question should be addressed to the War Department.

#### RECRUITMENT OF ASSISTANT ENGINEERS ON NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY.

**249. \*Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** (a) Will the Honourable Member for Railways be pleased to state if it is a fact that ordinarily Assistant Engineers on the North-Western Railway are recruited through the Public Service Commission? What was the urgency which caused a deviation from this method of recruiting through the Public Service Commission this year?

(b) Is it a fact that the last recruitment was not done through the Public Service Commission owing to war exigencies? If so, why were not qualified subordinates promoted to avoid delay and discontent?

(c) Is it a fact that qualified subordinates with better experience than the new direct recruits were available? If so, why were they ignored?

(d) Is it a fact that the new recruits were originally appointed for one year, and that they have now been given another year's extension?

(e) Do Government propose to remove these temporary recruits in order to pacify the discontentment among the qualified subordinates? If not, why not?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) Direct recruitment to the Indian Railway Service of Engineers is made through the Federal Public Service Commission. As regards the second part, temporary addition to the strength of officers was necessary in order to deal with the work in hand.

(b) The reply to the first part is in the negative. The second part does not arise.

(c) There were subordinates who had the specified academic qualifications, but they were not considered suitable.

(d) The answer to the first part is in the affirmative; as regards the second part, out of four who have completed one year's service, three have been retained for another year and the fourth for six months.

(e) No, because they do not consider that the public interest would be served thereby, nor do they consider that the subordinates have any legitimate grievance.

**Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** Will those persons who have been retained for one or two years be made permanent in supersession of those who are senior?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** All appointments made during the war are temporary.

**Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** Is it a fact that one or two persons in Karachi Division who have been taken are juniors to those who are already there and they are academically also not so well qualified?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** Obviously I must have notice of that question.

**Mr. Muhammad Nauman:** What is the number of such recruits on that Railway?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** Four or it may be six.

**\*TEMPORARY TRACERS IN THE OFFICE OF DIVISIONAL SUPERINTENDENT, KARACHI.**

**250. \*Mr. Lalchand Navalrai:** (a) Will the Honourable the Railway Member be pleased to state how many temporary tracers are working in the office of the Divisional Superintendent, North Western Railway, Karachi, and since when?

(b) Why have they not been confirmed upto now?

(c) Is it a fact that they are suffering a loss of Provident Fund and other privileges owing to not being made permanent?

(d) What steps do Government propose to take to ameliorate their condition? If none, why?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** I have called for information and a reply will be laid on the table of the House in due course.

†251.

**PERSONS RECRUITED IN THE INTERMEDIATE GRADES ON BENGAL AND ASSAM RAILWAY.**

**252. \*Mr. Muhammad Nauman:** (a) Will the Honourable Member for Railways be pleased to state the number of persons recruited in the Intermediate grades on salaries between Rs. 100 and Rs. 500 on the Bengal and Assam Railway since 1st January 1942 to 30th June 1943?

(b) How many of this number are (i) Hindus, (ii) Muslims, (iii) Anglo-Indians and (iv) Indian Christians?

(c) Were the posts advertised, and if so, in what newspapers?

(d) Were selections made by any duly constituted Board or were they made by individual officers?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) to (d). I have called for information and a reply will be laid on the table of the House in due course.

**OFFICERS REQUISITIONED BY BENGAL AND ASSAM RAILWAY FROM OTHER RAILWAYS.**

**253. \*Mr. Muhammad Nauman:** (a) Will the Honourable Member for Railways be pleased to state the number of officers requisitioned by the Bengal and Assam Railway from other Railways, between June 1942 and June 1943?

(b) Were there no officers on the Bengal and Assam Railway, competent to be entrusted with those works, which have been entrusted to the new officers imported from Foreign Railways?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) Between June 1942 and June 1943 three officers were transferred to the B. and A. Railway from other State Railways.

(b) The transfers were made as the number of officers on the B. and A. was insufficient for the requirements.

**Mr. Muhammad Nauman:** May I know whether these officers are considered more fit to cope with the particular situation in that locality than those officers who are already there and who could have been promoted?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** There was no question of comparison. The transfers were made as the number of officers on the B. and A. Railway was insufficient for the requirements.

†This question was withdrawn by the questioner.

## PERSONS RECRUITED IN INTERMEDIATE GRADE ON EAST INDIAN RAILWAY.

254. \*Mr. Muhammad Nauman: (a) Will the Honourable Member for Railways be pleased to state the number of persons recruited in the Intermediate grade on the East Indian Railway between January 1942 and June 1943?

(b) How many of this number are (i) Muslims, (ii) Hindus and (iii) Anglo-Indians?

(c) What was the method adopted for recruitment of these people?

(d) Is it a fact that they were appointed without any duly constituted Board of Selection?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) to (d). I have called for information and a reply will be laid on the table of the House in due course.

## DESIRABILITY OF APPOINTING A JUDICIAL OFFICER UNDER ACT XXV OF 1941.

† 255. \*Babu Baijnath Bajoria: Will the Honourable Member for Railways be pleased to state:

(a) whether any notification in the official Gazette has been issued as provided in sub-section (1) of Section (3) of Act XXV of 1941. (Act for regulating Taxation of Railway Property); if not, why not;

(b) whether any judicial officer has been appointed as provided for in sub-section (2) of section (3) of the said Act; if not, why not; and

(c) if the answer to parts (a) and (b) be in the negative, whether Government will take necessary steps to issue the notification and to appoint the judicial officer at an early date; if not, why not?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) No Notification as provided in Sub-section (1) of Section (3) of Act XXV of 1941 has so far been issued as proposals for such Notifications received from the Provincial Governments are still under examination.

(b) The question of the appointment of judicial officers is still under the consideration of the Central Government in consultation with the Provincial Governments.

(c) Does not arise.

## RATES OF FARES FOR PASSENGER TRANSPORT BETWEEN DELHI CITY AND SHAHDARA.

256. \*Hajee Chowdhury Muhammad Ismail Khan: Will the Honourable Member for War Transport please state:

(a) the rates of fares prescribed by the authorities for each description of passenger transport plying for hire between Delhi City and Shahdara in Delhi Province; and

(b) the nature of protection provided to the travelling public against the refusal of the Drivers or Conductors of those transports to carry passengers at the prescribed rates?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** Two kinds of road passenger transport viz. tonga and Gwalior and Northern India Transport Buses ply for hire between Delhi City and Shahdara in the Delhi province. The prescribed rates of II-Class tonga fares are:

From Delhi to Shahdara—including return if return is on the same day—Rs. 3.

IV-Class tonga fare is  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the above rates.

The Gwalior and Northern India Transport Company, Limited, has been granted the monopoly for motor passenger transport on this route, which is, however, used by other public service vehicles, but these cannot take up or set down passengers between Delhi and Shahdara inclusive. The Gwalior and Northern India Transport bus service on this route has been temporarily suspended by the Company owing to demands made by the Military Authorities, but it is expected that traffic will be resumed from the 9th August, 1943. The revised fares to commence from the 9th August, 1943, is annas 4 between Delhi and Shahdara.

† Answer to this question laid on the table, the questioner being absent.

(b) The travelling public are protected by the provisions of Rule 4.38 of the Delhi Motor Vehicles Rules and Rule 21 (B) (7) of the Hackney Carriage Rules framed by the Delhi Municipality. Under the former rule, the police are empowered to institute prosecutions on complaints by the travelling public. Prosecutions for breaches of the Hackney Carriage Rules are instituted by the Municipal prosecutor or counsel on the authority of the Secretary of the Municipal Committee, and disciplinary action against the drivers who refuse to take passengers on the scheduled rate is taken on complaints either personally or in writing.

**REDUCING OF TICKET COLLECTORS TO LETTER DELIVERY CLERKS BY THE DIVISIONAL SUPERINTENDENT, MORADABAD.**

**257. \*Hajee Chowdhury Muhammad Ismail Khan:** (a) Will the Honourable Member for Railways please state:

(i) the rule or regulation under which a non-gazetted Railway servant in Superior Service can be reduced to Inferior Service for inefficiency or otherwise after an approved confirmed service of over three years;

(ii) if it is a fact that the Divisional Superintendent, East Indian Railway, Moradabad, in a letter No. E/3/35-T.C., dated the 25th March 1935, reduced the Ticket Collectors on failure to pass the Ticket Collectors' Examination to the post of the Letter Delivery Clerks on Rs. 40 per mensem in grade 26—2—40 (Superior Service);

(iii) if it is a fact that the said Divisional Superintendent in a letter No. E/3/35-T.C., dated the 19th July 1935, reduced the same Ticket Collectors for the same failure to the post of the Letter Delivery Clerks on Rs. 27 in grade 18—1—27 (Inferior Service); and

(iv) if it is a fact that the posts of Ticket Collectors are included in the Superior Services?

(b) Do Government propose to mend the wrongs of the staff concerned? If not, why not?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) (i). Presumably, the Honourable Member refers to subordinate service when he speaks of superior service. The rule which prescribes reduction to a lower post or time scale or to a lower stage in a time scale is para. 1702-(5) of the State Railway Establishment Code, Volume I; it does not prohibit action of the kind referred to by the Honourable Member.

(a) (ii) and (iii). I have called for information and a further reply will be laid on the table of the House in due course.

(a) (iv). Ticket Collectors are classified as subordinates.

(b) Government cannot decide till they have secured and examined the information they have called for. The second part does not arise.

**Dr. Sir Zia Uddin Ahmad:** While making enquiries, may I ask the Honourable Member also to enquire if it is a fact that those persons were incompetent or simply they failed in the Examination? A person may be quite competent and yet fail.

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** I will keep this in mind. But I have no reason to suppose that justice was not done.

**ALLOTMENT OF WAGONS TO THE STATION MASTER, MUZAFFARNAGAR.**

**258. \*Hajee Chowdhury Muhammad Ismail Khan:** Will the Honourable Member for Railways please state:

(a) the conditions and terms on which the allotment of wagons to the Station Master, Muzaffarnagar, United Provinces, on the North Western Railway, is made by the Control Office, New Delhi;

(b) the conditions and terms on which the Station Master distributes them to the customers;

(c) the daily average number of wagons allotted to that station during the preceding one year, as compared with the daily average number of wagons allotted to Meerut, Hapur, Saharanpur, Ghaziabad, Deoband, Begumabad.

Rohana Kalan, etc., on the said Section of the Control Office during the said period;

(d) the number of complaints received against the Station Master, Muzaffarnagar, for corruption; and

(e) if the Traffic Inspector of the section was also implicated in those complaints and what the duration (total) of his stay in that section out of the total period of his service as an Inspector is?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** With your permission, Sir, I propose to reply to both questions 258 and 259 together.

(a) and (b) of question 258. I lay on the table a copy of letter in which is reproduced a summary of the method adopted on the North Western Railway for the distribution of wagons.

I regret that the information asked for in the remainder of this question and in question 259 is not readily available.

I have called for a report from the Railways concerned and on its receipt will consider the action to be taken.

*Copy of a letter No. 3062-T. T., dated the 25th February, 1943, from Government of India, Railway Department (Railway Board), to Class I, II and III Railways.*

*Supply of wagons at stations to traders.*

The Board are of the opinion that there is a wide-spread belief that the control of empty wagons supply is entirely in the hands of Station Masters. It is considered, therefore, that it would be very valuable if propaganda was disseminated outlining the procedure adopted in the control and distribution of empty wagons to merchants and traders requiring transport. With this object in view a draft notification which the North Western Railway have drawn up, outlining the procedure adopted on their line, is enclosed with this letter and it is requested that you will please draw up a similar notification, suitably amended in accordance with the procedure existing on your Railway, for publication in the principal English and vernacular newspapers.

2. Prominent exhibition of advertisements, substantially on the same lines but perhaps with greater detail, could be undertaken with advantage at railway stations so that the actual traders doing business with the railway may know the exact procedure followed.

3. These steps it is believed would materially help to lessen, and possibly remove, much of the criticism now being levelled against the station staff especially in regard to demands for illegal gratification before wagons are made available.

*Copy of North Western Railway's Notification.*

*Supply of wagons at stations to traders, how it is controlled and by whom?*

The N. W. R. notify for the information of the trading public details of the system of control and allotment of empty wagons, other than coal wagons, to merchants and traders, the distribution of coal wagons being regulated by an organization under the Controller of Coal Distribution, Calcutta.

2. *Initial procedure at stations.*—At each goods-booking station a Wagon Priority Register is maintained, which is open for inspection by the public during the normal hours of business. When a trader brings his consignment to the station and presents a forwarding note covering the consignment his wagon requirement is entered in this Register in order of application showing his name, name of commodity, destination, etc. This entry is signed by the trader. An acknowledgement slip, signed by the Station Master or his representative, showing the position of the trader in the list of applications, is handed over to him at the time of the entry, e.g., the 7th registered applicant on page 5, will receive an acknowledgment bearing page 5, No. 7.

3. *Action by Divisional Officers.*—Once daily, all Station Masters report the details of wagons that are required on the following day, for loading at their station giving the number of wagons that are on hand empty and the number that is expected to be unloaded, and available for re-loading. On receipt of this information in the Divisional Superintendent's Office, the total requirement of the Division is consolidated and reported to the Head Office. In the meantime, the Divisional Office orders the supply of empty wagons, after considering the demand for, and availability of wagons at each station, with due regard to:

- (a) Traffic covered by priority certificates.
- (b) Traffic covered by special priority orders issued by the Head Office.
- (c) Position of traffic offering in the list showing grading of commodities used during periods of restriction.
- (d) The direction of booking.

4. *Control by the Head Office.*—The Head Office is kept constantly advised of the general wagon position on each Division and appropriate action is taken to maintain a balance between Divisions consistent with the demand obtaining on each Division.

5. *Allotment of quotas for restricted traffic.*—There are also instances in which other railways limit the number of wagons to be made over to them at junctions. In such cases the Head Office assigns a quota for each Division proportionate to the traffic offering. Quotas may sometimes have to be imposed also for local loading for certain junctions or certain stations, etc. Each Division, on receipt of its assignment, proceeds in a similar way to allot wagons for each station, bearing in mind each station's physical capacity for loading and unloading.

6. *Allotment at stations.*—In paragraph 3 above it has been shown how the allotment of wagons is made to stations by the Divisional Office. On receipt of the allotment the Station Master after meeting requirements of wagons for traffic covered by priority certificates issued by the Defence and Supply Departments, and priority orders by the Head Office, distributes the remaining wagons to those traders whose traffic falls within the non-restricted commodity groups in accordance with the priority assigned to them in the Wagon Priority Register referred to in paragraph 2 above. Should, however, restrictions be imposed either on certain routes or on certain commodities, then it is not possible to allot a wagon against such restrictions and so the wagon is allotted to the consignee of the next non-restricted traffic in the order of registration. The consignee, so barred, however, retains his position in the register and his claim to allotment when circumstances permit, take precedence over all subsequent applications except those covered by a priority certificate or priority orders.

7. It will be seen that the constant and continuous control by higher authorities on the supply of wagons leaves no discretion to the Station Master in this respect.

#### REFUSAL OF COVERED WAGONS FOR MILITARY SUPPLY OF TIMBER AND BAMBOOS BY STATION MASTER, NAJIBABAD.

†259. \***Hajee Chowdhury Muhammad Ismail Khan:** (a) Will the Honourable Member for Railways please state if it is a fact that covered wagons No. 5170, 8450, 20015, 35816, 10674, 37911, 6247, 5116, 20800, 18164, 8650, were loaded with bamboos during the 2nd to 5th April 1943, and despatched from Kotdwara (East Indian Railway) to stations Gojra, Amritsar, Hardwargunj, Shakurpur Basti and Garhmukhtesar where no military works were being undertaken?

(b) Is it a fact that covered wagons during that period were refused for the military supply of timber and bamboos by the Station Master, Najibabad? If so, why?

#### CONTRACTS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF GRAINS TO EAST INDIAN RAILWAY SERVANTS.

260. \***Hajee Chowdhury Muhammad Ismail Khan:** Will the Honourable Member for Railways please state the terms and conditions on which the contract for the distribution of grains to Railway servants has been given to Messrs. Ballabhdas Eshwardas and to other contractors on the East Indian Railway?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** I have called for information and a reply will be laid on the table of the House in due course.

#### STEPS FOR UTILIZATION OF INDIAN WOOL FOR WAR PURPOSES.

†261. \***Seth Yusuf Abdoola Haroon:** (a) Will the Honourable Member representing the Supply Department be pleased to state what steps Government have taken to utilise Indian wool for war purposes, and thus to help to relieve the situation?

(b) What are the exact figures of consumption of Indian wool by mills engaged on war work? Have Government carried out the necessary research work for the utilisation of the increased quantities of Indian wool by Indian mills for war and other purposes?

(c) Is it a fact that the foreign wool valued at about rupees three crores has been imported annually into India for manufacturing woollen clothes for military requirements during the last few years since the commencement of the war?

(d) Is it a fact that mills in India engaged on war work have been provided \* by the Military Department with specifications which principally require the use of the foreign wool?

† For answer to this question, see answer to question No. 258.

‡ Answer to this question laid on the table, the questioner having exhausted his quota.

(e) Are certain qualities of Indian wool, such as best Bikaner, Kashmir and Jodiya wools and other qualities being utilised for making woollen clothes?

(f) Do Government propose to recommend to the Military Department to give preference to Indian wool for manufacturing clothes for military purposes?

**The Honourable Dewan Bahadur Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar:** (a) The question of utilisation of Indian wool has been considered by Government, but apart from its use in the making of Barrack Blankets Indian wool is unsuitable for other woollen materials required by the Army. Clothes made from Indian wool, hand-spun and hand-woven, have, however, from time to time been accepted for use as substitute clothing for the Army.

(b) The estimated consumption of Indian wool by Mills engaged on war work is 20 million pounds per year. As regards the question of research work expert committees were formed to examine the existing specifications and relax them if possible with a view to making the best use of Indian wool.

(c) Yes.

(d) Certain specifications of the military require the use of foreign wool.

(e) Yes.

(f) This has already been done.

#### UNSTARRED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

##### CONTRACT RATE TO MESSRS. BALLABHDAS ESHWARDAS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF GRAINS TO EAST INDIAN RAILWAY SERVANTS.

**53. Hajee Chowdhury Muhammad Ismail Khan:** (a) Will the Honourable Member for Railways please state if it is a fact that the contract for the distribution of grains to Railway servants on the East Indian Railway has been given to Messrs. Ballabhdas Eshwardas, at the rate of annas ten per maund, with effect from the 1st April, 1945?

(b) Is it a fact that the contract for the distribution of grains to Railway Servants has been given to all other contractors at the rate of annas eight per maund from 1st April, 1943?

(c) If the replies to parts (a) and (b) be in the affirmative, what are the reasons for the differential treatment and for not reducing the rates allowed to Messrs. Ballabhdas Eshwardas to the level of the rates allowed to all other contractors?

(d) If the replies to parts (a) and (b) be in the negative, what are the correct rates?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) Yes, except that the rate of annas ten per maund applies from 1st June, 1943.

(b) Yes.

(c) The reason is that the original contract with Messrs. Ballabhdas Eshwardas, who were the very first contractors employed, permitted the contractors to keep the bags; the administration now requires them to return the bags and so compensate them for this, an additional payment of annas two per maund has been agreed upon.

(d) Does not arise.

##### NON-RETURN OF GUNNY BAGS REQUIRED FOR DISTRIBUTION OF GRAINS BY MESSRS. BALLABHDAS ESHWARDAS TO THE SUPPLY OFFICER.

**54. Hajee Chowdhury Muhammad Ismail Khan:** Will the Honourable Member for Railways please state:

(a) if it is a fact that the Gunny Bags required for the distribution of grains to Railway Servants are returned by the contractors to the Supply Officer for refills; and

(b) if it is a fact that Messrs. Ballabhdas Eshwardas on the East Indian Railway are exempted from the said procedure; and if so, why?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) Yes.

(b) No, since Messrs. Ballabhdas Eshwardas are also returning the bags. The second part does not arise.

## RUNNING OF CERTAIN TRAINS BETWEEN DELHI AND DELHI SHAHDARA.

**55. Hajee Chowdhury Muhammad Ismail Khan:** Will the Honourable Member for Railways please state:

(a) when the trains No. 68 Down, A Up and D Down, are scheduled to arrive at Delhi-Shahdara Railway Station on the North Western Railway;

(b) the average number of hours per day that the trains No. 68 Down and A Up are arriving late at Delhi-Shahdara;

(c) whether another train was provided for the small children attending schools at Delhi from Delhi-Shahdara in the early morning when train No. 68 never arrived at Shahdara at the scheduled time during the preceding four months;

(d) the result of the census of passengers by the A Up train taken at Delhi Junction to justify its continuous running to its present scheduled time during the preceding four months; and

(e) what objection the Government has to running the A Up train from Delhi Junction at 22-30 hours daily?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) 06·59, 09·15 and 18·02.

(b) 68 Down arrived, on an average, approximately five hours late during the months of June and July, 1943, and A Up approximately 30 minutes late on an average. 68 Down is a train carrying heavy parcels traffic and consequently subject to inevitable delays.

(c) No.

(d) No census of passengers by A Up train has been taken, but it is estimated that approximately 600 passengers travel daily from Delhi and the running of this train to its present schedule is justified.

(e) The N. W. Railway consider that the running of A Up train from Delhi Junction at 22-30 hours would be inconvenient for the bulk of the passengers who travel by this train.

## RUNNING OF A UP TRAIN BETWEEN NEW DELHI AND GHAZIABAD.

**56. Hajee Chowdhury Muhammad Ismail Khan:** Will the Honourable Member for Railways please state:

(a) if it is a fact that the A Up train is run daily between New Delhi and Ghaziabad on the North Western Railway; if so, to what timings;

(b) the number of passengers who used to travel by it between New Delhi and Delhi;

(c) if the number of passengers justifies its running between New Delhi and Delhi; and

(d) the reasons for its late start from New Delhi during the preceding four months?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) Yes.

New Delhi	dep. 17-30 hours
Delhi	arr. 17-42 "
	dep. 17-52 "
Delhi-Shahdara	arr. 18-02 "
	dep. 18-04 "
Sahibabad	arr. 18-12 "
	dep. 18-14 "
Ghaziabad	arr. 18-23 "

(b) and (c). The exact number of passengers is not known as no census has been taken. It is estimated, however, that approximately 600 passengers travel daily from New Delhi station and Government consider this justifies the running of this train.

(d) Due to the late running of other trains, for a variety of reasons, platform accommodation at Delhi Junction is not always immediately available, for this train.



## NON-GAZETTED STAFF ON EAST INDIAN RAILWAY GIVEN EXTENSIONS OF SERVICE.

**57. Hajee Chowdhury Muhammad Ismail Khan:** Will the Honourable Member for Railways please state:

(a) the number of non-gazetted staff on the East Indian Railway given extensions of service after the age of 55; and

(b) the reasons for not employing the man after the age of 55 on the Revised 1934 Scales of Pay as a temporary new entrant?

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall:** (a) 105, up to the middle of March 1943.

(b) Government employ both methods; extension or re-employment being adopted according to the circumstances and merits of each case.

## MESSAGE FROM THE COUNCIL OF STATE.

**Secretary of the Assembly:** Sir, the following message has been received from the Council of State:

"I am directed to inform you that the Council of State at its meeting held on the 6th August, agreed without any amendment to the following Bills which were passed by the Legislative Assembly at its meeting held on Thursday, the 29th July, 1943, namely:

1. A Bill further to amend the Indian Boilers Act, 1925.
2. A Bill to amend the Mines Maternity Benefit Act, 1941.
3. A Bill to amend the Motor Vehicles (Drivers) Ordinance, 1942.
4. A Bill further to amend the Agricultural Produce (Grading and Marking) Act, 1937; and
5. A Bill further to amend the Indian Army Act, 1911, and the Indian Air Force Act, 1932."

## STATEMENT OF BUSINESS.

**The Honourable Sir Sultan Ahmed (Leader of the House):** Sir, Honourable Members are aware that it had been our intention to put down the outstanding items of legislative business on the list of business for today and tomorrow in advance of the food debate. It will have been observed from the agenda that in response to a very general demand we have decided to leave the whole of today and tomorrow free for the food debate. We still, however, consider it necessary to complete the outstanding legislative business before the Session terminates, and I would therefore request you, Sir, to direct the House to sit on Friday and Saturday for the transaction of official business. I hope and trust that every effort will be made to complete the outstanding business on Friday and I would suggest, Sir, that the House might, if necessary, sit till a later hour than usual on that day provided it can finish its business on that day.

**Nawabzada Muhammad Liaquat Ali Khan (Rohilkund and Kumaon Divisions: Muhammadan Rural):** Sir, may I make a submission before you decide about it? If you will remember, Sir, the Honourable Member stated last time that they were definitely finishing the Session on Thursday, but now the Government seem to have changed their mind. I wish Government would know what exactly they intend to do. As regards the meetings on Friday and Saturday I would submit that if the business is likely to be finished on Saturday we should sit on Saturday, but if the business cannot be finished on Saturday we should not sit on Saturday but on Monday and the following days. It appears that the intention of the Government is not to finish this Session till the legislative business is completed. Is that correct?

**The Honourable Sir Sultan Ahmed:** Yes, that is right.

**Nawabzada Muhammad Liaquat Ali Khan:** I would therefore suggest that for the present you will be pleased to fix a meeting on Friday, and if it is found that the business is likely to be finished on Saturday we might sit on Saturday; otherwise not.

**The Honourable Sir Sultan Ahmed:** All that I can say is that I hope and I do appeal to the House that they will be able to finish the legislative business on Friday because we have given over three days to the University Bill, and I hope that we may be able to finish that before lunch, and then

[Sir Sultan Ahmed.]

there will be only another small Bill which will not take a long time. If, however, we are not in a position to finish the business till 5 O'clock on Friday, then I would respectfully suggest to the House that they might continue to sit a little longer so that the business may be finished that evening. If that is not done I would suggest that we might sit on Saturday because after all business people have come here and they want to go back as quickly as possible. It is not our fault that the business cannot be finished on Thursday next; the debate has taken a turn which necessitated that the food debate should be taken up first and the legislative business taken up afterwards. I was merely responding to the general desire of the House to have the food debate first; otherwise my own inclination was to finish the legislative business first before we go on to the food debate. But the demand was insistent and very great and we could not possibly refuse that demand.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): As regards the request made by the Leader of the House all the Members are apparently agreed that there should be a sitting on Friday; as for Saturday there seems to be some difference of opinion, and the House generally does not like to sit on a Saturday. I think for the present it will be best to fix a meeting next Friday for the official business and then, as suggested by Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, if it is found necessary to sit next Saturday and there is a chance of the business being completed on that day, I shall direct the House to sit on Saturday. At present it will be sufficient to fix a meeting for next Friday.

#### INTERIM REPORT OF THE RAILWAY CONVENTION COMMITTEE.

**The Honourable Sir Edward Benthall** (Member for Railways and War Transport): Sir, I lay on the table a copy of the Interim Report by the Railway Convention Committee appointed by the Legislative Assembly.

*Interim report by the Railway Convention Committee appointed by the Assembly: Resolution of 23rd March, 1943.*

This Committee was elected in pursuance of the resolution passed by the Legislative Assembly on the 23rd March, 1943, to consider matters arising out of clause (iv) of the Assembly's Resolution of the 2nd March, 1943, amending the Separation Convention adopted by the Assembly on the 20th September, 1924, and to report the result in the course of the session preceding the Budget Session of 1944. Clause (iv) of the resolution of the 2nd March, 1943, mentioned above runs as follows:—

“(iv) for subsequent years (i.e., years subsequent to 1943-44) and until a new convention is adopted by the Assembly, the allocation of the surplus on commercial lines between the railway reserve and general revenues shall be decided each year on consideration of the needs of the railways and general revenues, the loss, if any, on strategic lines being recovered from general revenues”.

2. The Committee met 7 times at New Delhi between the 10th April and 24th July 1943. They were supplied with copies of all the papers and documents placed in 1928 before the Committee which was then appointed, though infructuously, to review the Separation Convention, and also with five more memoranda of which four related to the depreciation fund and renewal expenditure. After careful consideration, the Committee have come to the conclusion that it is impossible to foresee the conditions which may prevail after the war and that, therefore, the present is not a suitable time for undertaking a comprehensive enquiry into, or a permanent revision of, the Railway Separation Convention, such as the Convention Resolution itself provides for. The Committee have, in accordance with their terms of reference, confined their attention to the devising of an interim arrangement for the division of the railway surplus between railways and general revenues till a new convention is adopted and recommend that a committee be set up as soon as circumstances will permit to examine the whole question of the convention. Such an interim arrangement involves the question of the quantum of the surplus falling due for division which, in turn, depends upon the rate of the annual appropriation to the depreciation fund. The Committee, therefore, examined this question at some length.

3. The Committee are in favour of the depreciation fund being built up on the scientific basis of the lives of the assets, except Dr. Sir Zia Uddin Ahmad who is not in favour of maintaining the depreciation fund in the form in which it now exists. All members except Mr. Jamnadas Mehta, whose view is stated below, are of the opinion that the annual contribution to the depreciation fund should not be less than 1/60th of the capital at charge. Some members felt that this rate of contribution was inadequate and that in past years

railways had not been contributing sufficiently to the fund. There was, however, unanimity on one point namely, that on account of the war, the railway assets were being subjected to heavier wear and tear than in normal times, though it was recognised that the additional depreciation on account of the excessive wear and tear could not be precisely calculated, and that these assets will have to be renewed after the war at a cost very much higher than the original cost on which the contributions to the depreciation fund are based.

The Committee recommend that, until the convention is revised, the present rate of contribution to the depreciation fund should not be reduced. Mr. Jamnadas Mehta considers this rate excessive but, in view of the abnormal wear and tear during the war, is agreeable to its continuing till a new convention is adopted.

The Committee also recommend that there should be an immediate enquiry as to what additional appropriation, if any, should be made to the depreciation fund during the war as an emergency provision, and that the result of the enquiry should be laid before this Committee for consideration and report.

They further recommend that a comprehensive enquiry should be made, as early as possible, into the lives of the assets, including obsolescence, and the consequent normal rate of contribution to the depreciation fund and any other matters, such as the level of prices, affecting the fund. Such an enquiry is essential to any further consideration of the adequacy, or otherwise, of the fund.

Sardar Sant Singh considers that the two enquiries are, in fact, interdependent and should take place immediately.

4. The Committee agree that the present prosperity of railways should be utilized to strengthen railway finances. They note the observations of the Public Accounts Committee in their report on the accounts of 1940-41, to the effect that arrears of maintenance are accumulating owing to the non-availability of materials, that this would result in heavier maintenance expenditure against revenue in future years when receipts might be reduced and that the only source from which it will be possible to finance this expenditure (to which the Committee would add any necessary writing down of stores balances), will be the Railway Reserve Fund.

There was considerable support for the view that, in order to place railways on a sound financial footing having regard to post-war contingencies and the uncertainty of the future both of railways and their personnel, their general reserve should, until a new convention is adopted, be built up by an annual appropriation of a minimum of 1 per cent. on the capital at charge from the surplus. Sir Frederick James, while admitting the abnormalities of war-time finance, also holds the view that the railways will not be on "a sound financial footing" until their General Reserve has reached the level of 10 per cent. of the capital at charge on the understanding that the depreciation fund is treated as such and not, as in the past, a depreciation-*cum*-reserve fund, from which payments due to general revenues can be made. The Committee, however, do not consider that it is possible to prescribe such a minimum appropriation irrespective of the surplus of the year and for an indefinite period. They, therefore, recommend that in allocating the surplus on commercial lines between the Railway Reserve and General Revenues, as provided in clause (iv) of the Resolution of March the 2nd 1943, until a new convention is adopted by the Assembly, the appropriation to the Railway Reserve should be the maximum consistent with a fair allocation to General Revenues as determined from year to year by the general budgetary situation arising out of the present emergency.

To this Mr. Jamnadas Mehta and Sardar Sant Singh would add the rider that the accumulations in the Railway Reserve should not be allowed to exceed two years' contribution to General Revenues, and that any excess over this should be spent in reducing rates and fares and in giving additional amenities to passengers and railway staff.

5. The Committee also took up for consideration a number of other questions such as provision for amortisation of capital, betterment fund, the question of a fixed contribution to general revenues, the correct method of calculating interest on the capital at charge and the allocation of the replacement cost of an asset. They decided, however, that, as these questions were closely bound up with the permanent revision of the convention, they should be left to be examined by the committee recommended above.

E. C. BENTHALL.  
A. J. RAISMAN.  
T. S. SANKARA AIYAR.  
F. E. JAMES.  
JAMNADAS MEHTA.  
SANT SINGH.  
K. C. NEOGY.  
COWASJI JBHANGIR.  
S. MURTAZA.  
ZIA-UDDIN AHMAD.\*  
G. K. MD. SHAHBAN.  
MOHD. YAMIN KHAN.

I. S. PURI,  
Secretary.

\*Subject to a note.

The 2nd August 1943.

*Note by Dr. Sir Zia-uddin Ahmad.*

The Indian Railways have attained a position peculiar to this country. They are partially business concern, partially revenue yielding concern and partially service of public utility and we have not been able to find a position of equilibrium between these three ideals.

2. The major portion of the income at present is derived from Government traffic, the burden of increased rates and fares during the war falls primarily on the Government revenues. The Railways are now collecting from General Revenues by increase in their rates and fares much more than they give us in the form of contribution.

3. In my opinion the Administration of the Indian Railways should be based on sound finance, but we should be honest in our financial policy. We should not follow the examples of dishonest companies which cheat the income-tax officer and the shareholders by various devices. We should be fair to general revenues, the travelling public and to our own employees. We should help the Government as much as we can afford at the time of their greatest necessity. We should not neglect in boom time the needs of the travelling public and provide better comforts in travelling, and we should not neglect our own staff in the time of economic strain whose labour has contributed to the increase of our income, and we should not also forget that this is the time when we can build up our reserve. We have to frame our financial policy with due regard to all these factors.

4. Contribution to the General Revenues, Depreciation Fund, Reserve Fund and the question of rates and fares cannot be discussed as isolated problems. They are correlated subjects. The framing of policy on these issues will require very elaborate investigation. Even if we undertake the investigation now at war time, the conclusion that we arrive at will not apply to peace time. Knowledge of conditions of Railways in other countries will be necessary for correct appreciation of our problems and we will have to import from outside a person of qualifications of late Mr. Acworth to assist us in our investigations. It is impossible during the war time to secure the services of a first class expert in Railway Finance from England or America. I am therefore inclined to think that all these three questions should be left alone for the present, and we continue to follow the existing practice as laid down in the Resolution of 1924.

(a) We continue debiting 1/60th of the Capital at charge under Depreciation Reserve Fund.

(b) The contribution of 1 per cent. to the General Revenue as determined by the Convention of 1924 may not be altered.

(c) The balance may be divided between the General Revenues and the Railway Reserve Fund. The proportion should be determined each year by a special resolution of the Assembly.

5. As majority of the Members of the Committee are of opinion that the Depreciation Reserve Fund in its present form should not only be retained but the contribution of 1/60th of the capital, being insufficient, may be raised and they have recommended immediate enquiry about the lives of the assets, I beg leave to give my opinion on this issue. I am strongly of opinion that Depreciation Reserve Fund as it now exists is as unnecessary to maintain as it is difficult to work out. The present system of debiting the cost of renewal, and maintenance of track, rolling stock and buildings partly under Revenue income, partly under Depreciation Fund, and partly under capital is unsatisfactory. It is difficult to decide with accuracy under which head a particular expenditure should be allocated. No two persons will agree as to the classification of any expenditure under proper heads and the same person will have different opinion at different times. I ask under what heads will a Railway Financier debit the cost of abandoned projects and purchase of branch line shares. I will get different answers. (*Vide Administration Report, Page 175.*)

I suggest that we follow a simple method, a method which is being followed by nearly all the Railways in the world that all expenditure which does not yield any income should be debited to the Revenue and all expenditure which yields revenue should be debited to Capital account. This will simplify the accountancy which has been made unnecessarily complicated.

6. The Railway Administration in India is being fallen into error in regarding Indian Railways only as a business concern. It neglects its responsibility as service of public utility and its duties to travelling public, and to general Revenues. I am quite willing to accept the view that Railways may be regarded as business concern. But I would then press that they should pay like other business concerns the custom duties, income-tax and excess profit tax. When demand for taxes is made, the Administration pleads exemption from these taxes on the ground that it is a service of public utility and is maintained for the benefit of the State. They cannot have both ways.

7. The practice of taking a fixed amount from revenues of Railways each year for renewal, replacement, and maintenance of track and rolling stock under the name of Depreciation is peculiar to this country. They are unnecessarily attempting to solve difficult problem of determining what this fixed amount should be. The present practice is that this fixed amount should be 1/60th of the capital at charge. The figure 60 is very arbitrary. Why not 1/59th or 1/61st? The only argument in favour of 60 is its popularity among the Greeks and the Arabs who always used sexagesimal scale. The Financial Commissioner for

Railways is now admitting that this method of calculation of the *fixed amount* (known as Depreciation) is unscientific and should be given up. The alternative they fall back upon is the determination of the lives of the assets. I challenge that the lives of the assets cannot accurately be determined. It will be as arbitrary as the selection of the number of 60. The life depends on the intensity of the use of the stock, the manner in which it is used and the supervision of maintenance. In calculating the life of rolling stock, the movements in ton-miles must come into consideration. These ton-miles are very great during the war and small during the period of depression. Can anyone calculate the life of a motor car? Neither the mileage nor the time will determine the life of a car. It depends on so many factors which cannot be accurately determined. Countries which are more business-minded than we are have given up this calculation and have adopted the simple method that all expenditure on renewal, replacement and maintenance should be paid directly by the revenue. The expenditure will be great during the busy time and less during slack time, but our income will also be greater in busy time. Depreciation thus depends not only on the capital, but also on our income.

We should therefore give up the practice of setting aside a fixed amount whether based on the percentage of capital or the basis of the assets irrespective of traffic each year, but we should pay from revenue each year as much as we require for replacements and renewals. In case the entire amount could not be spent, the balance should not be allowed to lapse, but it should be carried forward in suspense account, which is different from Depreciation Reserve Fund.

8. The practice of our Indian Railways of setting aside a fixed portion under Depreciation is very embarrassing to the students of the Railway Economics. When they look into the figures of various Railways (*vide* *Statistiques Internationales des chemins de fer* table 3-4 which I have summarised in my book on page 266) they will find that the percentage of expenditure under Miscellaneous is abnormally great; for Indian Railways it is 25.2 and it is 0.5 in National Canadian Railway and 3.1 in London North Eastern Railway; but the percentage under the head of rolling stock is minimum for Indian Railways. It is 9.8 against 24.6 for National Canadian Railway. The marked discrepancies arise out of the fact that persons who prepared these statistics could not comprehend the purpose of our Depreciation Reserve and they put it not under maintenance of track and of rolling stock, but under miscellaneous.

The operating ratio of our Indian Railways also assumes illusory figure. I have calculated the true operating ratio from illusory operating ratio for various years from 1931. The fictitious operative ratio is about 28 per cent. higher than the real operating ratio.

9. There is one more danger to which I would like to draw the attention. During the period of 18 years we have credited the Depreciation Fund with an amount of 225 crores and spent about 150 crores, leaving a balance of over 75 crores. This Reserve has been further increased during the last two years by about nine crores, raising the reserve to about 84 crores. This reserve of 84 crores could have been usefully spent in providing amenities for passengers, in increasing the pay of employees or reducing rates and fares or building up our own general reserve. Special name has been devised to the money so locked up and it is now called Depreciation Reserve for which no visible expenditure could be devised. It was argued that the entire Reserve would be used up during the next thirty years. It cannot be done unless the connotation of the word Depreciation is widened and it is spent in wasteful undertakings such as Kangra Valley Railway or Kalyan Power House. The peaks in the graph of Capital expenditure depend on political factors, but it would not lead to depletion of our depreciation reserve.

10. I am strongly in favour of building up a Railway Reserve Fund which may be utilised for objects mentioned in clause (4) of the Railway Convention of 1924. I would like to add the words 'to provide amenities to passengers' to this sub-clause in order to make this object more explicit. The upper limit of the Reserve in my opinion may be fixed. Wedgewood Committee recommended fifty crores. In view of the objects for which the fund is established which includes expenditure on Depreciation, also seventy-five crores as suggested by Sir Frederick James is not excessive. The limit of seventy-five crores is fixed on the supposition that the second Reserve called Depreciation Reserve should be abolished. It is unnecessary as general reserve can be utilised for arrears in renewals and replacements as mentioned in clause (4) of the Convention.

#### Conclusion.

11. The position according to Convention of 1924 is that from the Revenue of Railways we first pay working expenses, interest charges, one per cent. of the capital at charge to general revenues, and contribution to Depreciation Reserve Fund, and the balance is divided between general revenues and Reserve Fund. It is now contemplated that we first pay (1) working expenses, (2) interest charges, (3) Depreciation Reserve Fund and possibly enhance its amount and the balance may be divided between general revenues and the Reserve Fund. From the share of general revenues, the losses on strategic lines should further be deducted.

I regret that I am unable to subscribe to this opinion. I do not object to the administration of Railways as a business concern, but like other business concerns they should pay all the taxes including income-tax and excess profits tax.

ZIA UDDIN AHMAD.

## MOTION *RE* THE FOOD SITUATION.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): Before I call upon the Honourable the Food Member to move his motion I think I ought to ask Honourable Members whether they desire that there should be a time limit for speeches as on the last occasion. (Several Honourable Members: "Yes".) On the last occasion Leaders of Parties were allowed 30 minutes and other Members were allowed 20 minutes, and the Government Member was given one hour or more. I suggest the same time limits should be fixed on this occasion also.

**Mr. Akhil Chandra Datta** (Chittagong and Rajshahi Divisions: Non-Muhamadan Rural): Sir, the President should have some discretion.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): So far as I am concerned, you may give me discretion but as the Members are aware I do not like to disturb the time limits once fixed.

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque** (Food Member): Sir, I beg to move: "That the food situation in India be taken into consideration."

India today is in the midst of a most difficult food problem. War on the modern scale represents a great economic upheaval entailing an inevitable shortage of available food supply in every country, and there is no country in the world today, not even the United States of America or Great Britain, which has not to suffer from the consequences of food shortage. But whereas this economic upheaval and shortage began much earlier in other countries, we have been faced with this problem which has some special features of its own for just about a year.

The year 1943 opened with a good prospect for wheat crop and the all-India wheat production was estimated to be at least a million ton surplus. Maize and millets were also estimated to be a surplus production. But the last rice crop was affected by weather conditions, cyclone and flood. And rice constitutes by far the biggest acreage in the country. The estimated all-India rice shortage was about 2 million tons. But while the deficits and surpluses of other areas almost cancelled each other, the province of Bengal representing about one-third of the total acreage of rice in India was deficit by about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  million tons against the normal average, but surplus by about a million ton compared with the crop of 1940. On the other hand the rice crop of the year 1941 was a surplus crop in Bengal by about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  million tons over the normal average, thus providing a fair carry-over for the following year. Taken all together—rice, wheat, maize and millets—the all-India food position at the beginning of the year was nothing exceptional. In no less than five out of the previous ten years the production of foodgrains was worse than the estimated food production of this year and no grave shortage was expected by even the worst pessimist. Only Bombay, Travancore and Cochin were then badly affected and prompt arrangements were made to meet the requirements of these areas.

Within a few months the food position took a turn almost unparalleled in the history of India. Travancore and Cochin are faced with grave distress and people are living there on a meagre supply of foodgrains supplemented by roots and vegetables. This region has always been deficit in respect of food grains and had normally to draw its supplies from other provinces and from Burma. With the fall of Burma this area was suddenly confronted with a shortage of foodgrains. Today the rationed quantity per head of all grains—rice, wheat or other dry grains—is only  $4\frac{1}{2}$  lbs. per week. The City of Bombay is being rationed for the last few months and the ration there, including all grains—rice, wheat and bajra—is  $6\frac{1}{2}$  lbs. per week per head. Some of the districts of Bombay are also in a most difficult food position and almost similar is the case in some parts of Madras. There is unprecedented distress in Bengal and the situation there is fully known to you all. There are other parts of India which have been more or less affected either owing to the pressure of high prices or due to local shortage. The general food situation is a matter of considerable

anxiety to all and for the time being we have to face day to day problems of the most complexity and often at a moment's notice. We are doing our best and all that is possible to meet the exigencies of the situation.

Let me go back at this point, for a moment, to explain to the House the steps taken from time to time by the Government of India from the beginning of the war. From the very first, the Government of India realized that sooner or later they might be confronted with some of the inevitable consequences of war conditions. But for the time being the problem was to evolve a common price policy and to co-ordinate the necessary measures that might be taken by the provincial authorities to meet the exigencies of the war situation. India is a vast continent with 390 million inhabitants. Even in normal times with fast train services it took about three days to go from Karachi to Calcutta. From Delhi to Travancore it was even a longer journey. We have to work under a constitution under which the provinces function as autonomous units with responsibilities of their own, within their own sphere and this is true as much of the ministerial provinces as of the section 93 provinces. And we have no right to interfere in matters within the scope of provincial responsibility. Agriculture, agricultural development, production of foodgrains and irrigation are primarily the responsibilities of the provinces and while the Government of India have from time to time given a lead in many measures of reconstruction and rehabilitation of agriculture, the provinces have direct responsibilities in shaping their own policies and programme. The Indian States are generally autonomous in their economic policies and they function in conditions of their own. On the other hand, the Government of India have no administrative agency of their own and must necessarily depend on the provinces and their established administrative machinery to carry out any common planning or programme in the food problem of India. They can only enforce all common measures through understanding and agreement with the Provinces and States. The Government of India therefore in the existing scheme of things depended upon the Provinces and States as the basis of future economic policy and have throughout tried to take the provinces and States with them in accepting a common policy for the country as a whole. No other method would have been feasible and no other method was even suggested.

Within a few days after the declaration of the war, the Government of India therefore issued a notification under Rule 81 (2) (3) of the Defence of India Rules empowering the Provincial Governments and the Chief Commissioners to control the prices of certain essential commodities, such as foodstuffs, salt, kerosene, medical supplies, etc. The representatives of the provinces and the States were thereafter invited to a Conference convened on the 18th and 19th of October, 1939. The Ministries were then functioning in all the provinces. This Conference recommended against any control of the price of agricultural commodities, and was in favour of the provinces being the proper authority to exercise control over the commodity prices if and when necessary.

It soon became apparent that the measures till then taken were not adequate, and the second Price Control Conference was convened on the 24th and 25th of June, 1940. This Conference recommended that while the Central Government might control the primary wholesale market prices when necessary, the Provinces and States should control the retail market prices; and that in fixing wholesale prices, when and if necessary, the Central Government should first consult the primary producing provinces concerned. On a full consideration of the general price level, this Conference came to the conclusion that the price of agricultural commodities was not high enough to warrant the imposition of any measure to check the rise. Meanwhile the trend of agricultural prices was downward and the problem of price control receded for the time being into the background.

Late in the summer of 1941, market conditions began to deteriorate along with adverse war news. The price level began to rise and the third Price Control Conference was called on the 16th and 17th of October, 1941. Some

[Sir M. Azizul Huque.]

of the representatives at this Conference strongly criticised any attempt to keep agricultural prices down as being only in the interests of export. The rise in prices was considered to be due to local and temporary factors and the Conference was not in favour of any control of prices by the Centre. Some of the representatives were not only against any control of prices, but were in favour of a further rise in prices of rice and opposed to any import of rice from Burma. Punjab was emphatically against any control of wheat prices and was not in favour, in any circumstance, of any control during harvest.

Shortly after the Conference met, the wheat situation began to deteriorate with considerable speculative activities. With the impending danger of hostilities breaking out in the East, the Government of India decided to confer further powers on the provinces to deal with emergencies. On the 29th of October 1941, provinces were given further powers, *inter alia*, to control movement of commodities in local markets, fix prices and secure the availability of foodstuffs. These powers were given only with a view to quick action being taken in an emergency. It was specially emphasized that these powers should not be exercised by the provinces without previous consultation with the Government of India. In the event of any such consultation being not possible owing to breakdown of communication or in any emergent situation demanding quick action, the Government of India desired that reference should be made immediately afterwards to the Central Government.

The wheat situation continued to deteriorate and on the 5th of December, 1941, the Central Government, in accordance with the recommendations of the Second Price Control Conference, issued a notification fixing the maximum price of wheat at Rs. 4/6 per maund in the primary wholesale markets at Hapur and Lyallpur, the prices of wheat in other markets being left to the provinces to be fixed on a derivative basis. The Provincial Governments were simultaneously requested to take action to fix maximum prices of wheat in other markets within their respective areas at an appropriate level and related to the maximum price fixed at Hapur and Lyallpur.

Soon after the declaration of war by Japan, followed by the rapidity of the Japanese advance, one of the Provincial Governments enquired from the Central Government as to whether a provincial reserve should not be built up in anticipation. Sir, the Government of India gave the most careful consideration to the matter but came to the conclusion that it would not be in the best interests of the country as a whole to take any such measure. The Provincial Governments were informed of the inevitable consequences that would follow if every province began to build up a provincial reserve. One province would be followed by another and this would inevitably choke up the flow of grains and would thereby create an artificial shortage throughout India. Sir, the Government of India specially emphasized that in conditions of shortage this would lead to an economic disaster and any such measure should therefore be avoided. In the meantime, some of the Provinces had already restricted the movement of certain food-grains to destinations outside their boundaries.

The Fourth Price Control Conference met on the 6th and 7th February and as I read the speech of my distinguished friend, the Honourable Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar, whom I am glad to welcome here, I find that he warned all Provinces not to dam in any manner the free flow of food commodities, and especially emphasized that a ban on inter-provincial exports would do much more harm than good, and should be avoided to the utmost extent. In order to ensure an equitable distribution between surplus and deficit provinces, this Conference recommended that the Central Government should create an appropriate organisation. The Conference further recommended that inter-provincial exports should not be prohibited, and that stock-buildings by provinces should be deprecated, especially on the part of deficit provinces. The Conference re-affirmed its views that price control administration should be left to the provinces and



recommended further that the price of rice should not be controlled; should the time come when it became necessary to do so, it should be done after consultation with the provinces.

With a view to enable the Government of India to be ready for any future emergency or contingency, the producing provinces, in accordance with the recommendations of the Conference, were requested to give the names of the common varieties of paddy in the locality and to recommend the price that should be fixed. Honourable Members are aware that, unlike wheat, there is no organized wholesale market for rice in India. With hundreds of common varieties of paddy, it was difficult to consider any control measures without careful collection of data. The Government of India were not able to get the necessary data.

In the meantime, a conference of the representatives of the Governments of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, the C. P. and Assam—the main rice-producing provinces—met together to discuss a common rice policy, but no agreement was arrived at.

**Dr. Sir Zia Uddin Ahmad** (United Provinces Southern Divisions: Muhamadnan Rural): When?

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque**: February-March 1942.

In April 1942 the Central Government introduced control over the price and movement of sugar produced in India, but could not introduce any central price over other food-grains excepting wheat in view of the general attitude of the Provinces. On the 28th March, 1942 the Government of India fixed the price of wheat at Rs. 5 in Lyallpur and Hapur and Rs. 5/4 in Sind.

In the meantime various local authorities had passed multiple and sometimes confusing orders with the resultant dislocation of trade. Some of the Provinces had also begun to build up their reserves. The next Price Control Conference was therefore called on the 7th and 8th April, 1942 and came to the following conclusions:

that stock-building was inadvisable especially when a Province was a deficit one, and if unavoidably necessary, should be done only to the extent of a reasonable provision;

that a control price of wheat was unnecessary;

that wholesale dealers should be licensed and that retail licenses should be issued at the option of the Provinces;

that in any price control scheme, or in taking further price measures, the established trade should not be disturbed and existing trade channels and agencies should be utilised as far as possible;

that wheat wholesale price should not be revised.

Throughout May this year unfounded rumours spread all over the country about the general wheat position. The price of wheat, inspite of the maximum prices fixed, rose up abnormally high in Hapur and the Wheat Commissioner had to stop the issue of further wheat permits in the U. P. on the 16th December, 1942. The situation was aggravated by wild rumours to the gain of persons interested in speculation. British India was then short of wheat in some places. With a view to relieve this wheat shortage in some parts of British India, the Political Department requested the Indian States if they could release any wheat from their stock. Interested parties spread a rumour that the Government proposed to export a million ton of wheat and that godowns had already been hired in Bombay. So strong was the rumour that the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and some other commercial bodies sent representations to the Government of India. Sir, the Government of India immediately contradicted this entirely unfounded rumour, but somehow or other the representation made by some of the trade organizations was published in the press before the reply could be sent. Speculators made gains, prices rose and wheat went underground. The Wheat Control Order was therefore promulgated, in the month of May, prohibiting inter-provincial movement of wheat unless covered by a permit issued by the Wheat Commissioner in India.

[Sir M. Azizul Huque.]

The general food situation at the time demanded further measures and the Food-grains Control Order was promulgated on the 21st May, 1942 providing for the licensing of wholesale dealers in food-grains and requiring them to submit periodical reports of stocks held by them and all relevant information regarding the disposal of such stocks.

Once again in July 1942, the Government of India deemed it necessary to reiterate their views that stock-building of food-stuffs should in the then existing conditions of things be regarded as inadvisable as a rule; that acquisitions of stocks by industrial concerns in excess of their normal requirements should be discouraged as far as possible. Provinces and States were informed that the Government of India was not in favour of any stock-building except to safeguard supplies in particular areas and that only to a reasonable limit and only after a previous reference to the Government of India.

Sir, the situation continued to deteriorate and it was soon apparent that the statutory maximum prices were not being observed and that clandestine transactions were taking place on a widespread scale at rates much in excess of the legal maximum. The Sixth Price Control Conference was therefore called in September 1942 as further and more comprehensive steps were considered necessary to prevent the development of the black-market and to check further rise in prices. This Conference recommended that a single agency should be employed for all civilian and defence purchases, that the export of wheat on private account from the surplus provinces should be prohibited, that the Central Government should arrange to make purchases from the surplus provinces and distribute them to the deficit areas, and that the governing principle in all measures under conditions of shortage should be equality of sacrifice on the part of all. The Conference was also of the opinion that there should be the least interference with the normal channels of distribution.

In the closing months of 1942 the Government of India decided to set up a special department to deal with the food problem. The Department of Food was thereupon created on the 2nd December, 1942, and soon after, the first Food Conference was convened on the 14th and 15th December, 1942. It may be noted that provinces and States were asked some time in August of this year to give a forecast of their productions, surpluses, and deficiencies. No reply came from most of the major provinces. An estimate was therefore placed before this Conference showing the probable deficits and surpluses of each area, with a view to getting the latest information from the representatives at the Conference about provincial acreage and yield. The wheat position was then extremely critical in some parts of India. There were threats of strikes in industrial areas with crop failures in other parts. A disastrous cyclone on the East Coast caused havoc in extensive areas. This Conference discussed the general wheat position and the estimates of deficits and surpluses as stated by the provinces for the next four months. The estimated surplus available, mainly in the Punjab, till the next harvest was not enough to meet the deficit and the Government of India therefore took immediate steps to get some imports of wheat from abroad. While I am not in a position to state the actual figures of imports for obvious reasons, I can say this much that it was a substantial quantity and that the surplus available within the country with the imported wheat was for the time being sufficient to meet the situation. The rice position was thereafter discussed by the Conference, and this Conference was attended among others not only by the official representative of the Government of Bengal but also by the then Chief Minister of the province. As regards rice the statement on behalf of Bengal was as follows:

"We do not require for the next few months any rice even though we are in deficit."

Sir, on an enquiry whether the Bengal Government had any suggestion to make as to how they would be able to get rice if it was required by the province, neither the Chief Minister nor the official representative had any suggestions to offer.

**An Honourable Member:** When was this?

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** December last. "We have to make our suggestion", said the official representative, "when the occasion arises." Sir, the general position taken up by Bengal was that as they were not in surplus, but in deficit, they should not be asked to contribute in any way to the all-India pool, and that they would be able to manage their affairs if they were not asked to undertake any extra provincial responsibility. The statement of the then Chief Minister was in the following terms, viz.,—

"We know rice is enough for us. We do require some wheat from outside. We do not want to be fixed to a policy. We shall act as we may decide."

The other provinces thereupon considered their deficits and surpluses without taking Bengal into account. As regards millets the Bengal representative declared that his province was not particularly interested. The Conference thereafter made certain general recommendations, viz., that the Government of India should get surplus grains from the provinces through purchasing agencies under the control of Governments of the producing Provinces and distribute the available surplus grains to the deficit areas. As regards price control Bombay was definitely against fixing any price on the ground that commodities would not come out. Bengal opinion was, "We have regarded the whole matter as so academic that we have not attempted to make any calculations".

**An Honourable Member:** Happy-go-lucky!

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** "In the case of rice it is of little importance so long as we are allowed to look after our own interests". Madras, C. P. and Assam were also opposed to the enforcement of any maximum price and the U. P. also was opposed to the fixing of price of any commodity other than wheat. The official representative of Bengal was of the opinion, that all price control measures should be given up and that the price should be moderated by market activities and controlled distribution. The Punjab, the main wheat producing surplus area, agreed to a purchasing agency subject to the Government of the Punjab deciding the quantity to be exported from the province. The Conference also recommended that there should be no requisitioning of foodstuffs as it would dry up supplies. The question of rationing was also considered. The province of Bombay was definitely in favour of rationing schemes. The Government of Bengal was not in favour of any rationing measure beyond group rationing in labour areas and queue distribution for the public. The Conference finally recommended the de-control of the price of wheat.

The original proposal of the Government of India before this Conference was the setting up of a purchasing organisation, an organisation of merchants buying on behalf of the Central Government on a commission basis as the best means of effecting purchases on a large scale. The provinces had been consulted but as there was considerable difference of opinion, the question was discussed in the Conference. Sir, as I have said before, the consensus of opinion at the Conference was that the purchasing operations should be left entirely to the Government of the producing provinces, the Central Government merely assuming responsibility for moving the surplus grain from the surplus to the deficit areas. Sir, speaking at this Conference, the late Mr. Holdsworth, the then Secretary of the Food Department, uttered a warning against any such dual scheme. He pointed out the difficulties the Central Government would encounter in shouldering the responsibility for moving the surplus grains from the producing provinces to the deficit provinces, through an organisation not under its own direct control but controlled by the Government of the producing province which in effect would place the Government of India in an almost impossible position. As he stated frankly at this Conference:

"We are going to be asked by the deficit provinces to carry out a quota programme—if we can ever arrive at a quota programme. We are going to be expected by the deficit provinces to produce grains for them. At the same time we shall have to cajole or persuade the producing provinces that they can go a little bit further than they can go and try

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to reach the requirements which are necessary in other parts of India. It will be a constant struggle in which we shall be pressed, on one side, for more grain, and hindered on the other side, on the ground that we are starving the producing areas. I do not suggest that either side would take up an obviously unreasonable position. But I think it must be admitted that if the Government of India are to take any responsibility in the matter of feeding the deficit areas they must have a much freer hand in dealing with the producing areas than some of the Provincial Governments see at present to allow. I should rather like the provinces which have objected to the scheme as propounded by us to consider the position that I have just stated and to let us know if they can see their way to giving us a freer hand than they seem prepared to do in their replies to our reference."

But the recommendations of the provinces were as I have just stated and the decision of the Conference was as I have just said. As I have just stated and  
12 Noon. primary responsibility for the food problem was on the provinces it was not possible for the Government of India to go against the consensus of opinion at the Conference and impose its own purchasing organisation upon unwilling provinces.

In accordance with the recommendations of the Food Conference, the wheat price was de-controlled and immediately the price shot up to near about Rs. 12, though it came down later, against the previous controlled price of Rs. 5 or Rs. 5/4. The Government of India then prepared a procurement plan for all provinces and States and a further conference was convened to discuss the details of the plan. The provinces, both deficit and surplus, were urged in the meantime to begin purchases of all available food stuffs within their respective areas. This procurement plan was formulated in accordance with the recommendations of the previous conference to distribute the deficiencies all over India, so that each surplus province may take its share of the general deficiency on an all-India basis and not leave the deficit provinces only to meet the pinch and the pressure of the shortage. It was specially emphasized that the entire plan was based on the principle that provinces with a surplus should buy whatever they have and that if they could spare more they should give more. At the second Food Conference held on the 25th and 26th February of this year, U. P., Bihar, Punjab and Assam were of the opinion that the provinces themselves should purchase their own surpluses. Bengal had no opinion either on the procurement policy or on the question of surpluses except that "anything beyond a safe limit is a matter for the province to decide." The Conference agreed that all provinces should have procurement organisations and that the Provincial Governments should be responsible for the movement of commodities purchased on their behalf in the surplus areas and that all provinces should supply information of stock purchased and of the general food situation. There was no unanimity as to who should determine the quantity that should be surrendered by a province for the deficit areas. The Punjab, Bihar and C. P. were against the Central Government determining the quantity to be surrendered by a province. Orissa was neutral while Madras, Bombay, U. P., Sind, Assam and N. W. F. P. were in favour. The Conference recommended that there should be no export from a province except under a provincial licence. The Government of India thereafter finally decided on the basic plan of distributing surplus to deficit areas. Much has been said about the statistics of surpluses in the basic plan. Major General Wood clearly enunciated the views of the Government of India in the following terms:

"All discussions of this kind of surplus or of that and all discussions based on available statistics were based on very unstable foundations and so were largely conjectural and hypothetical. What we should now concentrate on is action; action to set up our procurement organisations and, action to commence procurement operations which, operated vigorously, would alone reveal what could be made available for the solution of our problems. All else is supposition."

What was the plan agreed to and accepted by all and what was the result. (An Honourable Member: "What is the date of this?") 6th February of this year. Firstly, both the surplus and the deficit provinces were to bring the maximum stocks of food grains under governmental control. That was the only solution devised to solve future difficulties and to gain some equilibrium in the matter of price as well as supply.

Secondly, every province, surplus or deficit, was to set up a procurement organisation for the above purpose. They had been asked in January to take emergent and extemporised action to buy up whatever rice and millets they could from stocks of current 'kharif' crop coming into the market. But the net result was disappointing. Some did, some followed their own methods, others did not take action commensurate with the plan. In some places where they did, they tried to build up their own reserve first.

Thirdly, all provinces were to supply certain information about their stock position, purchases and of the general food situation. Out of 52 returns which should have reached the Government of India by the end of June, only 3 were received and our greatest difficulty throughout in dealing with the food problem has been a sad lack of information in most matters. In our task of evolving the procurement and supply plan we made it quite clear that the figures were conjectural and were to be taken as targets only. We realised that the amount of actual purchases might not reach the target figures but who could realise that they would be so wide of the mark as it turned out to be in the face of all provinces accepting the collective responsibility. The Provincial Governments no doubt disputed the surplus figures under the central procurement plan. One province agreed to supply 200 thousand tons of rice, 50 thousand tons of jowar, and 120 thousand tons of gram as surplus for the year 1943. Against this total quantity of 370 thousand tons of food grains, it needed a monthly supply of only six to seven thousand tons of wheat. According to the programme of supply framed by the province itself, not by the Government of India, namely, to supply 46,480 tons of rice, 24,215 tons of jowar and 28,932 tons of gram, an aggregate total of 99,627 tons from April to June, it was not possible for us to get more than 25 thousand tons of rice only. (*An Honourable Member*: "Was transport available for that province?") Yes. (*Another Honourable Member*: "which province was it?") In the public interest, I do not wish to give any names. Another province against a declared surplus for the year of 200,000 tons of millets, 100,000 tons of wheat and 125,000 tons of gram, supplied only 20,000 tons of millets, nothing of wheat and only a thousand tons of gram from December to July.

Taking all-India position as a whole, we should have received during April, May and June about 14½ lakh tons of various kinds of food grains from the surplus provinces. We could obtain just about 5.7 lakhs ton for distribution to the deficit provinces and States.

By about the beginning of May, the situation began to assume a critical character and it looked as if the food situation in Bengal was beginning to get completely out of hand. The province was faced with a rigorous shortage and it looked as if the industrial war effort, war effort generally and civil life of the province were in distinct danger of dislocation with its inevitable reaction on other areas as well. The Government of India had, therefore, no other alternative but to tide over the immediate situation by introducing free trade in the Eastern zone as the only means of getting a flow of food grains into the deficit areas. This was done and for the time being a grave crisis was thereby averted. If free trade had full play, it would have had a permanent effect not only in bringing supplies to the deficit areas but also in bringing down the price levels of the whole of eastern region even though there would have been some temporary rise for a time till the market found its equilibrium. But as soon as free trade was declared in the Eastern Zone, obstructions of every kind were placed in its way. I have before me a list of over 60 cases reported from time to time and we have not yet been able to complete the investigation of these cases. But the nature of the allegations are as follows: *viz.*, stocks purchased were requisitioned, the stocks purchased were seized, a percentage of all purchases were ordered to be surrendered, and in some cases at a much lower price than purchase price, stockists were ordered to close godowns, traders were warned not to sell, stationmasters were asked to refuse wagons, carters and carriers were stopped from assisting movements, export was banned by peremptory orders . . .

**An Honourable Member:** Is that the work of some Provincial Governments?

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Haque:** I am merely making a statement of facts. Until the investigations are finished, I would not like to be drawn into this controversy.

**Mr. Hoosainbhoj A. Lalljee** (Bombay Central Division: Muhammadan Rural): Even the stationmasters were asked to refuse wagons?

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Haque:** Yes, why not? I have seen much of human life. Among those who complained were General Managers of Railways, the Chief Mining Engineer of the Railway Board, the Price Administrator of the Indian Mining Association, the Officer-in-charge of rice supplies to aeroplane construction, Bengal Chamber of Commerce, Muslim Chamber of Commerce, Indian Chamber of Commerce, National Chamber of Commerce and industrial concerns, not to speak of traders and purchasing agents. It is said that trade agents were arrested and prosecuted and that goods in transit were seized. Thus free trade did not function. Taking the case of one of the provinces, we had an authoritative statement that the province had at least 30 lakhs of maunds of surplus grains. This province did not take any step from January to April to purchase any rice for its own purposes at a time when price was admittedly low. Yet as soon as the free trade was introduced, it tried to build up a reserve stock for its own needs. We were just at the time considering the feasibility of gradually restoring free trade throughout India as the only other means of ensuring steady supply, thereby bringing down the general price level and distributing supplies commensurate with the needs of various parts of India. But for some time it looked as if this may possibly endanger even the partial supply to the deficit areas. With few exceptions there was no acceptance of a common responsibility. Sir, having regard to the compelling necessity of immediately doing whatever we could to arrange supplies as the producing provinces could give us with good will, we convened a Conference of the representatives of all provinces and States.

This Conference met on the 5th, 6th and 7th of July. The Conference was definitely against any form of free trade and recommended reversion to the original procurement plan with arithmetical adjustment functioning under the Government of India but with purchasing organisations working under the Provincial Governments. The Government of India accepted the recommendations of the Conference; there was hardly any time to evolve any other policy. Any other alternative measure would necessarily have taken at least a preparatory period to build up the necessary organisation for effective purchase, distribution and transport. Just at the time when this was settled and the provinces were requested to supply such quantities as they could spare for the deficit areas, we found that sometimes even with some stocks in hand enough foodgrains could not be despatched due to various transport difficulties. To lose no time, the Honourable Member for War Transport, to whom I am grateful, and myself went immediately after the Conference to Lahore to settle matters on the spot in consultation with the local railway authorities, the representatives of the War Transport Department and the Government of the Punjab. We found that the North Western Railway could despatch more wagons with foodgrains provided they could be promptly cleared. We also found out that operational difficulties and bottlenecks stood in the way of larger movements to the deficit areas of the South. Possibilities of alternative routes to the South were, therefore, explored. The War Transport Department also agreed to raise the quota of foodgrains from the North Western Railway into Calcutta to 120 wagons of foodgrains daily provided the Bengal Government could make firm arrangements for their immediate clearance. Just at the time when we could clear up all these operational difficulties, there came the unfortunate breach due to the Damodar flood and it is not possible at the moment to say how long it will be before the railway lines are restored. We tried to send more grain by ships and, in fact, two ships were actually loaded with wheat. But just after loading the ships developed engine troubles and are now under repairs. In order to utilise shipping if and when available for future supply, we are arranging storage accommodation of

wheat that may be available for immediate loading. We have done all that is possible but none can contend against obvious limitations and even where we can, it cannot be done in a day. If growers are asked not to sell but to wait for better prices, if grains do not come to the *Mundis* in monsoon conditions, if some over-zealous officer a thousand miles away requisitions foodgrains while in transit through his area from one State or province to another, it takes time for information to come, remedies devised, provincial authorities referred to and goods moved again. For the time being, our efforts are all directed to one act, namely, to arrange and ensure more supplies to the deficit areas while we propose to take other remedial and necessary measures as soon as the exigencies of the moment are under control. If the Government of India have to accept any responsibility in the food problem of India, we must devise adequate machinery to carry out and quickly enforce our decisions. How this can be done and ensured cannot be decided until the difficulties of the moment are tided over.

So far, we had to face three problems. Firstly, the deficits and surpluses, according to provincial figures, had never met each other. There were much more deficits than surpluses available and the surplus provinces, probably with reasons of their own, do not accept any other surplus figure than their own. Secondly, as I have said before, the purchasing organisation is not at the disposal of the Central Government; the procurement plan does not function and supplies are not available according to programme. Thirdly, exigencies of war conditions have created difficult and complex transport problems with operational restrictions, defence movements, bottlenecks, movements of essential commodities like coal, not to speak of the occasional break-down of communications due to monsoon and flood.

But behind all these we must remember the economy of Indian agriculture. The Indian peasant is not a farmer in any sense of the term. He grows food crops, retains what he needs for his own consumption and sells only the surplus. The marketable surplus is thus made up of the small margins of millions of small peasant growers. In the past, he had often to sell his own food crops by the compelling necessity of meeting his money obligations and essential needs. With low agricultural prices, he had often to sell a share of even his bare subsistence needs. With not enough to eat, he had often to underfeed himself to meet his fixed liabilities. Today with high agricultural prices, he is able to meet his monetary liabilities by selling only a very small quantity of his food grains and sometimes by only selling his subsidiary products. The growers, the 50 million of small farmers on the other hand, have no incentive, no urge, no necessity today to sell their grains in the absence of consumer goods. The general inflationary position has also visibly affected the market. No one of these elements by itself is entirely responsible for the food problem of today. But all of these combined have their influence on the food problem. On the other hand, new consumer class have been created under the stress of war conditions. The Indian Army strength is now over two million in number. Recruited mainly from Indian villages, the rank and file form a new consumer class on regulated scale of army diet. Defence constructions, expansion of old industries, growth of new industries, expansion of multiple governmental activities have increased beyond measure the class of wage earners with wages much higher than the pre-war level, bringing in new elements in the economy of India. Higher wages are invariably first reflected in their effects on the primary needs of food and clothing.

Superimposed on all these lies an undercurrent of apprehension about the future economy of India resulting in all consumers trying to keep some stock of food grains from fear of future shortage.

In pre-war economy, the trade adjusted the general price level. In war conditions, trade functions under many limitations and restrictions. Unless therefore the whole organisation of distribution from the grower in one end of India to the consumer in the other end of this vast Continent functions as a whole, it clogs up supply. Conditions of shortage generate a tendency for higher price and higher profit. It is not possible within a period of few weeks or even

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a few months to neutralise the effects of all the factors or set up any effective machinery to deal with these problems fully.

Sir, when trade channels are choked; every one becomes a buyer, industrial concerns who must feed their labourers, employers of labour engaged in war works, Governments purchasing to build up their reserve stocks, consumers who have money to buy for long range needs, and no doubt others with motives of speculation and profit. Shortage is aggravated and it is a struggle to get the marketable surplus of food grains.

Sometimes, I wonder whether we devoted sufficient attention in the past to the food problem of the country. I am not aware if this had been discussed in the various legislatures of the country in the past. I am not aware of any nation-wide effort to tackle the problem of nutrition, the ultimate purpose of food. Did we realise within ourselves that the very basis of our economy is so made that it is hardly enough to meet our minimum needs, and certainly lacks the strength to stand the pressure of any abnormal circumstances or conditions of strain. The suggestion of the Government of India in January last to create improvised purchasing organisations was not followed up in most of the Provinces, both deficit and surplus; probably they never anticipated any acute shortage. As I said before, the then Chief Minister of Bengal only a few months back thought that there would be no rice shortage. And it was not the Bengal administration alone which failed to anticipate events. Speaking in this House on the 17th February last, on the food situation, my Honourable friend, Mr. Hooseinbhoj Lalljee—I hope he will excuse me if I quote him—expressed himself in the following terms:

“I make bold to say that so far as this country is concerned, as a businessman who has been trading or whose people have been trading in rice and other foodstuffs for the last 140 years,—I make bold to say that there is no much fear of ourselves suffering from scarcity of foodstuffs in this country.”

Sir, in economic calculations, astrology is the last method which we should get at. Sir, it has been said that exports are responsible for the shortage of food grains within India. May I state that the total exports of rice and wheat since January up to date is just about 85,000 tons including exports to Ceylon. (Interruption.) That does not affect the present position. Since then rice export has been completely banned and unless we have a surplus in hand after meeting the needs of India, we do not propose to export other food grains either, except such small quantities as may be necessary in the interests of India.

Sir, I have seen various statements and reports about the inflated defence purchases of food grains. May I say that from January to July the total defence purchases of wheat and rice is just about 279,000 tons and do please remember that two million people in the army are to be fed.

But the food problem of today is much deeper than it appears on the surface. If statistics are correct, rice production in India from 1911-12 to 1942-43 has remained nearly constant between the figures of 25 million tons and 27 million tons except the two war years 1916-17 and 1917-18 when production was higher than these figures.

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi** (Dacca cum Mymensingh: Muhammadan Rural): What about 1942?

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** I will reply to that.

As compared with three pre-war years, the combined acreage for our basic food grains, rice and wheat is almost constant, viz., 108, 109, 108, 108, 107.5, 109 million acres as from 1937-38 to 1942-43 respectively. In the meantime the population has increased from about 311 millions in 1910-11 to 388 millions in 1941, with the corresponding increase of the rice eating population. The main food grains production of India has also remained practically constant between 50 and 51 million tons with small variation from year to year. It is difficult to believe, and that is my reply to my Honourable friend, Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi, that there has not been at least some increase of production in this long period in spite of a very large increase of population.



But there is at least some relative truth behind these statistical figures, however inaccurate they may otherwise be. And that is that there is some actual lag between production and population figures. Again, if statistics are correct, the average *per capita* production of rice in Bengal during the census decade of 1911-12 to 1920-21 was 384 lbs. The average *per capita* production from 1940-41 to 1942-43 was only 283 lbs. If we take the normal production of Bengal as 8½ million tons, the *per capita* production comes to 314 lbs., 70 lbs. less today than it was 30 years before. I do not wish to confuse this House with statistical figures, but if the average adult diet is only 1 lb. of foodgrains a day the consumption needs of India as a whole is about 50.5 million tons. With 4.5 million tons as seed requirements the total foodgrains necessary is at least 55 million tons. If half the people of India consume a little more, *viz.*, 1½ lb. a day, the figures go up to 61 million tons of all foodgrains major and minor. And our normal production of the principal foodgrains is only about 50 or 51 million tons. If the growers choose to keep any quantity as insurance against bad harvest, if they eat a little more than the poor meal of past years, if there is any carry-over, it means a serious gap in the supplies available of the main food crops in the existing conditions of things for the non-agriculturist population, which have to be compensated with minor foodgrains, vegetables, etc.

Mr. Neogy was kind enough to refer the other day to my book "Man Behind the Plough". In that book I pleaded for a planned economic policy to reclaim agriculture in the interests of generations to come. May I quote only a few lines, written five years ago, and I leave it to Mr. Neogy to compare it with conditions of today not merely for Bengal but for other areas as well:

"Bengal must grow more food within the province and our economic policy should be so framed that we may always have an assured supply of sufficient food. Our production should at least be equal to consumption. This is essential as a reasonable measure of economic security. Every country is from time to time faced with economic and political crises. It will be weakness in our economic life if the food supply is not sufficient to meet the strain of such occasions. One must remember that during the great European war, the presence of the EMDEN in the Bay of Bengal dislocated the movements of ships to and from Bengal ports considerably. It would be an economic disaster of the first magnitude if we are not self-sufficient in respect of our food supply. The producers of food must also have enough food to maintain national health."

Behind all these is the fact that the whole economy of India in the past was on the basis of India as one economic unit. If there was shortage in Bombay grain came quickly from Bengal; if there was famine in Orissa, the other parts of India supplied foodgrains, moving through forces of normal trade.

A spirit of economic nationalism is no doubt a healthy feature in the economic life of the people. But when policies of economic nationalism are carried to such extremes as to exclude and prevent the fullest inter-provincial co-operation in times of food shortage, lacking the inspiration of a common economic purpose for the country as a whole, they become dangerous and deadly. In the absence of the realisation of such a common purpose it becomes difficult to devise any scheme that fits the interests of all and even when an agreement is reached one comes across many obstacles which give pretexts for breaking any agreement reached. In Europe, the same conditions have led to the present war. In India it has brought about the present food problem of the country.

We are today in the midst of a great upsurge of economic nationalism. Coming as it does so suddenly against past conditions where every province was dependent on others for its sources of supply, we are faced too suddenly with a new problem. If economic nationalism on a provincial basis is to be the choice of India, it is the period of transition from the old order to the new during which we will have our anxious times. By action and conduct today we are trying to create multiple economic zones, each with its own barriers and oblivious of the needs of the neighbours. None of us can stem the inevitable that must happen. But sometimes I feel whether what Mr. Sumner Wells

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spoke some time back about America of 1920 is not applicable to economic tendencies of India today:

"In 1920, and in the succeeding years we were unbelievably blind. We were blind to what constituted our own enlightened self-interest, and we therefore refused to see that by undertaking a measure of responsibility in maintaining world order, with the immediate commitments which this might involve, we were insuring our people and our democratic ideals against the perils of an unforeseeable future, and we were safeguarding our children and our children's children against having to incur the same sacrifices as those forced upon their fathers. Protected by two great oceans to the east and to the west, with no enemies to the north or to the south, the nineteenth century imbued into the minds of our people the belief that in their isolation from the rest of the world lay their safety. But the oceans shrank with the development of maritime communication, and the security which we enjoyed by reason of our friendly neighbours vanished with the growth of aviation."

For the time being we in the Department are in the midst of tackling the immediate problems, but we have soon to devise a planned food policy and programme for the future. Honourable Members are aware that a Long Range Foodgrains Policy Committee has been sitting for some time. Its deliberations have just concluded and we are awaiting the final report now being drafted. It is the intention of the Government of India to take action on the report without the least possible delay.

I have avoided referring to matters which lie within the scope of provincial responsibilities and it is the tradition of this House that matters lying within the provincial jurisdiction are not discussed here. I have seen criticisms about the internal distribution, rationing measures, anti-hoarding drives and various other matters. But while we have continually pressed for the adoption of various measures they must be left to the judgment and discretion of the provinces who have to face problems and responsibilities of their own and we cannot judge their acts and their omissions without full knowledge of their difficulties.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not speak here of the measures taken by the other Departments of the Government of India. The Government of India started for some time past an active "Grow More Food" campaign. In the year 1942-43 a sum of nearly Rs. 18,83,721; and in the current year a sum of Rs. 16,24,816 have been given as grants to the provinces to enable them to take vigorous measures. Nearly a crore of rupees has also been given as loans to the provinces during the current year for the same purpose. A sum of about 12 crores of rupees has also been given as loan to the provinces for purchase of foodgrains, and in addition a loan of over 5 crores of rupees has been granted to the provinces for general purposes, a part of which is understood to be for the purpose of agricultural assistance. I am grateful to the War Transport Department for the steps they have taken to accelerate supply to the deficit provinces. On our part, we have in about six months moved more than half a million tons of foodgrains and that in six months of special stringency.

Sir, I welcome this discussion today to get the assistance and guidance of Honourable Members of the House and to know their viewpoints. I have never been impatient of any criticism and things can always be done better if we can see ourselves as others see us. In a recent book by Professor Marrack I find the following statement about the Ministry of Food in England which from my personal knowledge I can say has most successfully tackled the food problem in extremely difficult circumstances. He says:

"The Ministry of Food has been something of a whipping boy. Every one feels the effect of shortage of food, most people know of many breakdowns and mistakes in organisation, many do not realise what would have happened without the active intervention of the Ministry."

That is what I sometimes feel within myself.

I have felt it my duty to give the House a faithful picture of the difficulties and of the obstructions that we have had to encounter; I have kept none of the unpleasant facts from the Honourable Members, and I have tried to bring out how heavy is the task that has to be performed today. But I

hope I have also made clear to them how much has been done, the vigour with which my Department has tackled this problem and the results we have achieved. Unabated action brought us safely through great difficulties in the first six months of this year. We have many difficulties today, and we shall probably have more difficulties in the future. I can assure the House that the Department for which I speak will spare no effort to solve those difficulties.

But we must have the help of everyone in this country. I have told the Honourable Members what we have done in the six months of grave difficulty. We will do our best to improve on that in future. I hope that the discussions with the provinces and states in conferences we have organized will lead to greater mutual understanding and greater co-operation. There are still those in this country who do not help us, who are indifferent to the fate of others, so long as they can attain their own selfish end, an absolute security of profit. I appeal to the public opinion to express itself against those men; against the hoarders and speculators. So far as I and my Department are concerned, so far as Provincial Governments working closely with us are concerned, we will do our best to see that they do not escape. But public opinion and public vigilance are a safeguard of vital importance in securing that end, and speaking through this House to a wider audience throughout India today, I would beg for that vigilance and for the sharpening of the weapon of critical public opinion. But let me repeat: the Government of India can do, and intend to do, everything in their power, but the help they can give to solve a problem that affects every man, woman and child in the country can be doubled in its value, if not more, if it has behind it the help and goodwill of Provincial Governments and of the ordinary man in the street. Without that help, without that goodwill it is sorely hampered, with that goodwill it can achieve great things. Against great obstacles we have tried to do our best and we feel we have done our best. We are planning to the best of our ability and with the best of experience that we can call upon. I will only add that the country may rest assured that so far as the Government of India are concerned, nothing will be left undone to get the results that the country demands. For myself I always remember the immortal saying of Tagore, and I hope the House will pardon me if I speak in his language:

*"Tumi jānō mōr mōner bāsōnā  
Jāto sādā chhilo sādādyā chhilonā  
Tobu bōhīāchhi kothin kāmōnā  
dībās nishī"*

*Monāy jāhā chhilo hōye galō ā  
Gōritay bhāngiā galō bār bār  
Bhaloy mōndey āloy andhāre  
gāchhey mishī"*

"You know to what my heart aspires;  
Though poor my means for those desires,  
Yet burning zeal hath fed the fires,  
Of hope, through night and day.

My plans are scarce fulfilled aright,  
Oft they broke, my toils despite,  
Till bad with good and dark with bright  
Have mingled in the way."

**Dr. Sir Zia Uddin Ahmad:** May I ask the Honourable Member whether he is in a position to supply us with copies of the proceedings of the conferences he has mentioned in his speech?

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** I do not think it will be possible. I am informed they are available in the Library of the House, except the first food conference which has not yet been printed.

**Mr. President (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim):** Motion moved:

"That the Food situation in India be taken into consideration."

**Mr. Akhil Chandra Datta:** Sir, for one year I did not speak on the floor of this House. My health did not permit me to do so, but the food situation is so grave in several provinces and is so awfully desperate in my own province

[Mr. Akhil Chandra Datta.]

that I have decided to speak on this occasion in spite of my doctor's injunctions.

Sir, Bengal is passing just now through a regular famine which is no less devastating than the famine of 1770. The Honourable the Food Member has given a faithful picture of the situation according to his own ideas. Allow me, Sir, to give a faithful picture of what is happening in Bengal now. There is not only scarcity of food, not only acute distress, but regular famine in its literal sense in most parts of Bengal. The price of rice has risen by 800 per cent. Rice which was selling at Rs. 5 per maund at the commencement of the war, i.e., in September, 1939, is now selling at 35 to 40 rupees per maund. In some parts rice is not available at all with the result that people are dying everyday by scores and hundreds. People are eating leaves of trees and grass of the fields. Thousands of famished people are pouring into Calcutta and other towns in search of food. They lie down on the streets under sun and rain unable to move even for food. They die in such large numbers that streets of Calcutta are blocked up by the dying and the dead. Dead bodies lie on the streets putrifying for hours and weeks. Corpses are flowing down the river. People are dying in mofasil under the very nose of the District authorities and in Calcutta almost under the nose of the Governor and his Ministers. Dust-bins are surrounded by hungry crowds for want of food. I have heard, Sir.—I cannot vouch myself for the truth of it—I have heard that wives and children are being sold by people. There is looting of rice and paddy by hungry and angry mobs. These are some of the horrors of the famine in Bengal today. This recalls to our mind Hunter's picture of the great famine of 1770 and of the gruesome story given by Macaulay in his life of Lord Clive about that famine.

Sir, it is a pertinent question as to what are the reasons and causes of this famine. There has no doubt been some failure of crop in some parts, but such failure has never in the past resulted in acute famine in the entire province. It cannot. Therefore, I say this famine is not a natural calamity, not the result of ravages of nature, not an act of God, but an act of man: the inevitable result of the ill-conceived and suicidal policy of the Government of India carried out by the province in spite of protest of the then Ministers.

The Government in the United Kingdom and the United States of America took proper steps at the very beginning of the war. There have been various sins of omission and commission by the Government. I shall refer to them. In England and U.S.A. a co-ordinated policy of production and distribution was formulated and put into execution from the very beginning. The acreage under food production rose by 50 per cent. in England and production went up by about 12 per cent. in the United States of America. But the Government here did nothing of the sort—did not take the situation seriously. In England people have now more to eat so far as the necessary foodstuffs are concerned than before the war. Here in India the position gradually and steadily deteriorated and now the situation is absolutely desperate. In Bengal the situation became acute since Japan's entry into the war. Then followed a series of sins of commission.

(1) Rice was exported outside India on a large scale under orders of the Government of India. Now, Sir, Government exported rice when they should have imported. They snatched away food from the mouths of the dying and starving children of the soil and gave it to foreigners. This export went on in spite of famine in rice and never stopped till about a fortnight ago when a communique was issued on the 28th July withdrawing the Government's undertaking to export rice until further notice. This, I say, Sir, is a scandal of the first magnitude, a shameful story of the betrayal of the people's life and property. It is a cool calculated policy of starvation of the people of Bengal. All deaths by starvation in Bengal really constitute murder by those who are responsible for the export of rice. Sir, on behalf of the people of my

province, I bring this charge of mass murder against those who are responsible for the export of rice during a time when there was a famine in rice. They will have to answer before man and God.

(2) Another reason for this famine is the purchase by and on behalf of the Government for troops and those connected directly with war efforts. The Government slogan was 'purchase any quantity at any price'. This slogan was freely promulgated by Government officials even in public meetings.

(3) Still another reason for this famine is the purchase by and on behalf of the Government in furtherance of denial policy promulgated by the Government of India in Bengal. The fiat went forth that rice must be removed from three districts within 24 hours. Denial policy indeed! May I ask denial of whom? Denial of Japan or of Bengal?

(4) Categorical and solemn promises made by the Centre for supply of foodstuffs to Bengal were not implemented. Bengal's arrangement based on these promises therefore failed inevitably.

These are some of the important causes which have aggravated the situation in Bengal.

Now, the question is: What is the responsibility of the State during famine? I say that it is the primary obligation of the State to feed people during famine, not any particular class, but all people who cannot obtain food for themselves—not as a matter of charity or concession but as a matter of bare duty inherent in a civilised Government. This is not my theory or principle. This principle was first enunciated by the Government of India 75 years ago after the Orissa famine of 1866 and the Rajputana famine of 1868, the principle being "to save every life" and to prevent all deaths by starvation and relieve all distress caused by scarcity of food. The Famine Commission of 1880 recognised this responsibility to the full and most unreservedly and unequivocally. Again the Famine Commission of 1898 completely vindicated this principle of 1880, viz., the duty of feeding people and saving every life. That policy still holds the field. There is no going back. There is no escape from it.

Judged by this test, are the Government discharging that responsibility? Are they saving every life in the country? Let the dead and the dying people in Bengal, let the starving and suffering people in all deficit provinces pronounce their own verdict. That verdict is that the Government have not done their duty by the people. They can only fight the Congress but not the demon of Famine.

Sir, I claim the Government shall frankly and fully admit that responsibility, and admitting it perform that duty honestly and courageously like a dutiful and civilised Government. Let there be no legal quibbling and hair-splitting argument about the constitutional position and technical division of responsibility between the Centre and the Provinces in the Schedule to the Act of 1935. Let there be no attempt of throwing the entire or main burden on the Provinces by the Centre or by the Provinces on the Centre. Sir, the war has thrown to the wind almost all the laws of the land and the country is being governed by fiats of the Executive and the Military. There should therefore be no plea of constitutional difficulty. The ultimate responsibility must be taken by the Centre. The Centre must have a thoroughly organised All-India Food policy and enforce loyal co-operation of the surplus Provinces and not rely merely on their mercy or charity. They must not leave the deficit Provinces at the mercy of the surplus Provinces to fight their own battle.

Bengal's case is special and peculiar. It is the greatest deficit province in normal times. All imports of rice have been cut off by Japan. It is in the war zone. It is an industrial area. The Government of India should in the interest of defence of the whole of India come to the rescue of Bengal as a war measure and even for reasons of strategy. It is not an ordinary peacetime famine but famine in war-time resulting from war conditions and further aggravated by mistaken policy in support of war efforts.

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One difficulty has been to know what has been the policy of the Government of India. The policy has been changed almost every fortnight. Sometimes controlling, sometimes de-controlling, sometimes free trade, sometimes inter-provincial restrictions. Even the Food Department was not started at the Centre within a year of the commencement of the war.

The original scheme was for distribution under Central control of surplus foodgrains to deficit areas. Estimates of such available surplus fluctuated wildly. Promises made to Bengal were not implemented. Bengal's arrangements based on those promises therefore failed with dire consequences. The scheme failed admittedly. It failed for want of co-ordination between the Centre and the Provinces and for want of an administrative machinery. The Government of India bungled. Mr. Amery said: "There has been serious bungling in the food administration of India."

Rice can be had in some parts of the country at Rs. 8 to Rs. 15 per maund. Why should the price be Rs. 35 to Rs. 40 in Bengal? Why should there be a shortage of rice in the most fertile portions of the province: nay, even in Barisal the granary of Bengal? The irresistible conclusion is that there is something wrong somewhere in the administration of the country. Has the Government discovered the plague spot? Is it merely hoarding?

The original scheme failed and a new policy has been formulated. It has been changed "drastically" in the language of His Excellency the Viceroy. The provinces have now been asked to procure their own supply and to organise their own measure of control and to make their own arrangement for transport. In other words, the deficit provinces are to fight their own battle

without effective intervention of the centre. This is a vicious principle for shirking the responsibility of the centre. The new policy does not relieve the vital needs of deficit provinces. A more thoroughly organised and co-ordinated All-India Food Policy is necessary. The new policy does not provide that.

Now, let me conclude my speech with a few constructive proposals. Bengal must forthwith be declared a famine area and the Government must undertake to feed the famished people. That is the first step that is required. There are three distinct problems, *viz.*, supply, distribution and control of prices. As regards supply, the Central Government must now assume sole responsibility for making necessary supply of food grains available to the deficit provinces, particularly in Bengal. The purchase should be made by the Food Department of the Government of India through the Provincial Governments concerned. Supplies must commence immediately and at reasonable price and must continue as long as the scarcity prevails. The Central Government must make full and adequate arrangements for transport. To meet the emergent situation of Bengal military stores within the province should be made available immediately as loan for temporary period. There should be stoppage of purchase for the military excepting for their immediate requirements. Exports should be totally stopped. Imports from outside India should be arranged immediately. As regards distribution, there should be a Central Council consisting of representatives of all parties in each province and their advice should be accepted by the Government. Besides, there should be Food Committees constituted on the same basis to advise the authorities in towns and districts. Industrial concerns and firms should not be allowed to stock food grains for a great length of time. Rationing should be introduced in all urban areas. As regards price, a ceiling price should be fixed. There should be strict scrutiny of purchase price and control over all incidental charges at various stages through which the stuff will pass till it reaches the consumer:

With these words I conclude my speech.

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** Mr. President, my heart ached when I heard the Honourable the Food Member disposing of the case of Bengal so lightly. Coming as he does from Bengal, knowing as he does what is happening in Bengal he has disposed of the case of Bengal in a few sentences. With a

trembling heart, I stand to-day to narrate the harrowing tale of my province, the harrowing tale of the famine stricken people dying of starvation in hundreds, and yet the stony hearted Government . . . .

**An Honourable Member:** Which Government?

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** Government of India and the Bengal Government both. Both these Governments treat this matter with a callousness which has no parallel in the history of British India. Before I proceed to give you the full picture, I would narrate to the House what happened to me a few days ago. In my frantic attempt to get the latest news from the various Chambers of Commerce, and from various public men in Calcutta, I asked for certain trunk calls and was anxiously awaiting messages from Calcutta to acquaint myself with the up to date food situation. As ill luck would have it, in spite of the best efforts of Sir Gurunath Bewoor, whenever we want the service of a telephone, that breaks down, and I was told that I could not get my trunk call owing to breakdown in the Calcutta line. Disappointed as I was, I kept the telephone at my bedside hoping against hope that I might catch some news from Calcutta . . . . .

**The Honourable Sir Jeremy Raisman (Finance Member):** To catch the market.

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** . . . . to catch the market of the men dying of starvation. Luckily my telephone rang and I thought I would get a message. But, behold, it was an inter-connection and I accidentally listened to the telephonic conversation between a high official from Calcutta and a high official in Delhi. It was audible enough. I could hear and I jotted down the message which was being transmitted from Calcutta to this end. The message ran as follows:

"Death roll is mounting, mostly amongst peasants and working classes. Looting and arson of food grains are taking place more and more. It is advisable to declare Bengal a famine stricken area. Unless this is done the situation will become worse. I suggest that Government should at once declare Bengal a famine area as the situation is deteriorating every minute."

I heard this telephonic message owing to the inter-connection. We have listened to the Honourable the Food Member for one hour and twenty minutes. He tried his very best to impress upon this House that so far as the Government of India was concerned everything was done to meet the situation, and that it was no fault of theirs and they take no responsibility for the condition now prevailing. He went on to various statistics which I shall question later on but I want to bring before this House my point of view and that is this. On the 3rd September, 1939, when the war was declared by Germany, was it not the first duty of the Government of India to have taken statistics of food grains of India? I ask, were any statistics of any kind taken when the war was declared? Neither was any assessment made as to the requirements of the food grains for the armed forces that were sent to India, nor was any assessment made as to the requirements of the food grains for the civilian population of this country. This is the first mistake they made. No statistics were available of the food grains available in the country and also the requirements of the civilian population as well as the large army which has been coming in from year to year. Particularly when Japan declared war, the Allied countries flooded India with armed forces and yet no serious steps were taken to find out the food position. On top of that, owing to the fall of France in 1940, the Anglo-French Pool by which the resources of both the Empires were pooled together for common use broke down owing to the non-availability of the share of the French Empire and the loss of our own Empire's contribution which was sent to France. Still the Government did nothing at all. As the Food Member only took charge a few months ago, he will presently hear from me as to what happened during the last four years of which he knows nothing. He said that everything was O. K. so far as the Government of India was concerned. I say here and now that every year and every month they have been doing absolutely nothing to meet the situation that has ultimately arisen today. In 1941, as my Honourable friend, the Food Member,

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has told us, the price of food grains started shooting up. The Government of India thought that the time had come to control the price of food grains and they first experimented with the control of the price of wheat. They put a maximum price on wheat at its source and they said that this wheat should be available at that price *plus* the freight to the centres of consumption. My Honourable friend's predecessor made that arrangement but it utterly failed. That system did not work and cannot work. It failed because merely the fixing of price cannot achieve the object of keeping down the price. It is common sense that if the supply is short, no amount of price fixation can stabilise the prices or keep them down.

The Assembly then adjourned for Lunch till Half Past Two of the Clock.

The Assembly re-assembled after Lunch at Half Past Two of the Clock. Mr. Deputy President (Mr. Akhil Chandra Datta) in the Chair.

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** Mr. Deputy President, Sir, I was discussing the wheat situation in 1941 when I said the wheat supply in India was short and merely fixation of a price would not help to stabilise the price until you can find the wheat to supply. What happened was this. When the Government of India fixed the ceiling price of wheat at Rs. 6 at its source *plus* the transit charges to the destination where it will be sold, the U. K. C. C. were freely buying wheat at Karachi and Bombay at a much higher price than was fixed by the Government of India. That being the case, how could anybody believe that the level of price could be kept down? Perhaps the U. K. C. C. can be said to be the first to create a black market in this country.

On the 8th December, 1941, Japan declared war. Even then the eyes of the Government would not open. Sir, it is difficult to make the deaf hear and the blind see. That is my difficulty. This wooden Government is deaf and blind.

**The Honourable Sir Sultan Ahmed (Leader of the House):** They can hear you all right and see you also all right.

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** Even at that stage after the declaration of the war by Japan, neither the Centre nor the Provinces took any account of the food census or started a "Grow More Food" campaign.

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** They did.

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** My Honourable friend says they did. I am talking of December 1941. They did nothing of the kind then. There was no 'Grow More Food' campaign at that time. It was done at a much later stage. The House will bear me out that the Burma rice, which used to be imported in India, fed almost half the labour population of India. That rice was lost. On the top of that, exports were freely continued. That was the position of Bengal in December 1941.

My Honourable friend, the Food Member, had written a book which we have read with interest—"The man behind the plough". He has already quoted the last paragraph from his book on the rice position, but I will say this that he had already given to the Government of Bengal and the Government of India ample statistical figures long before the war. The war was started in September. He had pointedly stated in his book about the rice position, and the book should have been consulted and considered and action should have been taken apart from the war. He had pointedly referred in his book to the fall in the production of rice in Bengal and the Bengal's position as a deficit province was particularly emphasised. He had shown it very clearly in his book that Bengal was a deficit province as far as rice was concerned.

**Dr. Sir Zia Uddin Ahmad:** When was the book published?

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** The book was ready in 1938. He had prepared it for the use of the Flood Commission which met in 1939. If anybody would read the chapter on Bengal Rice, he would understand the position that



Bengal was all along the deficit province so far as rice was concerned. He had proved also that while Bengal's rice production was falling, the other rice producing provinces were increasing their production, and the population in Bengal was increasing as in other parts of India. He mentioned Madras as an example. The rice position in Bengal was that most of its labour in the western districts was fed on Burma rice and therefore the Bengal rice which was of a superior quality could be exported to a certain extent to other parts of India or outside India. The moment the Burma rice was stopped, it was incumbent upon the Government to put a stop to all sorts of exports from Bengal. That they did not do.

My Honourable friend, the Food Member, gave us statistics of exports from January 1943 to 31st July, 1943. I asked him then and I repeat my question again: Will he kindly place before this Honourable House the figures of exports of rice from Bengal in 1941-42? You exhausted Bengal by exporting all its rice. I am now coming to the further serious matters which account for this famine condition which now prevails in Bengal. The condition that now prevails in Bengal is entirely due to the Government of India and I will prove it.

In April 1942 the Government of India decided to carry out a 'denial policy' in the three surplus rice growing districts of Bengal. This was not done by the Provincial Government but it was done by the Government of India on the advice of its military advisers. When it was feared that there may be an invasion by Japan, they made arrangements that the surplus of the three districts which are on the borders of the rivers and the sea should be removed at a safer place in order that it may not fall in the hands of the enemy. Now, Sir, Mr. Fazlul Haq in the Bengal Legislative Assembly on the 5th of July, 1943, referred to a letter which he had addressed to His Excellency the Governor of Bengal on the 2nd of August, 1942 and with your permission I will read only an extract from that letter to show who is responsible for this position in Bengal. He says in that letter:

"In a matter of such vital importance affecting the question of foodstuffs of the people, you should have called an emergent meeting of the Cabinet and discussed with your Ministers, the best means of carrying out the wishes of the military authorities and of the Central Government. But you did nothing of the kind."

Later on, he says:

"At the present moment we are faced with a rice famine in Bengal, mainly in consequence of an uncalled for interference on your part and of hasty action on the part of the Joint Secretary."

Now, Sir, you would bear me out that he cried hoarse in August 1942, he apprehended a famine in August 1942 and I cannot believe that he had said here when attending a Conference in Delhi that no rice was required in February 1943. Then he goes on to say:

"The most outstanding instance of blunder which has been committed by the permanent officials, apparently with your knowledge and concurrence, has been the case of prevention of boats from going out into the Bay of Bengal for the purpose of cultivation of the lands in the various islands lying at the mouth of the Delta."

And therefore all the talk of 'Grow More Food' campaign came to an end and the 'more food' produced was taken away on account of the 'denial policy', and instead of making more arrangements for food, arrangements were made to have no food at all. There is a statement later on which he wrote to the Governor about two cases, which he has repeated on the floor of the Assembly on 5th July, 1943 and this statement stands unchallenged and uncontradicted till now.

Now, Sir, that was their 'denial policy' which was adopted under instructions from the Government of India by the Government of Bengal. The 'denial policy' was put into effect and the surplus rice from these surplus districts was removed to a safer place in Bengal. What did they say? They said this: we are removing this rice to a safer place so that it may not fall into the hands of the enemy. When this rice was being collected, we were assured by the Government that this rice would be solely utilised for the people of Bengal. But what did they do? May I ask the Honourable Member for Food to consult his Secretary, Major General Wood, and find out what was

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done with this surplus rice that was taken away. What was the assurance given? Was that assurance carried out? Sir, the Honourable Somerset Butler who was then in charge of this 'denial policy' himself came to me and told me, as I had something to do with this 'denial policy', and he assured me that his instructions were from the Government of India to remove this rice to a safer place for the use of the Bengal people as and when required. But what was done?

Now, Sir, before I come to what was done, what happened to that huge quantity of rice which the Government of India paid for and purchased, I will mention one particular instance and that would give you an idea as to how the black market came into existence in Bengal. Now, Sir, this rice was being bought by the Government of India at rupees six per maund in mufassil places, plus a ten per cent. premium. Discretion was given to the buyers to increase the purchase price by ten per cent. if they could not find sellers at Rs. 6 per maund in the mufassil. This was being carried out under instructions from the Government of India in the three mufassil districts. Simultaneously the Commerce Secretary to the Government of Bengal, who was asked by His Excellency the Governor of Bengal to remove this rice from these three districts within the next twenty four hours—but it ultimately took from four to eight months to remove the whole quantity of rice from those three districts—this Commerce Secretary issues a *Gazette Extraordinary* in Calcutta fixing the ceiling price of rice. He fixed the ceiling price of rice to be sold at Calcutta market at Rs. 6. Here, Sir, you have the Government of India buying rice in the mufassil at Rs. 6 per maund plus even ten per cent. more. On the other hand you fix the ceiling price for rice to be sold at Calcutta at Rs. 6 not even taking into consideration the freight.

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** Sir, I have nothing to say as regards the previous statement. But when my Honourable friend enters into the question of what was the price fixed by the Provincial Government, surely that is a matter which is not for the Government of India to take up or for this Legislature to discuss.

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** My Honourable friend need have no apprehension. I am discussing the Bengal position and I am entitled to say what was done by the Government of Bengal. I must put my case as clear as I can put, giving all important facts.

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** That I am prepared to hear.

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** That is all I want you to do. Sir, by putting a ceiling price at Rs. 6 at Calcutta, the result was that all the rice that was available at that time went into the black market. That is quite natural. You buy in the mufassil at Rs. 6, surely you do not ask the traders to sell it at Rs. 6 at Calcutta, taking no consideration of the freight and the normal profit. Then, you see that it did not end there. Immediately the price began to rise. The next step was to ask the traders to hand over all the quantity of rice that they had in their godowns and this resulted in the scaring away of rice and making it go underground. All the rice that was available in Calcutta thus went underground, at that time. As I have said, it was the 'denial policy' that was pursued that was responsible for this. Rice was collected and removed to a safer distance in order that it might not be got hold of by the enemy. But what was the actual result? Will my Honourable friend the Food Member say what was done with the rice thus collected? Does he know where the rice had gone? Was it made available to the people of Bengal as was assured? I put to my Honourable friend this straight question. If he cannot answer, I will give him the answer. The answer is this. The Government of India exported all the quantity of rice that was collected on account of the 'denial policy' and they made a huge profit over the transaction. On the pretext of removing the rice on account of the 'denial policy' and on the pretext of removing it to safer distance, the Government of India exported all the rice to Ceylon, the Middle East and other places, wherever rice was wanted.

**An Honourable Member:** How much?

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** Let the Honourable Member for Food state how much. I ask him to state what was the quantity that was bought under the 'denial policy'.

**Mr. Deputy President (Mr. Akhil Chandra Datta):** The Honourable Member's time is over.

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** That did not end our trouble. The Government of India were under certain commitments to *Saudi Arabia* for the supply of rice, and numerous licenses were granted to the merchants of Calcutta by the Government of India to export rice from Bengal to *Saudi Arabia* and the Persian Gulf. First we lost the Burma rice, then we lost a huge quantity of rice that was collected under the 'denial policy', and then we also lost on account of the Government of India's commitment to *Saudi Arabia* and the Persian Gulf due to which huge quantities were exported there.

**Sir Muhammad Yamin Khan (Agra Division: Muhammadan Rural):** When was that exported?

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** The whole of it was exported in 1942.

**Sir Muhammad Yamin Khan:** In what month?

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** That is for the Honourable Member to state.

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** Sir, I should have expected that before the Honourable Member makes a charge that this has created a situation of deficit in Bengal he ought at least to give facts as to when that deficit took place, because the situation will completely change if the events occurred after October and November or before.

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** It was collected from April to August. They can find out from the records or from the Honourable Somerset Butler who is still their officer in the Food Department, as to how much of that was exported and when and how, at what price it was bought and at what price it was exported.

Sir, a frantic telegram was sent to me by Mr. Fazlul Huq, the *ex*-Premier of Bengal, which led me to move an adjournment motion. In this connection I want to mention certain matters arising out of that notice which I gave. That notice of adjournment was given by me on the 4th for discussion on the 5th. The Honourable President after reading the text of that notice, which is a public property and will be printed in the proceedings of the Assembly, disallowed that motion. It was given to the press but my Honourable friend, the Leader of the House, gags the press and nothing is published which is not to the liking of the Press Officer. What is the use of our being here and making statements which are not allowed to go to Bengal; thus people do not know at all that we are doing our best to give them relief. That is what the Honourable Member in charge of Information has done,—gagged the press.

**Seth Yusoof Abdoola Haroon (Sind: Muhammadan Rural):** Sir, on a point of order, are we discussing here the question of the liberty of the press?

**Sir Muhammad Yamin Khan:** Sir, I should like to point out that the time fixed was 20 minutes for each Member and if any one wants to exceed that time he should discuss only relevant points.

**Mr. Deputy President (Mr. Akhil Chandra Datta):** That is quite right.

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghuznavi:** I will not read the whole of that telegram but I will read only a few lines from it:

—Bengal conditions surpass even horrors of 1770 famine. All political parties strongly urge allotment at least five days discussion food situation reserving two days for Bengal. Muslim League including League M.L.As. supporting present Ministry Bengal admit people dying by thousands and living on carcasses floating down rivers also selling wives and children. Bengal Government have been requisitioning foodstuffs under rule 75-A, Defence of India Rules which in our judgment *ultra vires* and which point is *sub-judice* High Court. Bengal Government allowing purchase of foodstuffs for undefined purposes. All available foodstuffs should at once be sent to Bengal to be distributed on the advice of a Food Distribution Committee consisting of all parties. Impossible to raise funds publicly because Government have effectively gagged press and passed stringent orders against publication of distress conditions on pain of severest penalties."

**Mr. Deputy President (Mr. Akhil Chandra Datta):** The Honourable Member must now conclude his speech.

**Sir Abdul Halim Ghusnavi:** I am finishing, Sir. Believe me when I say that hundreds and thousands are dying every day, and every minute lost will mean more deaths. I therefore ask my Honourable friend to rush food to Bengal. If he cannot do it he should ask the military who have got stock, to lend to Bengal. They can lend it till he is able to send food to Bengal, and only thus can he save the lives of people who are dying in such large numbers.

**Sir Henry Richardson (Nominated Non-Official):** I congratulate the Honourable Member for the Food Department on the very full survey and interesting details which have been disclosed in his speech. We certainly expected nothing less from one who has given practical evidence of study of agriculture by his book "The Man Behind the Plough", a title which curiously enough is most apt for the position he now occupies. The Honourable Member's speech will be studied by this House and indeed by the whole country with that care and unusual interest which this problem demands, for undoubtedly food has become a subject of primary concern in this country. For this reason, Sir, we in this Group share the feeling which has been evident from the many questions which have been asked during the course of this Session that this debate, which is of first-class importance, ought to have taken place at the commencement of the Session instead of at the end of the Session. I cannot congratulate the Honourable Member or Government on the arrangements made for the programme of business this Session and it is inescapable that Government has laid itself open to criticism on the grounds that whilst people were starving, discontent was rife all over the country and the food problem was burning, Government were content to fiddle with legislative measures of far less urgency and which could have waited.

Sir, it is really deplorable after all that has happened that the lesson of the folly of being too late has not been learnt. It is quite obvious that the formation of the Food Department itself was years too late. When other countries were planning and rationing India had a surplus in many commodities which, had the Food Department then existed, could have been purchased and stored by Government as provision against the rainy day which has now come and found India unprepared. All countries engaged in this war must clearly have realised at the outset that the resources required for feeding their people should be fixed at a minimum and preserved as such, leaving the whole of the balances of transport and other ancillary functions to be devoted entirely to the prosecution of the war. So, even if there was no shortage there was a need at the very outset for the organisation of food supply on lines which would release the maximum of other services

3 P. M. to the prosecution of the war effort. Rationing, even if there is a surplus, is necessary in war time to provide against possible transfer of population, breakdown of transport and general uncertainty of the future. Wherever rationing has been introduced, it has immediately inspired confidence and has worked.

Then, Sir, when Government eventually began to wake up to the importance of food, they merely put a section of the Commerce Department on special duty and subsequently even when pressure became greater and a separate Food Department was actually created, it was attached to one of the most hard-worked Members of the Executive Council. The result is that the present Commerce Member has inherited not only the Commerce Department but the Food Department and the Department of Industries and Civil Supplies. Who can say today which of these departments under the care of that Member has suffered most from this over-burden? Is it still too late for Government to realize that the time has come when the problem of food can no longer be shared with other responsibilities and that the people of this country demand, as they have previously done, that this all-important

subject be placed in charge of a Member with ripe experience who will be able to devote his entire time solely to food as is so obviously necessary.

Sir, I am sorry to have to produce these recriminations, but I feel that unless Government's attention is called to the very strong feelings which have been aroused in the people of India by the present circumstances, we shall not only fail to learn the lessons which have been provided, but also it will not be possible to make constructive suggestions. We fully realise that Government need as much assistance as possible in building up any future plans which the many Conferences held may have evolved and we hope that in the course of the debate, Honourable Members will not confine themselves merely to recriminations and criticisms, but will endeavour to put forward constructive proposals for the future. It is in that light, Sir, that I shall now proceed to combine any further criticisms I may have with certain constructive proposals.

In the first place, before we attempt to cure the disease we must know what the causes are. What are the causes? There has, of course, been a shortage of food grains generally. The extent of the shortage we do not know because satisfactory statistics are not available. With this feature we on this side have dealt adequately in previous debates and I do not propose to recapitulate the points which will require attention before agricultural records can be considered in any way satisfactory. But admitting a shortage what were the results? We are all agreed that certain people have attempted to profit by the shortage and we call them hoarders. In every Legislature and in every public body condemnation has been universal. Everyone has demanded exemplary punishments, but if these have occurred I am not aware of them. I think I should be correct in stating that every Member of this House would agree with me when I say the general public has been tremendously disappointed in the measures so far taken. Government cannot complain that there was any lack of support during the last debate in this House, for indeed some of the strongest comments were made on this subject. I was certainly very pleased to see the strong comments of the Honourable the Commerce Member in an announcement which he made recently wherein he described hoarders as certain individuals with the most reprehensible criminal instincts. These sentiments as well as the Honourable Sir Sultan Ahmed's recent remarks when he appealed to the Press for co-operation in this matter have, I am sure, the cordial support of every one in this House, for they echo to the full the feelings which were expressed in no uncertain manner during the debate last Session. But, Sir, what is the use of expressing sentiments such as these when there is failure vigorously to carry out prosecutions and other measures to deal with this menace? Too long have we been tenderhanded towards hoarders and I say in the strongest possible manner that I can command that irrespective of who these persons might be, their names should be made known throughout the length and breadth of India and severe punishments meted out to them in order that once and for all warning may be given to all those other people who have only been encouraged by the ridiculous punishments which have been awarded—fines for instance, a fraction only of their disgraceful profits.

**Maulana Zafar Ali Khan** (East Central Punjab: Muhaminadan): Even if they are ministers?

**Sir Henry Richardson**: Yes. Now, Sir, as I have said in dealing with the causes of the disease, there has been shortage of food grains generally, there has been lack of statistics and there have been hoarders. Then there have been transport difficulties resulting from sabotage, floods and a shortage of coastal shipping which have further produced locally famine conditions.

But are these the basic causes or are they secondary? Why are we now facing conditions so very much more serious than have been faced in the past? The answer, in my opinion, is this: the very fact of a shortage and the fact of a war have convinced 400 millions of people that to the extent that their means permit they must ensure that their food will be available to them

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and they are carrying abnormal reserves. It is the common practice amongst individuals to carry a reserve of food, but I would merely ask Honourable Members of this House what they themselves are doing. How many Honourable Members could truthfully say that they are today carrying no greater a reserve of food than they carried in peace-times?

**Sir Muhammad Yamin Khan:** I can.

(Several other Honourable Members also voiced the same opinion.)

**Sir Henry Richardson:** This may seem a small thing but it may come as a shock to many to realise that if every person in Bengal decided to carry a reserve of one maund of rice in preparation for a rainy day no less than 2 million tons of this staple food would be removed from the market: one quarter of Bengal's average annual harvest. The metamorphosis from conditions of plenty to conditions of shortage is one which has not I think been sufficiently appreciated either by the Central or Provincial Governments. The margin of foodstuffs removed from the markets in order to provide abnormal reserves which the country has previously never carried equally removes the margin of safety between sufficiency and starvation. If the reserve was universally distributed we could sit back and India could live upon its hump while the matter was being sorted out. But unfortunately the distribution is not universal. The people who cannot afford to carry food reserves will starve and are starving because of the situation which has arisen.

The question is: How are we to deal with this situation? Are we to send messengers to 70,000 villages to tell hundreds of millions of illiterate people that they must in no circumstances carry reserves? Provincial Governments have in fact done the reverse and have advised their people to carry reserves. No, the problem must be tackled in the light of reality and with co-ordination and co-operation between Provinces and States, which has hitherto been unhappily absent.

As I have previously said crop statistics are unreliable and Provinces themselves do not really know what stocks of food they have. Estimates may be made both by the Central Government and by Provincial Governments, but if a Province is mainly concerned with the safety of its own subjects, who could blame that Province? If that Province, being uncertain as to its actual stocks, provided for a margin of safety, would that Province be wrong? On the other hand, if that margin of safety means death from starvation in other Provinces, there is reason seriously to demand that the safety margin shall be removed. How is this to be done under the present constitution which provides for autonomous provinces with agriculture as a provincial subject? The Food Conference held last cold weather came unanimously to the conclusion that in the present emergency food measures should be subject to Central control and co-ordination. But food measures have never been centrally controlled, and even if this were possible, it is clear that Central policy must rely upon Provincial administration. Time and again it has been emphasized that vigorous action and inter-provincial co-operation are essential. In replying to the Food debate last Session, Major General Wood reiterated what the Commerce Member had himself said when opening the debate, namely, that cordial co-operation and understanding between all Governments was vital. Only through Provincial administrations could the policies of the Centre be enforced. If this is agreed, and indeed there is surely no doubt of its truth, why has there been confusion? I think the reason is partly constitutional and partly psychological. Unless we are to alter the constitution, the autonomy of Provinces must remain, and unless Provinces can overcome the psychological effect of isolationism there will be shortage in deficit Provinces. It may well be asked: Which are the deficit Provinces? From such reports as I have seen there appear to be practically no surplus Provinces. Some have just enough for safety and others are definitely short. A "Daniel come to judgment" would probably say that those Provinces which have demanded free trade are in deficit because they are so short that they

will pay anything for their food. He would also probably say that the Provinces which demand provincial barriers have clearly sufficient for their requirements and possibly more. But until and unless both Provinces and the Centre can agree upon a policy, it seems to me that our difficulties must remain.

What then are the needs? We do not know what stocks we have at present. But surely we can make some effort not only to ascertain what new crop we are getting but to keep track and control of it. If this can be done, and I admit it will be difficult, both Provinces and the Centre will know where they stand, and the burden can be distributed fairly if there is a shortage. Then, at least, this terrible margin of security can be reduced, a margin which may mean security to some, but starvation to others. We are approaching a difficult "corner" and only by untiring effort and efficient administration will we negotiate it without catastrophe. The "corner" in Bengal extends over the next two or three months and then I believe that the price factor and the "Grow More Food" campaign will ease the position. It will not be done easily, nor will it be done without some sacrifice. It will not be done by each Province looking after itself or by each Department of Government working in a separate compartment. It is useless for one Department to demand that the people shall sow more crops if another Department fails to supply them with the seed to sow. We all have reports of such lack of co-ordination, but it will avail us little to dwell upon them if we cannot remedy them. I am of course mainly concerned with the seriousness of the present situation, and I have not dwelt with the more distant future for this very reason. But I would conclude with a word of warning which will, I feel, in course of time be fully needed. The day will come when high food prices and propaganda will meet the food demand however large it is. There are, for instance, 150 million acres of culturable land in India which are not even sown. When the present margin of safety is no longer needed, an enormous quantity of food may be placed on the market for sale, and the turn round may occur without notice within a very short period. 90 per cent. of India's population lives in villages and agriculture is their mainstay. The effect of such a slump as may occur by the return of normal conditions may be most serious, and I sincerely hope that the Central and Provincial Governments will be better prepared for excess than they were prepared for shortage. Unless they can protect agricultural prices, the improvement that we had hoped for in agricultural conditions will be gone and the situation of the countryside will be worse even than it was before. I sincerely trust that the forward planning of the Government is taking this danger fully into account and that for once in this vital matter they will not be too late.

**Mr. T. T. Krishnamachari** (Tanjore *cum* Trichinopoly: Non-Muhammadan Rural): I would like to congratulate the Honourable the Food Member on his brilliant and panoramic survey of the activities in relation to this problem of the Government of India since the war commenced. But, Sir, it was not very happy hearing. It does not appear that the Honourable Member himself had any faith in the Government of India being able to solve the problems arising out of the present serious situation. Sir, as he was reading his speech, I was reminded of a story which many Members in this House may have heard, of a clergyman in a ship which was being tossed about in a storm, asking the captain of the vessel, "Well, is there any hope?" The captain said, "Well, Padre, we have done our best. Now we must put our trust in God." The clergyman exclaimed, "Has it come to that?" Sir, it looked to me to-day that the Honourable Member was much in the same predicament. He told us, "if you put your trust in us, you will get nothing. We have tried all these years and here is a glorious record of our failures. The Government of India is powerless to do anything because the provinces are refractory." That is not the conclusion which we had expected from that vigorous speech of the Honourable the Food Member. He has held out no hope whatever though he ended with a general appeal for co-operation.

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Sir, is it really as hopeless as all that? I do not know why the Leader of the European Group also should say, provincial autonomy functioning in the provinces the Government of India is powerless, I think I understood him to say something like that. But, as I know of the Government of India Act, to the best of my knowledge of the amendments that have been made thereto, I do not think that this Government is so powerless as to be in a position not to act. I would like to ask the Honourable the Food Member if he knows that there has been an addition to section 126 of the Government of India Act by section 126A, which gives full powers to the Viceroy in the provincial field. I would like to ask the Honourable Member if he knows that there is section 297 of the Government of India Act which prohibits provinces from banning inter-provincial trade? If to-day provinces have taken action on those lines, that is because of the powers that have been delegated to the provinces by the Defence of India Rules. Surely, those powers can be withdrawn from the refractory provinces. Surely, the Honourable the Food Member, and the other Members of the Executive Council could approach the Viceroy and ask him to invoke the powers that have been given to him by section 126A, with reference to the provinces. It is not like trying to satisfy the Members of the House who want that the liberty of the subject should be enlarged, that better treatment should be meted out to political prisoners in jails, who are told. "The Provincial Governments are independent, we cannot act." Here is a matter which is far more important. Here is a matter which calls for immediate action, and here you know you have powers. Why don't you use them? If you merely take shelter under the supposition that provincial autonomy is functioning, let me tell you it does not function in many provinces where the Governors act, it does not function in such provinces where ministers are acting, because of the Governor's interference. If the Government of India is to justify itself for this policy of inaction, for this policy of neglect, under the cloak of provincial autonomy, well, I do not think it will convince anybody who knows anything about the Government of India Act.

Sir, I would now like to refer to one or two matters relating to my own province. Bengal is in a very bad way to-day everybody knows that, and the House knows it too. And Madras is to follow suit soon, this being the other principal rice eating province. As it is, there is famine in very many places in Madras. In Malabar there is acute famine and cholera arising out of malnutrition, is raging in that district. I cannot see that the Provincial Government is in a position to handle the situation adequately. It is true that provincial autonomy is functioning, that the Adviser who is in charge of Civil Supplies, Sir Hugh Hood, has got greater sanction and authority than any popularly elected minister, and his position is so sacrosanct that the Government of India cannot interfere with him. But that is an argument that does not, as I have said, carry us anywhere. If the Government of India has summoned conferences, if they have summoned six price control conferences and several food conferences and found that all those suggestions that were put forward during the conferences did not bear any fruit, well, what have they done about it? What is the use of the Honourable Member saying, we have got the Nasik Security Printing Press, we have given money to the provinces, we gave 18 lakhs of rupees for "Grow More Food"—propaganda last year, and 16 lakhs this year, we are giving 98 lakhs to assist the agriculturists by way of loans and we are lending 12 crores to provinces to purchase food-grains. Does that end your responsibilities in the matter? Is it merely a matter for the Honourable the Food Member who is now in the unhappy position of having to take on a legacy of past neglect,—is it a matter for him alone? I would like to ask him what are his colleagues doing in this matter? What is really the root of the trouble in relation to this vexed question? The root of the trouble is that there is a lot of redundant money in the country which persists in upsetting the price equilibrium. That is the root of the trouble. And what is the use of



saying merely that there is shortage of primary commodities. Physical shortage there is. There is shortage in transport, there are psychological and other factors operating. But then the root trouble is there is redundant money about and I do not know what the Honourable the Finance Member has had to say to his colleague, the Food Member, and what the Government of India are going to do in that matter beyond jerky demonstrations by way of adding new provisions to the Defence of India Rules.

Sir, there are two aspects to this question, and I see that the Honourable the Food Member did not touch upon one aspect, barring his reference to what the Government of India were doing by way of monetary contributions to the Provincial Governments. The question I should like to ask is, what are you doing to increase production. This is probably an elementary question at this stage, but since the problem has not been tackled aright, the elementary question has got to be asked at every stage. If the Government of India has not done anything all these years they have got to do something at least now. The question of production has, at any rate, so far as my own province is concerned, not been tackled properly. There is no use the Honourable the Leader of the European Group saying, there is a lot of culturable waste, that can be brought under cultivation or the statistician giving us the figure of how much culturable waste has been brought under cultivation. The bringing of culturable waste under cultivation does not mean producing grain. Have you tackled those areas which are already under production, where you can increase production by means of an extra crop? I do not see that in Madras any such thing has been done. Nor do I believe that the attention of the Government of India has been drawn to the position of Madras which is so far away. In Madras, there are two areas which can bear considerably increased production. One is the Tanjore Trichinopoly area which I happen to represent in this House and the other is the Kistna-Godavari area. I ask what has been done to encourage people to grow more rice in these parts. So far as Tanjore and Trichinopoly are concerned, the Government of Madras have withheld or are threatening to withhold from the current year onwards the remission that they have given to landholders by way of concession in land revenue of Rs. 75 lakhs. in the aggregate which had been allowed since 1937 onwards. The Government say that prices have gone up and there is no more need for this concession and what is worse, for some reason or other, perhaps the Governor's Adviser thinks that the Tanjore Trichinopoly people are all Congress minded or are largely sympathisers of the Congress and therefore they ought to be taught a lesson and so he insists that the price of paddy in this area ought to be kept depressed. The prices that were ruling in February last were fairly satisfactory. Then came the control over inter-districts movement order and the district grain purchase officer and the Adviser said that they were not going to allow these Tanjore people to make any more money if they can. The grain purchase officer has been asked to keep the prices down. No amount of representation has done any good. I may tell the House that I even enlisted the support of the Government of India to make the Madras Government change their mind but to very little purpose. Is that the way to encourage production? If this is done in Madras I can quite see that it will be done in many other provinces. You are not really helping the food situation by discouraging people from producing more food. The prices obtained by producers are not adequate. Naturally they are not going to be interested in raising a third crop and I say that so far as Madras is concerned no attempt has been made to tap this potential source. Unless you give them concessions, you cannot induce the landowners to grow a third crop. Discussions often go on and they end in disputes between the Irrigation Department and the Revenue Department as to when to open the sluices in the irrigation system. The sluices are always opened 20 days too late. This is how the problem is being tackled in Madras.

These Provincial Governments try to control the prices so far as the producer is concerned but do they realise that the consumer does not get any benefit

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from this procedure. I know that so far as Tanjore is concerned, between the price at which the grain purchase officer buys rice and the price at which it is sold elsewhere there is a difference of 60 to 80 per cent and sometimes even cent per cent. When the matter is represented to the authorities we are told that the usual trade channels should not be disturbed. The policy is such that it is calculated to discourage the producer from producing more rice. Barring rice and other food grains there are many other commodities the prices of which have shot up many times their pre-war levels and it is here the Honourable the Finance Member comes in. So far as the price of rice, and other cereals are concerned, there might be a shortage or mal-distribution but what about tamarind and chillies? Why should the prices of these shoot up? Why should prices of cotton seeds which are very necessary for feeding bullocks go up? Why should the price of plough bulls go up? There are many other things which the agriculturist needs the prices of which have gone up and that is where the Honourable the Finance Member comes in. All this is due to his monetary policy and the fact that as a result there is lot of redundant money about us. That is why all prices have gone up. What then is the use of one department saying 'we will give you a higher price'?

What is happening in Madras now? We are heading towards a situation which will be much like that of Bengal. I shall, with your permission, read an extract from a paper, which perhaps is not very well known here. But the Editor is fairly well known all over India—Mr. G. S. Arundale. The name of the paper is *Conscience*. Perhaps the Government is subsidizing it. Mr. Arundale is a friend of the Government, an ardent supporter of War effort and thoroughly anti-Congress in his sympathies. He says that in a village near Adyar which is the Theosophical Settlement in Madras 18 families have got to subsist on one meal every two days, and 88 families just get one meal a day and 62 people are absolutely naked and in dire need of clothes. This report relates to a village near Madras and this report is made by a person not biased, who is friendly to the Government. His paper is perhaps one which they are subsidizing. (Interruption.) There is the National War Front saying 'no'. I must take Mr. Griffith's word for it. That is the position so far as Madras is concerned.

I would like to ask the Honourable the Food Member what is the use of merely saying that the Government of India cannot do anything. The most important factor in the war situation in India today is the Home front, more important than the war front and what is the use of my Honourable friend Mr. Griffiths crying out 'Grow more food'. You can spend lot of money, do lot of propaganda but it won't go home. Your advertisements cannot make any appeal to the cultivator. He will only be interested in something which is paying to him and I say that the pamphlets that come to me really show that money is being wasted and literally thrown into the drain.

Then there is another aspect of this question. I have heard it said that the Government of India are spending this year 98 lakhs by way of loans to the agriculturists and since 1937 I have been accustomed to hear Provincial Governments saying that they have been allocating such and such amount of money for the relief of the agriculturist by way of loans. Perhaps the Honourable the Finance Member has some experience as a District Officer. Does he realise that this money does not reach the agriculturist at all? If the Honourable the Finance Member has any experience of what is going on in the districts, he must know that these loans are distributed by the Tahsildar and the Tahsildar expects to become a Deputy Collector. When his name goes up to the Revenue Board or to the Government, as the case may be, his record is looked into and his promotion depends amongst other factors upon the number of loans where default has been committed being a few or non-existent and if there are numerous instances of default he is not going to become a Deputy Collector. The Tahsildar is naturally more anxious about his promotion than about helping the agriculturist. Do you mean to say that all this money is going to help the

agriculturists. The money comes back into the next year's budget and what is the use of merely saying that 98 lakhs has been set apart for distribution under this head. This sort of thing is not going to augment production at all.

What is the use of Government saying 'We have had price control conferences and we have done this and done that'. If you want the conscience of the people to be roused, you must do something more than what you have done. I found the Honourable the Leader of the European Group waxing eloquent on the question of profiteers, about what has not been done to put them down. I ask these gentlemen on my left to lay their hand on their heart and ask themselves 'where are the profiteers'. The Honourable the Leader of the European Group can point out the profiteers if he wants to. The profiteers are not the poor villagers who out of fear carry 3 or 4 months' stock with them. The profiteer is not the small merchant who hugs to his small stock to make little more money. The profiteer is the big man, the man who frequents Government Houses and the lobbies of your Councils, the man who is the Vice-President of your War Committees, the man whom you invite as Member of the National Defence Council.

I can even understand the existence of profiteering in rice and other cereals but why should there be profiteering in tamarind and chillies. (*An Honourable Member*: "Why are you keen on tamarind and chillies.") I may tell the Honourable Member that if he will consult his Nutrition Expert he will know that for poor people who cannot afford to buy vegetables these things furnish the necessary vitamin content. I am telling this House these details and these and other similar articles are those which have gone up in prices. That is how the inflation spiral goes on and there is no attempt at checking it. If you merely say that you are summoning a Price Control Conference and you are going to solve the problem, you will not be able to solve the problem. It is no use for the Government of India merely saying that they are helpless. The Government of India can help if they have enough guts in them. They have enough guts to put people in prison without trial and to curtail their liberties. Can these people associated with the Government of India on the Treasury Benches justify themselves in the eyes of posterity? These people are drawing Rs. 5,500 a month and yet they say they are helpless and they cannot save this country from starvation; they cannot prevent people from dying. It may be that in Bengal there were 27 cases of death that were known in one day, but I hear that subsequently the Police Commissioner has given instructions for the Police to pick up the corpses in their vans, as when people die in the roads, so that no publicity is given to this fact. That is the reason why we no more get reports of further deaths of this nature. Besides people are dying in various parts of the country and I now hear that even in the United Provinces the monsoon has failed. What is the use of my Honourable friend and his colleagues saying they cannot do anything. You have to do something; you have to invoke all the powers necessary and you have to take control of the situation. What is the use of your appointing Regional Food Commissioners? I saw a report the other day that a High Court Judge, Justice Braunt, now acting as Regional Commissioner going and begging on bended knees to the Orissa Government for some rice. Is it really right to hold in reserve surplus stocks of rice to meet the future demands of the people of Orissa when the people in the adjacent province are dying of starvation? Is it right to allow the persons of one town to be fed adequately and the people of an adjacent town in another Province to die of starvation? If you are unable to send rice from a surplus area to a deficit area that is adjoining, surely the problem will be met by a stream of refugees from the deficit areas. What is the use of these Regional Food Commissioners if they cannot do anything in matters like this. They are absolutely useless. I can say that so far as my Province is concerned, the Regional Food Commissioner is a Provincial Civil Servant. He is a very good, capable and honest man, but the fact that he was Madras Provincial Service man makes it incumbent on him to say, "Sir", every

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time he sees Sir Hugh Hood, the Civil Supplies Adviser to the Governor. Do you think he will carry any respect with him? Do you think the authority of the Government of India as represented by him carries any weight with it? I was very pleased to hear from the Honourable Food Member that India is an economic unit. When India was a political unit, unfettered by this provincial autonomy, goods were moving freely from one Province to another, but today because of this provincial autonomy we are in a helpless situation. I do not think the Government of India is in a helpless position. I think they can help and they ought to help. It is no use your being engaged in other problems in the name of war effort of this country if people are dying of hunger. If you cannot prevent this state of affairs, there is no use for the Government of India to exist. It may as well be liquidated. Starvation is the biggest problem today and the Government of India ought to put an end to it. The Government of India ought to exert itself and it is no use merely summoning infructuous conferences. I do hope that before we meet next, something real and effective would have been done. I hear that there is going to be a change again in the Food portfolio. This is rather unfortunate. Food seems to be tossed from one Member to another. But we do expect the Government of India to have done something to solve this problem instead of allowing the Provincial Governments to take the bit between their teeth and run away with it.

**Sir Muhammad Yamin Khan:** Sir, I join my Honourable friend Sir Henry Richardson in paying a tribute on the very eloquent and lucid speech of the Honourable the Food Member. It was a very interesting survey which he presented to the House and it showed how well acquainted he was with the food problem. We think that the food problem can be dealt with only by such people as are in touch with the people who produce food. For a long time, this matter had been left to those who were mostly in touch with commercial interests and therefore this problem was not tackled so nicely as it has been tackled now by the Honourable the Food Member. Sir, the long and lamentable story of the non-co-operation of the provinces which he has brought out has convinced me on one point notwithstanding the experience of His Excellency Marquess of Linlithgow that the Federation is a hopeless thing for India. If the Federation is kept up in its present shape as embodied in Act of 1935, it will bring greater calamity to our country than what we are facing today in spite of the Central Government having that power which they will not have under the Federal system.

[At this stage, Mr. President (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim) resumed the Chair.]

I would like to refer to where I feel the Government has failed. I would like to put forward my suggestions in that direction because I do not want to waste the time of the House. I do not want to support any provincial ministry and put up recriminations against the other. I hold no brief for any Government. If those Governments where the Ministries are still in existence have failed, there was no justification for those provinces to fail where there is no Ministry and the Government of India could exercise much greater influence on them by persuasion or by legislation or by some other means. But they have also failed. I will mention those points where they have failed. The first thing is to check wrong rumours which had been spread by certain interested persons. I do not know how the Government of India have failed in this respect when they have got the Broadcasting stations at their disposal and when they can control the press. They have got a Propaganda office and yet they have failed to check the wrong rumours which had been going round in this country and had been adversely affecting the Government. This shows the hopeless position of the Government and the want of vigilance in tackling these questions. I cannot congratulate the Government for coming to this House and saying that they could not cope with the situation. I think they have got ample powers in law in their hands, they can deal with people who

spread rumours which bring all these calamities to this country and upsets the economic equilibrium of the country. I assure the Government that my Party will give their wholehearted support to Government for any drastic measures that they may take in order to check these kinds of rumours.

Another place where the Government have failed is to check the rise in prices in 1942. Was it justifiable for the Government to fix the price of wheat at 8 seers to a rupee and then themselves buying at six seers to a rupee. The Government themselves is the first defaulter against their own orders. The Government Agents go out into the country and make purchases at higher price than what they themselves have fixed. This has resulted in the present deplorable condition. The law and order issued by the Government has been violated by the Government themselves and it is they who have brought this calamity to the country. Once the price has been fixed, it should never have been altered. It is only after taking into consideration the margin of profit for the cultivator that the price was fixed and the Government should have stuck to it. It does not matter if any Provincial Minister did not carry out those orders; the Government of India have got ample powers to deal with such a situation if he wants to upset the whole economic condition of the country. Government do not require my help in telling them how to discharge their duties and to advise them in the exercise of their powers. They have got the Honourable the Law Member who can arm them with powers under the Defence of India Act and the Rules thereunder. If the Government cannot control the situation, then they become ridiculous in the eyes of the public. The public begin to think that there is something wrong. The Government by their inconsistent actions have created in the minds of the ignorant people that the Government want to wind up their government, the people think that the British Government are leaving the country and running away. That was the idea created in the minds of the ignorant people. These ignorant people may have been misled by a certain political party in the country. But the impetus was given by the inaction of the Government themselves in not checking it.

Another thing in which the Government have failed is when they first came to know that wheat was not easily coming into the market and that it had been buried underneath, the Government did not take proper steps to get hold of the people who had buried the foodstuffs with a view to operate in the black market. Under the very nose of the Government these people were selling wheat in the black market and making huge profits. The black market was very well thriving. The Government fixed the price at eight seers a rupee, but we could not get at more than four seers a rupee. If you went to a *baniya* and asked for wheat, he would say that he had not got. If you tell him you would give him at Rs. 10 a maund, he would say, "all right; not this time, give me your address, the wheat will reach your house tonight". The wheat did reach home all right. The *baniya* did not want to divulge where he kept his stock. The Government knew the ways of these dealers and yet they were sleeping. The Government were taking no action. If they had been vigilant, all these things would not have been happening. I would suggest that these people could have been dealt with even under martial law. If the Government had taken strong action, the public would have supported them. The Government were playing into the hands of those people who were traders and who wanted to make huge profits. (Interruption.) If any Provincial Ministry did this, I say they were also inspired by the same commercial spirit. They wanted to make a lot of money for themselves and for their friends who had stocked the goods in their houses. The Government have hopelessly failed to tackle these people and the result is that there is economic chaos in the country.

**Sardar Sant Singh** (West Punjab: Sikh): May I inform the Honourable Member that the Government issued a circular to sell wheat at rates higher than the controlled rates to the Government Agents who were purchasing for the army.

**Sir Muhammad Yamin Khan**: Another thing in which they blundered was in taking away the control price of wheat, just at a time when the harvest was

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coming. By taking away the control price, they allowed wheat to get into the market suddenly at a very high price. Soon after the market was flooded with black market wheat, the harvests came in. The cultivator came to know that in the previous year, he sold his crop at eight seers to a rupee or Rs. 5 a maund, but when he himself wanted to purchase to meet his requirements, he had to pay Rs. 10 a maund. Therefore he was careful not to bring into the market his goods, if at all he started bringing very small quantity. I know, Sir, that in Meerut in one *mandi*, there used to be 120 carts every day from the adjoining villages bringing wheat during the crop season. This year, I find hardly two or three carts coming every day. When a cart comes, all people rush and purchase the same at whatever price is demanded by the cartman. The result was that the man charged exorbitant prices. You can imagine, Sir, that when wheat is selling at  $3\frac{1}{2}$  seers to a rupee in Delhi, just on the other side of the Jumna it is selling at  $2\frac{1}{8}$  seers to a rupee in Meerut district. What is it due to? It is due to the failure of the Government to tackle this question. There is no scarcity in Meerut district, there is plenty of harvest, yet what is the reason for this high price. The reason is this. The cultivator does not trust the Government in keeping up the price level. The cultivator gets nervous because of the previous experience he had of this Government. He does not want to bring wheat into the market. Therefore who is suffering? The urban public are suffering. The people are suffering on account of the general rise in prices. It is due to the failure of the Government. Not only the price of wheat has gone up but also the price of vegetables. Spinach which used to sell at two pice a seer now sells at seven to eight annas a seer. Correspondingly all vegetables have gone up in price. From half an anna it has gone up to seven annas, and correspondingly the prices of all vegetables have gone up.

4 P.M. If a poor man is able to purchase wheat or wheat flour he cannot buy anything else with which to eat it. *Dal* is very costly; and where and how can they purchase these things. It is the failure of Government. These things are produced here, they do not come from abroad, and cannot Government stop the rise in prices of these articles? I do not agree with my Honourable friend Mr. Krishnamachari who makes the Finance Member entirely responsible for this because he says it is all due to inflation. That is not my view. I think it is all due to want of public confidence, want of propaganda, want of laws and failure to enforce the laws, which have caused these rises in price levels.

As far as the "Grow More Food" campaign is concerned I think there is plenty of land available in Assam, but there is a line between Bengal and Assam which cultivators from Bengal are not allowed to cross, this rule being called the line system. It is not only hard on the Bengal cultivators but also hard on Assam where the land is not cultivated and the Government loses so much revenue. It is hard on the people of both the provinces because food which could be grown is not grown. Have Government taken notice of this?

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The Honourable Member has one minute more

**Sir Muhammad Yamin Khan:** My suggestions to Government are that whatever may be stored in the villages, wheat or rice, should be entirely controlled by Government and taken possession of after leaving enough for the cultivators' personal and seed requirements. Government may buy the whole thing and fix a selling price because it is no use controlling the price without controlling the stock and allowing it to go underground. That is why I say that Government must secure possession of the whole stock and make a proper rationing. And the next year's price must be fixed and announced this year instead of being left over till the harvest. If the price is made known this year the cultivator will know that he will have to sell at the price and he will bring it into the market.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim) : The Honourable Member's time is up.

**Sir Muhammad Yamin Khan** : I have finished, Sir.

What I suggest is something like what they have done in the case of cloth when the millowners had to sell their goods before a certain time and now the prices of cloth have considerably come down. The same procedure may be followed with regard to rice and wheat.

**Mr. Saiyid Haider Imam** (Nominated Non-Official) : Sir, I rise to say a few words about the food problem relating to my province of Bihar. A few weeks ago the situation there had become very grave and very serious indeed. Foodstuffs were selling at very high and exorbitant prices and in some cases no food could be had at all. So long as the food embargo was not lifted from the province people could get at least some eatables after payment of very high prices, but the moment the embargo was lifted the situation deteriorated very considerably. The greedy hoarders, profiteers and grain-dealers started sending huge quantities of rice and grains to adjoining provinces, particularly to Bengal, and there they sold them at very high prices. This worsened the situation a lot. People almost came to the brink of starvation. Rice was sold at nearly Rs. 40 a maund and in some cases even higher prices were demanded. This was the sorrowful state of affairs. From this it may be easily visualised that an ordinary labourer or a poor man who earns Rs. 15 or Rs. 20 a month must be finding it very hard to keep body and soul together. I had the privilege of addressing several meetings at Patna, and I am stating without exaggeration that it was a sight to see people rushing there to air their grievances. Distress, agony, hunger and starvation were writ large on their faces. Perhaps never before in the history of my town had so many women belonging to the lower strata of society mustered strong on such occasions to air their grievances about the scarcity of food. The Secretary of the Bihar Provincial Postal and R.M.S. Union, while I was in Patna, mentioned to me that several postal employees while on duty actually fainted on account of underfeeding and undernourishment. The Honourable Member in charge of that department is not here, as he is a Member of the other House, otherwise I am sure he would have heard this tale of sorrow with deep regrets. Sir, I am not far from wrong if I say that never before, even during the worst period of famine, had the food situation of the country become so intolerable as it is today. I understand strong representations were made to the Government of India by the Bihar Government for the reimposition of the embargo, and I believe the embargo has been reimposed, which has certainly improved the situation a lot. The reports that I am getting from my province indicate that things are slightly improving. Things are improving, though of course very slowly. A lot has got to be done before Bihar and other provinces can come back to their normal conditions.

Sir, in this connection I should like to say without fear of contradiction, that the Executive Officers of my province have all tried to tackle this problem with sympathy and understanding. If their efforts have been hampered, they have been hampered by the mischievous deeds of the profiteers and hoarders.

Before I conclude, Sir, I should like to make an appeal to the Government of India that they should, as far as they can, give freer scope to the provinces to tackle their food problem in their own way and as best as they can without much interference from here. Also, Sir, while I was in Bihar, this was a matter of common grievance that the public was not taken into confidence by the Government. In the important Food committees set up by the Government, the non-official element was almost nil, and I believe similar is the case with the Food Committee which has been set up by the Central Government. This should be remedied immediately in order to bring confidence to the general public. Unless this is done, the situation appears very gloomy and dark and there is no silver lining. With these few words I resume my seat.

**Mr. Abdur Rasheed Choudhury** (Assam: Muhammadan) : Sir, while I give credit to the Honourable the Commerce Member for the capable way in which he has initiated this debate, I must say that his speech so far as the

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rice provinces are concerned is not very helpful. He has not suggested any constructed programme for the immediate relief of the people who are dying of starvation. He has simply brushed aside the question of free trade which is responsible for so much distress in the provinces of Assam, Bihar and Orissa. The Government of India being surrounded by stalwart Punjabis and polished U. P. people from wheat-growing areas tried their best to keep down the price of wheat in these provinces. They had no occasion to go and look to the famished people of our provinces and they did not raise their little finger to come to their rescue in this difficult time.

Sir, ever since the occupation of Burma by the Japanese, the price tendency in the neighbouring provinces of Assam, Bengal and Bihar is on the rise. While the Governments of Bihar, Orissa and Assam were vigilant and with the sanction of the Government of India were using restriction and prohibition in keeping down prices, the Government of Bengal were indifferent. The Ministers were quarrelling with the Opposition members; the Governor was quarrelling with the Ministers. The result was that permanent members in the Bengal Service got indifferent and did not take initiative in keeping down the prices. There was slackness in Government machinery in Bengal with the result that the profiteers and stockists had everything in their own way and within the very eyes of the Government the prices of rice went up from 4 to 40 rupees. The Government of India were sleeping all the time. When in March the new Ministry came into power in Bengal, they brought the situation of Bengal to the notice of the Government of India. That broke the slumber of this Government and they at once decided to do something. But, Sir, as usual, they moved in a wrong direction, as I shall show later. They did not consult the Government of Assam; they did not consult the Government of Bihar and the Government of Orissa as to what they were going to do.

In Assam at that time the price of rice was something like Rs. 14 per maund, in Orissa Rs. 6-8-0 per maund and in Bihar from Rs. 8 to Rs. 9 per maund. The Bengal Government became jealous of the peace and prosperity of the neighbouring provinces and they found that by quarrelling amongst themselves they had brought themselves in a position which cannot be relieved in any way. They brought it to the notice of the Government of India who always look at the outlying provinces with a jaundiced eye. They at once started on taking steps. Their first thought was: why should Assam, Bihar and Orissa live in peace while hunger fire is burning in Bengal? Why the neighbours of Bengal should live in peaceful and easy life while the people of Bengal are suffering so much? They did not consult these Governments and all on a sudden they introduced free trade without caring for the result which will come out of this measure. It was the unkindest cut of all—the introduction of free trade. On the 18th of May free trade was introduced. At that time I was in Shillong and from my personal knowledge I know that price of rice was Rs. 14. Three days before this measure was introduced, somehow or other it leaked out that the restrictions put by the Provincial Government were going to be removed. Within three days the price rose from Rs. 14 to Rs. 20 and on the 18th it at once jumped up to Rs. 24 per maund. Similar is the case, Sir, with Bihar and Orissa. The Assam Government sent a protest asking the Government of India to postpone giving effect to this Ordinance of free trade. The Government of India did not listen. Then, Sir, the Adviser of the Government of Bihar spoke out at a Press Conference as to what would be the effect of this in Bihar. I will read a few lines from what he said so that the House may understand what a tremendous blow it was from the Government of India to the Local Government. It runs thus

“The Central Government have abrogated power which they themselves gave to the Provincial Governments under the Defence of India Rules. There is now the question whether the Provincial Government should or should not exercise certain powers to control the export of rice and other foodgrains. They no longer possess any powers to do so.”

Then, Sir, he said:

“The control had maintained internal prices at a level much below that of Bengal. With this removal of control, prices were bound to rise in Bihar.”



Mr. Anzorari said that the control had maintained internal prices at a level which in comparison with those ruling in Bengal was very low. This control of the Provincial Governments of Assam, Bihar and Orissa was removed by the introduction of free trade policy. The only reason the Honourable the Food Member gave for its introduction was that they had assurances from Provincial Governments that certain surpluses would be available for them. But, Sir, the Government of India forgot altogether the connected circumstances and before introducing this vital matter did not make sure whether all the surpluses promised would be available or not. The producers have generally become a little cautious because the rupee value has gone down a good deal. Formerly farmers used to keep a little surplus that was sufficient for their requirements. But now the prices of all commodities have increased. So they do not bring out all their surpluses to the market. That is the situation and it is no use blaming the Provincial Government for not giving out their surpluses. The result was that the Government of India did not get the surplus they expected from the Local Government. They ought to have weighed these points before introducing this free trade. In their usual way, without consulting those provinces which were to be affected by this free trade Ordinance they brought it in. With what results? Prices jumped up and there was no control on the part of the Local Government. In the beginning everything seemed to be in chaos. If we went to the District Officers they said: We have no powers. We have done our best and we pray to God for his blessings. With the introduction of the free trade Ordinance there started competitive purchases in the market. First came the military contractors, then the Government contractors, then the contractors from the rich tea-gardens to purchase rice at whatever price it was going, leaving nothing for the poorer people. This is the situation still existing in Assam. The result is that the poorer people are not getting anything to eat. In my own province the hill tribes of the Khasi and Naga hills are the worst sufferers. They do not grow much rice. They bring local produce to the plain markets and exchange it for rice. With high prices now prevailing, these people cannot get sufficient rice for their maintenance. So they are underfed. The other class of poor people, the wage-earners, cannot have more than one meal a day. I can from my own experience say that in Sylhet the middle-class people are having only one meal a day.

In the Province of Orissa on the 3rd July the Parliamentary Secretary in the Orissa Assembly made a statement to the effect that in one district alone, namely, Balasore, some 70 people died of starvation.

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** When did they die?

**Mr. Abdur Rasheed Choudhury:** On the 3rd of July the statement was made.

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** But when did the deaths take place?

**Mr. Abdur Rasheed Choudhury:** After May or June.

I had an adjournment motion down on that occurrence but it did not come up, so I could not say what I had in my mind. In the present instance, we find that people cannot have a full meal. The ordinary wage-earners work until they collapse and die. If you enquire from the District Officers they will tell you the whole story. Nobody has said anything about it for fear of being gagged by the Censors of the Government. What has Government done now? After two months' experiment with human life they have revoked this free trade and have authorised the Provincial Governments to put restrictions as they like. I say: Is human life a thing to be experimented on? The trouble is that Government are neither responsible nor responsive to anybody. In other countries, for this act of their foolishness they would have lost their office and people from this side of the House would have occupied their seats.

I come to the constructive portion of what I have got to say; I am not a critic alone, I would like to put forward some constructive suggestions. This question has to be looked at from two points of view. One is how to keep down prices and the other is how to arrange supplies. If the Government of India would keep down the price of wheat here up to Rs. 13, I do not know why they

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are so impotent or powerless that they are not able to keep the price of rice at Rs. 20. They may say they have got no hand in the matter. But people are dying by hundreds, we do not get all the information, otherwise we could inform.

**Dr. P. N. Banerjee** (Calcutta Suburbs: Non-Muhammadan Urban): The press has been gagged.

**Mr. Abdur Rasheed Choudhury**: I do not understand why the Government of India are satisfied only with taking partial measures in matters like this. The food question has been tackled by all the belligerent countries. England has got control over food, Germany has got control over food, the U. S. A. also,—as a matter of fact, every country is managing its own affairs. Why have the Government of India failed to manage the food problem in this country?

**An Honourable Member**: Because there are two Governments, the Provincial and the Central.

**Mr. Abdur Rasheed Choudhury**: Because they do not like to move keenly in any way. That is what I find. If England can by commandeering food keep down prices and give food to their population, I do not see why the Government of India should not be able to follow this step. Why not commandeer the entire produce, fix a price, and if necessary, ration out the whole thing? People who used to take three meals a day—you have got the propaganda department, ask people to have two meals, leaving one meal as surplus for the other afflicted provinces. These are things which the Government of India should do. By commandeering everything they must take up the sale of all the rice in their own hands so that there may not be any sale without the consent of the Government. That is the way to deal with these matters. Why the Government of India is fighting shy to take full measures I do not know. This is war time, this is extraordinary time, and without full measures nothing can be controlled. You fix a policy to-day and to-morrow you amend it. Do you think these half-hearted measures will satisfy the hunger stricken people? Time has come for the Government to commandeer the entire produce, as has been done in England, Germany and other belligerent countries, and to take up all the sale in the hands of the Government so that profiteers and black markets may not have anything to do with the produce of the country. This thing should be done immediately, because hunger stricken people will not wait till Government take their leisurely measures. People are dying, you have got to give them immediate relief. But you are not doing it. As for the future, what you should do is, to have more "Grow More Food" campaign. In my own Province of Assam I can give you. . . . .

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): The Honourable Member's time is up.

**Mr. M. M. Joshi** (Nominated Non-Official): One good feature of the speech of the Honourable the Food Member was its complete frankness. He admitted the great hardship and even the distress from which the people in this country have been suffering for some time. I am glad that he made no effort to minimise these things. He also admitted that this problem did not receive early attention. Unfortunately, Sir, he seemed to lay the blame either on the Legislature or on the public of this country. He should have been equally frank and admitted that the Government of India which is responsible for the administration of this country did not think of this problem at all in time. He should have known that during war, especially a war of this nature, of this totalitarian character, difficulties regarding food were bound to occur. The Honourable Member's speech appeared to throw the whole blame mainly on want of co-operation and selfishness, and want of patriotism of the Provincial Governments, and I feel he also appeared to find fault with the system of provincial autonomy.

**The Honourable Sir M. Asizul Huque**: I did not say anything either. I was merely dealing with facts. I did not say who were responsible, purposely. All these matters will have to be looked into, and it will not be fair on my

part to blame anybody. I was dealing only with facts and that inference is entirely wrong.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** Well, Sir, I am entitled to draw an inference from the Honourable Member's speech, and the inference that I drew was that he laid the fault at the doors of the cursed system of provincial autonomy. I am not an admirer of the system of provincial autonomy. I am not an admirer of the provincial ministers, at least some of them who have wrongly dealt with this problem. But I would like the Government of India to realise that when they became responsible for the administration of this country they knew the system under which they had to administer the government of India. Therefore it is useless for them now to blame the system. If the Government of India had realised that they had to work under a system of provincial autonomy, they should have taken sufficient care to secure the co-operation of the Provincial Governments. Moreover, Sir, I do not feel that the Government of India are so helpless in dealing with recalcitrant Ministers who refuse to co-operate with them in their food policy. I know, Sir, when a Minister, who gave up a ceremonial title, was compelled to resign from the Ministry—he was not only the Minister, but he was the Chief Minister—cannot the Honourable the Food Member recommend to the Governor General or any other authority to ask for the resignation of the Minister who was making propaganda against the policy of the Government of India? On the contrary, that Minister some time ago received a Knighthood. I would therefore like the Government of India not to indulge in this policy of laying the blame on others. If they are strong enough, if they are not timid, they have got powers enough under the Government of India Act to deal with recalcitrant provinces and recalcitrant Ministers.

Sir, while dealing with the provinces and showing their want of co-operation, the Honourable Member seemed to pay a compliment to his other colleagues in the Government of India who have to deal with departments which affected the food problem. I do not know whether he included the Honourable the Finance Member in the compliment and in the thanks that he gave.

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** All this expenditure has been sanctioned by the Finance Member.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** It is the policy of inflation for which the Honourable the Finance Member is responsible that has affected the food problem adversely.

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** I never said that.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** I myself feel that if there is want of co-operation between the Provincial Governments and the Government of India, there is equally want of co-operation between the different departments of the Government of India. In my judgment it is a Government which is incapable of co-operating with each other. It is a strange medley of ill-assorted persons with various interests—specially communal interests. I therefore feel that it is wrong for the Honourable Member to throw the blame only on the Provincial Governments. The Government of India should practise some introspection and try to find out whether the fault does not lie with themselves. The Honourable Member appeared this time to point out that there is actually a great deficit of food in this country.

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** I never said that.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** I am again giving my impression of the speech of the Honourable Member. His predecessors did show that although there was a deficit the deficit was not a very great one.

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** That is what I said.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** The Honourable Member pointed out to us that there were 50 million tons of food produced in this country and his estimate of the requirements was about 55 million tons.

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** I said 'principal food grains'. There is a good deal of difference between total food grains and the principal foodgrains.

[Sir M. Azizul Huque.]

I said that the total normal production was 50 to 51 million tons of principal food grains and I said that 55 million is the need on the basis of one pound per individual which will include both the principal food grains as well as the minor food grains to which I did not refer.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** Let me assure the Honourable Member that I am not attempting to show that there is a very great deficit of food grains in this country. As a matter of fact, my own opinion is that the actual deficit of food grains in this country is much less than what is tried to be made out. I feel, therefore, that if there are difficulties in the situation regarding food the difficulties are not due to the deficit but the difficulties are due to the inefficient management of the food problem mainly by the Government of India and to some extent by the Provincial Governments. If we once have a firm grip of this fact, then it will be easy for us to find out how the present situation has arisen and how we can meet it. I feel that the chief cause of the present situation is the vacillating policy of the Government of India and the half hearted measures taken by them to deal with the situation. They first started with controlling the price of wheat, not knowing that you cannot control the price of only one article, knowing full well that if they control the price of wheat, they must also control the prices of other commodities. They failed to do that. They should have also known that you cannot control the prices of any article unless you also take up yourself the responsibility of supplying that article to the people of the country. The Government of India failed to do that. It is true that for some time they appeared to take upon themselves the responsibility of supplying the needs of the provinces. They gave up that policy very soon and adopted a policy of free trade. We know the results of free trade and I do not wish to deal with that subject. The Government of India was threatened and bullied by the Provincial Governments and they have given up the policy of free trade. Can a Government expect to manage a difficult situation such as the one with which we are faced if they cannot make up their mind, if they are unable to know what is their duty under the circumstances. There lies the chief fault of the Government of India. I suggest to the Government of India now to make up their mind once for all and decide what they are to do. The Honourable Member told us that he has appointed a committee and he is considering the suggestions of that committee.

**The Honourable Sir M. Azizul Huque:** Not considering it. We hope to consider it. The report has not yet been received.

**Mr. N. M. Joshi:** I feel that the Honourable Member was too late in appointing the committee. He should have appointed such a committee long ago. Then, the Honourable Member should also follow a thorough policy of central control of the prices, not of one article but all the articles that are necessary to be controlled. Then, I would like the Honourable Member to take upon himself as Central Government the responsibility of supplying food grains to the different provinces. It is wrong to leave this work to be done and to be arranged between the different provinces. The different provinces have failed to do that and therefore the Government of India should assume powers either under the Defence of India Act or under the Government of India Act and they alone can do this work.

Then the Food Member did not tell us very much what he ought to have told us—that you cannot solve the food problem by merely controlling the prices, by merely supplying the wholesale needs of the provinces but the Government of India must also control the equal distribution of food grains that are available in order that the sacrifices to be made either by the provinces or by the individuals should be equal. We were told in one of the statements issued by the Government of India that the Government of India propose to establish the system of rationing in towns and cities. I feel that the Government of India in this matter also seem to be very

inactive and slow. If there is a complete system of rationing today, it is only in the cities of Bombay and Poona. India is a very large country and if the Government of India wants to establish a system of proper rationing, they should be more active than they are today.

Sir, there are only a few more remarks which I would like to make. The first remark which I would like to make now is that the Government of India is anxious to maintain the normal channels of trade. I feel that the Government of India is mistaken if they think that by maintaining and keeping up the normal channels of trade, they can solve this problem. They tried this method for a long time and they have failed. I therefore suggest to them not to expect too much by following this policy of maintaining normal channels of trade. I am not suggesting that the Government of India should drive out all the traders and all the shop-keepers. If the Government of India can maintain control over prices and can maintain their control over supplies for rationing system under proper control, they may use the shop-keepers. But the control and the work of supply must be in the hands of the Government of India or the Provincial Governments acting as the agents of the Government of India.

Then, Sir, the Honourable Member also spoke something about the "Grow more food" policy. In this matter, I feel that the Government of India have not done their duty properly. The present agitation for "Grow more food" in my judgment is a sort of an ornamental movement. It is not a practical movement at all. It is used in order to get some titles. I feel that Government of India is not serious about "Grow more food" campaign, neither are the Provincial Governments. We were told that the Government of India have given some grants to the Provincial Governments in order that the Provincial Governments should try to grow more food. But I would like the Government of India to tell us how that money has been utilised. We have been hearing about this "Grow more food" policy for the last two years. The Government of India could have given us some results of that policy. How many additional acres have been cultivated? How much more food has been produced on account of this movement? I feel that the Government of India should not be content by merely talking about "Grow more food" campaign. Let them take more interest; let them take more responsibility for this policy. At least they should find out the facts and place them before the Legislature of the country.

My last point is that the Government of India has failed mainly because the Government of India cannot get the co-operation and they do not wish to get the co-operation of the public in this matter. The Honourable Member appealed for co-operation, but by merely appealing for co-operation you do not get co-operation. You have to produce conditions under which the public can co-operate with you. You have to secure the confidence of the public. The present policy of the Government of India is not such that the public can co-operate with them even in this matter. The Government of India have, therefore, to adopt a policy even in political matters so that they will secure the confidence of the public. If they can get confidence, I have no doubt that the Government of India will be able to solve this problem.

Sir, I began my speech by saying that there is not much deficit of food grains in this country. It is the proper and efficient management of this problem which is necessary and in order to manage this problem efficiently and properly, Government must secure the co-operation of the public. If they do that, the problem can be solved.

**Maulvi Muhammad Abdul Ghani** (Tirhut Division: Muharradan): Sir, I am one of those unfortunate persons who come from a province which has been most affected by the order of the Central Government. The Government of India in May last lifted up the provincial ban on food. The moment this fatal order of the Government of India reached our province, the rise in prices of commodities knew no bounds and the business men and merchants rushed in from the neighbouring province of Bengal. The fate of Assam has already been narrated by my Honourable friend Mr. Abdur Rasheed Chaudhury and

[Maulvi Muhammad Abdul Ghani.]

Bihar and Orissa are in the same boat. Fortunately, Orissa had a Ministry which, to some extent, came to the rescue of the people there, but the people of Bihar, constitutionally speaking, are regarded as orphans so far as their Government is concerned. There is no Ministry which is responsible for the maintenance of law and order. Even then law and order there has been interfered with by the Central Government. As has been rightly pointed out just now by the Honourable the Mover of the motion, Government of India have no right to interfere with law and order of any province. But knowingly, they did so. Afterwards, when they had done lot of harms, as a sort of repentance, they have again permitted the Government of Bihar to impose the provincial ban. But the remedy was given when the patient had practically expired.

Sir, I was in Patna on the day when the order was passed and I learnt that the Collector of Purnea and various other Collectors ran to the headquarters expressing their utter helplessness at the hands of a number of traders and business men. My Honourable friend perhaps may later on come with pleas that the people of Bengal were not benefited by the rice transported from Bihar and also may raise pleas that no considerable quantity of food grains was transported from Bihar. What happened was that the traders took the rice and other articles from Bihar to the neighbouring districts. The Purnea district is contiguous to the districts of Dinapur and Malda. Similarly, the southern side of Bihar is also contiguous to Bengal by land, not by river or by sea. And what did they do? There was no necessity of transport by rail. They could transport by means of bullock-carts and at some places where there is a river by means of boats. So, in a week they arranged the whole thing in such a way that they usurped all the grains from Bihar.

5 P. M. How funny it was for the Government of Bengal to declare Calcutta and Howrah Municipalities to be out of the controlled area.

**Mr. President** (The Honourable Sir Abdur Rahim): It is now five o'clock. The Honourable Member can continue his speech tomorrow.

The Assembly then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Tuesday, the 10th August, 1948.