

Friday, 13th August, 1943

COUNCIL OF STATE DEBATES

(OFFICIAL REPORT)

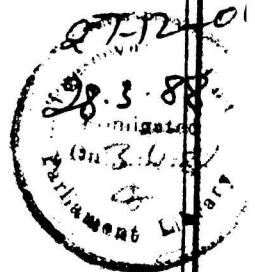
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FOURTEENTH SESSION

OF THE

FOURTH COUNCIL OF STATE, 1943



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COUNCIL OF STATE.

Friday, 13th August, 1943.

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

MOTION RE FOOD SITUATION—*contd.*

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT : The debate on the food situation will now be resumed.

THE HONOURABLE MR. N. K. DAS (Orissa : Non-Muhammadan) : Sir, I tried to show yesterday afternoon, that my province is not a surplus one, and that, because of natural calamities last year, our food supply was very short indeed. I also said that, in spite of this fact, the Government of Orissa, having been deluded by the idea of an imagined surplus, was prevailed upon by the Government of India to spare three lakhs of maunds of foodstuffs for the Government of India's pool. And, Sir, it was at this juncture that the Government of India initiated the free trade policy on the eastern coast of my Province, and in other provinces also on the East Coast. As a result of that, people from the neighbouring provinces, especially from Bengal, invaded the outlying parts of Orissa in large numbers and purchased whatever they could. Again, as a result of that, large quantities of foodgrains began to flow out of Orissa, because of the high prices then obtaining in Bengal. In spite of all measures taken by the Government of Orissa that flow continued. The net result has been that there are already visible signs of scarcity in my province, and although measures of price control have been initiated in urban areas, still scarcity of foodgrains in the country-side is rather acute.

The net result of all that has been done to relieve the food situation is this, that Bengal has not been relieved to any appreciable extent. Today the food situation remains as distressing as it was some time back, and, if reports appearing in the papers are correct, people are dying of starvation in the streets of Calcutta.

Then, Sir, the bogey of hoarding, to my mind, is not very correct. As a matter of fact, if there was actual scarcity in Bengal, how could people be expected to be hoarding? The situation in Bengal to my mind, is due to many causes. Natural calamities are certainly one of them. It is also due to the large amounts of foodstuffs sent out to Ceylon and utilised for military purposes. Military purchases had been on a very large scale. In spite of this the Government of India have not yet been able to formulate any plans to relieve this distressed area, and the distress is growing more acute indeed from day to day. To a supplementary question asked by me, Major-General the Honourable E. Wood replied that the Government agents from Bengal had been purchasing rice at a very low price in the Orissa States and had been selling the stuff in Bengal at a very high price. I do not see why the Government of Bengal should take advantage of the distress of the people and try and make large profits. I believe the Grow More Food campaign could have done a great deal to relieve this distress although it came at a very late stage last year. Even if it was late, if the policy followed was of a bold character, and if large areas of fallow land and land available had been put under intensive cultivation, I am sure it would have gone a great way in relieving the acute distress in many parts of the country. My Honourable friend Maulvi Ali Asghar Khan was telling me yesterday that 8 lakhs of acres were available in Assam and other parts of the country. Those acres were lying fallow, and the Grow More Food campaign could have directed its activities towards bringing them under cultivation. In my province the Grow More Food campaign exists in the shape of *takavi* loans being granted to certain cultivators. That is no encouragement; that is never calculated to encourage people to bring waste lands and fallow lands under cultivation. I think the policy regarding the Grow More Food campaign should be pursued in right earnest, and a bolder policy in this respect should be taken up. I am sure that if it is taken up seriously a great part of the present distress in respect of shortage of food crops will be relieved.

THE HONOURABLE SIR RAMUNNI MENON (Nominated Non-official) : Sir, the speeches of the Honourable the Food Member in another place and of the Honourable the Food Secretary in this Council, containing as they do several statements based

[Sir Ramunni Menon.]

on objective realities, provide us with plenty of material for reflection. One of my first reactions to these speeches has been that after all, for the past blunders, the bungling, the tardy methods and the ineffective and vacillating policies of the Government or of the Governments, the Central Government is not solely to blame. In any case it will be useless for us at this stage to try to apportion blame between the various parties or to indulge in recrimination. Far more important for our purpose will be our application to the immediate task in hand, and to devise ways and means for its solution. What is the problem which confronts us today? Briefly stated, it is this. There is considerable shortage in foodstuffs in this country. In several places this shortage has resulted in very acute distress to the poorer classes. How can we best solve this problem? I think most people will agree that whatever measures we may propose, effective control by the Governments, Central, Provincial and States, over the foodstuffs from the moment they leave the producers' hands, through all stages of their movement until they reach the consumer, is absolutely essential. Without some such control no policy can succeed in this vast country. It is all very well to talk of the ordinary channels of trade, of the ordinary merchants and firms and so on. But it has been amply proved by experience that if things are left to their own course and sweet will and ways of interested people no satisfactory solution will be forthcoming. I give an example. In a speech made the other day by the Dewan of Cochin he said that after giving free scope to the operation of the natural economic laws, after giving full room for the exercise of their knowledge and public spirit by the big merchants and trades people, he found the whole scheme ended in disaster, with the result that the State took complete control over all the foodstuffs from the harvest right on to the time when they reached the consumer's hand. The result has been that notwithstanding its very acute shortage in foodstuffs, Cochin has been saved a very grave calamity. I think that is an example which other Governments may well profit by. Our immediate problem being, as I have stated, it is worth while to consider what the proposals of the Government of India are for the solution of that problem. Complaints have been made by various speakers that the Government of India have not fully disclosed their plans. That may be true to some extent. But, as far as I have been able to gather from the speech of the Honourable the Food Secretary in this Council and from the published proceedings of the meetings of various bodies earlier, for example the meeting of the Food Council which took place some time in July last, it appears to me that the Government have decided on a definite plan of action the central feature of which is to introduce rationing in all the important urban areas. At least I take that to be the core of their policy and in confirmation of that view I may refer to a report which appeared in the papers a day or two ago and also to the remarks which fell from the Honourable the Food Secretary, that arrangements are in progress for the training of the men who are to be entrusted with the execution of this rationing scheme. I think I am justified in assuming, and it is sufficient for my purpose to assume, that the Government of India have decided upon a policy of rationing. This is a policy which many people had been advocating for a long time. There is nothing new in it and the pity of it is that the Government of India did not come to their decision somewhat earlier. Rationing has been in existence in all the countries at war. In this country it has been tried and found successful. In Cochin and I believe in Travancore it is in operation and in Bombay and Poona it has been tried with considerable success. It is usual to talk of the vast size of India and of the numerous autonomous Provinces and States. But if a rationing scheme can be put into successful operation in those areas which I have specified, there seems to be no valid reason for us to suppose that it will be impossible of achievement in other places. In any case, I am very glad that the Government have decided upon the scheme because it appears to me that some method of rationing is the only method by which we can meet out a highly desirable and urgently needed measure of social justice, by which we can level up the gross inequalities in the resources for obtaining food which now exist among the different sections of the people. It may be that people who are fortunately placed under the existing circumstances and who are able to command their foodstuffs and other needs though at a very high cost will not perhaps welcome rationing, because rationing must mean a slight reduction in their quota. But we must leave objections coming from such quarters aside. We must go

ahead, convinced of the justice of the plan that we have decided upon. Whether all Provincial Governments agree with us or not, while leaving nothing undone which will secure their full co-operation, we must go ahead irrespective of this Government or that.

I was very glad to listen to certain remarks which fell from the Honourable the Food Secretary particularly the remark which he made, namely, that action and not talk is what is required. That leads me to the expression of a hope that he will succeed in introducing rationing without any delay in Delhi, where no provincial question exists, where the whole area is under the Government of India's own control and where you can watch the progress of events very closely. I hope he will be able to do that. That will be not only an additional vindication of his own point of view but, if successful it will become a shining example to other provinces.

During the course of the debate several Honourable Members expressed a doubt as to the existence of hoarding. I have no personal knowledge of the matter, but in the face of statements made by men holding very responsible positions—Administrators, Dewans of States—according to some of whom hoarding is rampant in many places in India, I cannot but feel that members who doubt the existence of this practice are not in full possession of the facts. In any case, nothing but an attempt to root out this evil will reveal the actual existence and extent of the evil. Take those reports which appeared in the papers a few days ago. The food drive in Calcutta has apparently unearthed a number of hoards. If in such cases exemplary punishment is meted out to the offenders and due publicity is given to the proceedings, it will have a very salutary effect on other parts of the country.

Doubt was also expressed in the course of the debate as to the likelihood of success of the new "Grow More Food" campaign. The Honourable Member in charge of Agriculture has given us facts and figures and has assured us that nothing is being left undone in his Department to make this drive a success. I know that in other places also the campaign is receiving encouragement, for instance in Cochin to which I referred a little while ago, several lakhs have been spent on this Grow More Food campaign and several thousands of acres have been released for cultivation under that scheme. I have very little doubt that in the course of a year or two we shall see the fruits of that scheme and those who now doubt will, I hope, be convinced that their doubts were unfounded.

I should like in passing to make a reference to two areas which the Honourable the Food Secretary referred to in his speech only to say that they were excluded from the general statements that he made. I am referring to Travancore and Cochin. Those are two areas where the food problem is somewhat acute. I think they deserve well of the Central Government. Speaking of Cochin, I may say that it has rendered very valuable services to the whole country in its war effort. I believe it has contributed a force of more than 40,000 people for road-making in Assam; and in recruitment to the Defence services and in various other ways it has made very notable contributions. Its food problem is very acute. It has done its best to put its own house in order. It has established complete control over the food production, distribution and supply in the State. It has introduced rationing. I believe a similar state of things exists in Travancore also. And these two States are among the most distressed areas in the South. I hope the Government of India will do whatever they can to provide an adequate quota to meet their deficit and to secure that the quota provided is transported without delay to its final destination.

I do not think it will serve any useful purpose for me to dilate upon the difficulties which are likely to attend the introduction of rationing, the complexity of the problem and the numerous devices and expedients that will have to be introduced in solving it. But I think it is right to say that at whatever cost this method should be applied with vigour, consistency and resolution throughout the whole country. If that is done, I for one have very little doubt that the food problem, if not absolutely solved, will be brought within control.

With these remarks I welcome the speech of the Honourable the Food Secretary.

THE HONOURABLE RAI BAHADUR SATYENDRA KUMAR DAS (Nominated Non-official): Sir, after the illuminating speeches delivered by the previous speakers on the vital question of food which is now threatening our very existence, there remains less to be said on the subject. But as a member coming from Bengal—the

[Rai Bahadur Satyendra Kumar Das.]

province where this problem has assumed the most serious aspect and people in countless numbers are dying of starvation, I shall be failing in my duty if I do not put forth my humble suggestions as to the solution of this vital problem which may be easily called a national crisis of the first magnitude.

Sir, as I do come from Bengal, I shall confine my observations to the present plight of the people of that wretched province. I want to leave aside the controversy as to whose negligence or short sightedness Bengal is now facing starvation and death. It is no use to try to measure the degree of responsibility in this respect either of the Government of Bengal or the Government of India. The fact remains that a serious food crisis has occurred in Bengal. The fact remains that the price of rice, the only staple food of the province, has gone high four to five times that of the previous year. The fact remains that dead bodies are now found in almost all the towns of the province including Calcutta also. I have seen with my own eyes that awful sight near the dustbins where hundreds of hungry people make riot amongst themselves just to pick up a few particles of refuse and putrified foodstuff. But the situation in the rural areas is much more alarming. It beggars description. I personally know hundreds of cases where people including children could not secure any kind of foodstuff for days together. I know of cases in my own district where parents committed suicide being unable to bear the gradual collapse of their own children for want of food. I know of cases where hundreds of people of my own district have to drag their existence by living merely on jackfruit during the months of June and July last. This is, Sir, the present picture of our province.

But what are the reasons for which Bengal has been placed in such a serious plight as to her food problem. In my opinion, the following are the principal causes for the famine conditions which now exist in Bengal :—

1. *Denial policy.*—It is a known fact to you all that in pursuance of the denial policy followed by His Excellency the Governor of Bengal, contrary to the advice tendered to him by the Council of Ministers, lakhs and lakhs maunds of rice were removed from the coastal areas of the province. This policy had been followed for fear of an imminent Japanese aggression which has been proved to be a myth. As a result of this pernicious policy, the surplus districts of the coastal areas have been denuded of rice. Barisal, known as the granary of Bengal, has now been converted into a deficit district. This policy of depriving the people of their staple food for a bogey of foreign aggression should not have been followed at all.

2. *Export of rice.*—Although authoritative figures as to the quantity of rice so far exported are not available but the Government have admitted that export has taken place. To export a staple food out of a province without caring to ascertain the needs of the population is a policy which must stand condemned. We are still in the dark as to the reasons which actuated the Government to follow this policy. However, we have been assured by Major-General Wood, the Food Secretary, yesterday that export of rice from Bengal has been prohibited. We are thankful to him for this but this step should have been done long ago.

3. *Purchase and stocking for military requirements.*—A very large section of our people believe Sir, that too much emphasis has been given to maintain huge stocks for military purposes. I quite agree with the fact that due arrangements for food should be made for the military as it is an essential step for the successful prosecution of the war but at the same time we should not lose sight of the fact that military operations are bound to suffer very heavily if the civilian population is starved to death. If, therefore, it is possible to release a portion of the stock of foodstuff reserved for military requirements, this should be done without the least possible delay.

4. *Maldistribution of food.*—Sir, the Government of Bengal has practically bungled in respect of the distribution of food amongst the civil population. At one time, the Government has distributed rice amongst their employees at a much reduced rate without caring to give any relief to the population at large. This inequitable distribution of food has made the problem worse confounded. While a section of the people got their rice regularly and at a very cheap rate, the major part of the population were half-fed or starved.

Major-General Wood in his speech, delivered yesterday, has laid much emphasis and built high hopes on the prospects of the *aus* crop. I would have been glad if I could have shared his optimism with him. But, Sir, the situation with regard to the prospects of *aus* crop is quite pessimistic. *Aus* crop in Bengal does not grow all over the province and is not, therefore, a main crop. Moreover, this crop, as you know, Sir, has been completely washed away in many parts of Burdwan and Midnapore districts by high flood. It would be, therefore, unwise on the part of Major-General Wood to put much reliance on the ultimate outcome of this crop.

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD : On a point of explanation, Sir. The official and authoritative view of the *aus* crop in Bengal is that it is very good indeed. That is the opinion of the experts under Government.

THE HONOURABLE RAI BAHADUR SATYENDRA KUMAR DAS : I beg leave to differ from the views of the officials. There has been a flood subsequent to the receipt of the official report.

If the *aus* crop fails Bengal has to be fed for four months more before the harvesting of the next crop and coming of the *aman* crop into the market ; so Major-General Wood or the Bengal Government has to make arrangements for feeding the people. Moreover *aus* rice will be simply inadequate to satisfy the requirements even of a fraction of the province.

But where then lies the solution ? I have stated above, Sir, that instead of indulging in useless criticisms at this stage as to whose fault this grave situation has been brought about. There must be constructive suggestions which will lead to a practical solution of this problem. Towards that respect, my humble suggestions are as follows :—

1. Famine must be declared in Bengal without any more delay. The Government must take upon themselves the responsibility of feeding the civil population—a duty which is imperative on the part of any civilised Government in such an hour of grave national peril. No time is to be lost and the Government must apply the normal provisions for meeting famine conditions.

2. The Government must undertake complete control over all stocks, supplies and prices. Government have to arrange supplies from surplus provinces at any cost. The question of transport must not be allowed to stand in the way. Where the problem of feeding the millions of hungry souls has arisen, priority for transporting foodgrains must be given. If necessity is felt, I should suggest, Sir, that foodgrains must be transported even at the cost of temporary suspension of military transport. The Central Government must arrange to import wheat from Australia and rice from South America. They must arrange shipping space for these foodgrains. There should be no shilly-shallying over this question of import.

3. *Immediate introduction of scheme of rationing in urban areas.*—The scheme of rationing has been a success in England and in other countries of the world during war-time. In Bombay, Sir, it has been given a fair trial and has fairly succeeded. The Government of Bengal must be prevailed upon to introduce the said scheme of rationing in urban areas.

4. *Co-ordination between the Centre and Provinces.*—It has been argued from the Government side that in some respects of food problem, the Central Government are constitutionally powerless to enforce their decisions on the provinces. Sir, I am not a constitutional pandit. But I believe that the Central Government do possess sufficient powers under the Defence of India Rules to force the Provincial Governments to accept their decisions. Times are extraordinary and abnormal. The situation is extremely grave and threatening. Therefore, these constitutional issues must now be thrown aside and we must face this problem from the practical point of view. There must be complete and sincere co-operation between the Central and the Provincial Governments to tackle this problem. In such an hour of great crisis, official delays and red-tapeism must be avoided as far as possible. The decisions must be quick and swiftly put into action.

[Rai Bahadur Satyendra Kumar Das.]

5. *Grow More Food campaign*.—In the successful conduct of this movement, Sir, lies a partial solution of our acute food problem. If this movement is carried out with the utmost efficiency, more of the uncultivated lands might be brought under cultivation of foodgrains. This will naturally enrich the future stock position of the province. But before we can expect much success out of this scheme, the Government must enlist public sympathy on their side. I again repeat, Sir, that there are huge potentialities if this movement of "Grow More Food" campaign is conducted with popular sympathy and support.

Sir, I don't want to take any more time of this House. Before I conclude, I appeal to all sections of the House to forget their party politics and to be united in the solution of this vital food problem. There is yet time to save Bengal from starvation and ruins. There is yet time to take steps to prevent Bengal from being thrown in that awful plight in which she was once involved in 1770. The pitiful schemes of that memorable year must not be allowed to recur now. Quick and prompt steps, based on sound planning, must be taken to give food to millions of hungry people of that province.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU (United Provinces Northern : Non-Muhammadan) : Mr. President, the situation throughout the country in respect of food is serious. We are threatened with a calamity which we had never even dreamt of in the past but it has not come upon us all of a sudden. We have been aware for at least 18 months of the increasing gravity of the situation and the Government have nevertheless failed to take adequate steps to cope with the situation that had developed, and was bound to develop. The result of the vacillating policy of the Government of India has been that large tracts of the country are suffering either from malnutrition or starvation. In some parts of the country deaths are taking place owing to the lowered vitality of the people and the diseases that have broken out in consequence. For instance, in Malabar there is a cholera epidemic, which is believed by the people there to be due to the serious lack of food from which the population is suffering. At the present time Bengal, Orissa or at least some part of it, the Malabar district, Cochin, Travancore and at least some districts in the Bombay Presidency are suffering acutely. The difficulties of Bengal have been placed before us by several speakers. The situation there is such as to call for immediate action. I am not, therefore, averse to giving Bengal such help as it is possible for the rest of India to give. Indeed, Bengal is suffering for no faults of its own. It is suffering because its own Government has failed to discharge its responsibilities towards the people of Bengal. And the Government of India, who are strong enough to keep Gandhi and his associates in prison, and to prevent anybody from having access to him, have not the strength to compel the Provincial Governments if need be to be mindful of their duties and of those responsibilities with which they have been entrusted under the Government of India Act, 1935.

Sir, my Honourable friend General Wood drew our attention yesterday to the condition of Bengal and to the promises of relief that have been made to it by the Central Government. He also told us of the actual assistance that had already been rendered to Bengal by the rest of India. Now, I should like to put a few questions to him on this point. He drew our attention yesterday to the fact that even when the Government of India had given the deficit provinces all the help that it could, it would be necessary for the provinces to conserve and properly utilise all their resources, because those resources, however deficient they might be, would be vastly in excess of any quantity of foodgrains that the Government of India might be able to place at their disposal. I should, therefore, like to know what action the Bengal Government is taking at the present time in order to utilise its resources properly. Has it taken any steps to introduce rationing anywhere? Has it on its own account built up reserves of foodgrains—rice and wheat in Bengal? If so, what is their total quantity, and why are those stocks not being utilised at the present time to relieve the unutterable misery of the people?

Further, Sir, I should like to know what was the quantity of rice bought for Bengal in Assam and Orissa, respectively. What is the total quantity that has been bought by the Bengal Government in Bengal, and what is the total quantity supplied by

the Government of India ? I should further like to know what has happened to all these stocks. Has all this quantity been utilised by a proper organisation for relieving the sufferings of the people ? Or have the supplies that have reached Bengal from outside gone underground and have been made use of only by those profiteers of whom General Wood spoke yesterday, for their private benefit ?

I wish that my Honourable friend General Wood had told us yesterday, in addition to what he said about Bengal, what had been done, say, for Malabar, for Cochin, for Travancore, by the Government of India. The sufferings of the people there are no less acute than those of the people of Bengal. Yet, so far as I know, the Government of India have made no clear announcement of their policy with regard to the satisfaction of the needs of the people in those areas.

Sir, the purpose of all these questions that I have put to Government so far is to impress on them that steps must be taken to see that whatever assistance is given to the provinces by the Central Government is made use of in the best possible manner in order to put an end to or to mitigate the malnutrition and other difficulties from which the people are suffering.

My Honourable friend told us yesterday what was proposed to be done in regard to Bengal. But has the Government of India the guts to compel the Governor and his Ministry to take steps to the Government of India's satisfaction in order to ensure that the foodgrains that will flow into Bengal from outside in accordance with the Central plan will not be made use of by profiteers to their own advantage, to the serious detriment of the people committed to the charge of the Provincial Government ?

Another point in this connection that I should like to know is that even granting that other provinces are charging a high price for the rice and wheat to be sent to Bengal, what justification is there for the level of prices that prevails, for instance, in Calcutta ? Have the Government of India or the Government of Bengal looked into the matter ? I lay stress on that point because it is not enough to supply food to any province at the rate of half a pound or so per head of population, without taking steps to see that the food that would become statistically available was really within the reach of the masses, was really sold at a price at which poor people could buy it. If the price is too high for them, then whatever credit the Government of India may take for the supply of foodgrains to the deficit provinces, that supply will not reach those for whom it is meant and the sufferings of the people will not be abated one jot.

Now, Sir, I should like to make a few remarks with regard to the other provinces. I will not deal with the situation that prevails in the provinces because it was fully described by Sir Aziz-ul Huque in the Assembly the other day and was also clearly brought out by my Honourable friend General Wood yesterday. I must however, say Sir, that the Government of India are not as helpless as General Wood tried to make out yesterday. The powers that have been given under the Government of India Act, 1935 over provinces are meant, I suppose, to be utilised in certain contingencies. There is a war going on at the present time. When the war broke out, a Proclamation of Emergency was issued by the Viceroy. In view of that, directions can be issued to the Provincial Executives by the Government of India to comply with such directions as might be given to them. Apart from this, Sir, even before section 126A was passed, the Governor General had the power to instruct the Governors to see that the executive authority of the Federation—at the present time of the Government of India—in respect to any matter was not impeded or prejudiced in any way by the Provincial Executive. What are these powers meant for if the Government of India do not utilise them ? I do not suggest the utilisation of this power lightly. But both Sir Aziz-ul Huque and General Wood have told us that they are at the end of their resources and that the Provincial Governments, even when they have fully agreed in the Food Conference to the plans that were settled, have nevertheless failed to give adequate assistance in carrying them out. The Honourable Member has supplied me with certain figures which are of considerable importance. I think it was agreed that the Punjab should supply about 900,000 tons of wheat, but the quantity secured up to the present is only about 280,000 tons although those months in which the greatest quantity of foodgrains is sold, i.e., the months immediately following the harvesting of the *rabi* crop, are over. I do not mean to say that more wheat cannot be purchased even now, but the disparity between the quantity which was to be

[Pandit Hirday Nath Kunzru.]

supplied and the quantity which has been purchased though it may not have been moved out of the Punjab is great. It is only about one-third of what was promised. Take now the United Provinces, Sir. It promised to supply 100,000 tons of wheat but has not supplied a single ton as yet. I could multiply these examples. Any one who wants to have fuller information on the point can easily get it from my Honourable friend General Wood.

Sir, this being the state of things, it seems to us that the Government of India owe a duty to the people in this respect. They can no longer keep quiet and trot out the theory of provincial autonomy when people are dying. They must utilise the powers that have been given to them to save the lives of the people. When section 126A was passed, it was thought that it would be put into force against the Congress Ministries should they fail to carry out the instructions of the Government of India in regard to the war. But the provision which the Government of India would have merrily made use of against the Congress Ministries has been allowed to remain in abeyance so far as the present Governments are concerned, although many of them are section 93 Governments. No wonder, Sir, that the National Director of the War Front said the other day in the Assembly that the Governments which had set the worst example were the Governments of section 93 provinces. There is no provincial autonomy there and if the Central Government fail to discharge their responsibility in respect of these provinces as indeed in respect of the other provinces also, the fault will be theirs. Their failure to discharge responsibility they cannot easily shift to other shoulders.

I know that in regard to the utilisation of the powers that I have spoken of, the assistance of the Governor General is required. It is for the Governor General to look at the prevailing state of things and decide whether the time has come for him now to take action or not. But if he still fails to take action, I think it is the duty of the Members of the Executive Council to say respectfully to him, "We have tried all the means at our disposal but have failed. If you cannot give us any assistance, please take over the portfolio of Food yourself and do with it what you like. Bearing the responsibility for the destitution and misery that prevails in the country yourself instead of making the Government of India responsible for it".

Sir, my Honourable friend General Wood said yesterday that better leadership was needed than was in evidence. I think he said that with reference to the big landlords and zamindars. But I am almost certain that in his heart of hearts the remark was meant to have a wider application and to refer also to the vacillation the want of policy that has characterised the Government of India so far.

Sir, my Honourable friend trounced the big landlords and zamindars yesterday. He warned them that they had not realised their responsibility to their countrymen at this juncture. I have nothing to say against the remarks that fell from him. But when the Provincial Governments are allowed to follow a policy contrary to the general interests of the country, the Government of India seem to me to have lost the moral authority to bring the private trader to book. I understand, Sir, that there are provinces which are even at the present time building up reserves

of food. Apart from this, there is at least one province which is selling food grains, I mean rice and wheat, to the Central Government at a higher price than that at which it buys them. I understand that the Sind Government buy rice at Rs. 9 per maund but sell it at the rate of Rs. 14-8-0 per maund. They buy wheat at Rs. 7-11-0 per maund but sell it at Rs. 10 or so per maund. The apology that they offer for this state of things is that there is no reason why they should sell foodgrains cheaper to the Government of India than the Punjab is doing. Suppose, Sir, that a private trader had said to the Government of India, "I am holding up my stocks of grain so that I may be able to get the profit which the traders in other provinces are getting", would Government have shown any mercy to him? They would have set aside his ridiculous plea and immediately prosecuted him. The Provincial Governments are morally in no better position than the private traders and yet so far the Government of India have done nothing either to prevent profiteering on the part of the Provincial Governments or to compel them to use their resources for the benefit of the country as a whole, because the country in the last resort is one economic unit. Sir, India is still supposed to be a single unit but for all practical purposes this unity seems

to be at an end so far as the food problem is concerned. Every province appears to be an independent unit, a sort of Pakistan. It looks as if no Central Government existed and the sufferings of the people would never come to an end.

Now, Sir, I have only two more points to make before I sit down. My Honourable friend General Wood spoke a great deal about the manner in which food supplied to the provinces should be utilised by them. But he never said a word with regard to the necessity for the import of foodgrains from outside. That was a question which was discussed in this House in February last. Mr. Holdsworth who was the then Secretary in the Food Department assured us that 100,000 tons of wheat had been obtained from Australia and that more would be obtained in February and March. He also hoped that it would be possible to persuade His Majesty's Government to supply shipping for importing wheat from Australia in the coming year also. It is strange that his successor, General Wood, was absolutely silent on that point. I should like him to tell us what efforts the Government of India have made so far to import wheat, say, from Australia and to what extent His Majesty's Government have agreed to help us? I do not want merely to know his hopes or the hopes of the Government of India. I want to know what is the exact position taken up by His Majesty's Government in this matter. Has their agreement been secured or not? And, secondly, Sir, I should like in this connection to put a question to my Honourable friend Sir Jogendra Singh who took part in the debate yesterday. He spoke of the increase in the acreage under rice and under wheat. The increase in the acreage under wheat was small; but I gather from the *Indian Trade Journal* of August 5, 1943, that the total area under wheat in 1942-43 was slightly less than the average of the preceding five years. It does not look from these figures that a single more acre has been brought under the plough for the cultivation of wheat. As regards production, that varies from year to year. But the forecast for the year 1942-43 is only about 700,000 tons more than the average for the preceding five years. As regards rice, the acreage has substantially increased. It has increased by about 11 lakhs according to the *Indian Trade Journal* of the 8th April, 1943. But the forecast of the total production in 1942-43 was less than the average of the preceding five years by about a million.

My Honourable friend Sir Jogendra Singh referred yesterday to the fact that owing to unfavourable conditions in Southern and Eastern India the supply of rice had deteriorated to the extent of 800,000 tons. But even if these 800,000 tons had been available, there would have been no increase in the quantity of rice available to the people before. The production would still have been less than the quinquennial average. If this is the result of the Grow More Food campaign so far as wheat and rice is concerned, I confess that I have not much faith in it. The public has been fed on words and statistics, but I think it is time it realised that these words and statistics mean nothing in practice.

Now, Sir, one word more before I sit down. My Honourable friend General Wood referred to a number of factors relating to the food situation yesterday. But he never referred to other vital factors bearing on the situation. For instance, inflation, the prices of the goods which the agriculturist needs, the transport difficulties and so on. His presentation was, therefore, one-sided. I do not propose to supply all these deficiencies now. We have referred to inflation and prices on many occasions in the past. I will not, therefore, go into details in dealing the subject, but I shall take leave of the House to say that unless the Government of India radically alter their policy in respect of the expansion of the currency the solution of the problem that has so far baffled us will be well-nigh impossible, whatever steps the other authorities may take. The increase in the addition to the note circulation has been rapid of late, I suppose because of the reduction in the volume of purchases for the Middle East. But when India becomes a real base for the campaign against Burma, I am sure that we shall again be flooded with the notes that the Government of India was issuing formerly. If this policy continues, the result will only be disaster throughout the country. We might come to a situation like that which prevailed in Europe after the Great War and in which hungry people despairing of getting food may rise in revolt against their masters, however powerful they may be.

Sir, there are some other things also which I must draw the attention of the Government of India to. One of them is that they must win the

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confidence of the public. The late Mr. Holdsworth, speaking in this House in February last, said that the root cause of the present trouble was lack of confidence and the words that he spoke ought to be laid to heart by every official of the Government of India. Unless the Government of India take proper steps to gain the confidence of the public their troubles will not come to an end. Indeed, all that has happened during the last 18 months shows to my mind that without a National Government the troubles that we are suffering from throughout the country will not come to an end. There will not be complete co-operation between the people and the Central Government and the Provincial Governments and the Central Government unless the present system of government is altered, or at any rate much more power is made over to the real representatives of the people than has been the case up to the present time.

My last suggestion, Sir, is that the Central Government having tried all possible methods of securing the object in view of persuading the provinces to purchase for them the quantities of foodgrains agreed upon between them and the provinces, and failed on their own admission, it is their duty now to resort to another method. My suggestion is that there should be a central purchasing organisation at the head of which there should be a business man. Sir, this was the suggestion which it appears from the speech of Sir Aziz-ul-Huque that the Government of India themselves made at the second Food Conference. Mr. Holdsworth drew the attention of the Conference to the grave danger that might result from a division of responsibility between the Central and the Provincial Governments. He was afraid that if the Provincial Governments purchased foodgrains while the Central Government was responsible for their distribution conflicts might arise and the Government of India might be unable to fulfil their duties towards the people of the country. I think, Sir, that it is their duty now to revive this proposal and to insist on it with all the weight of their authority. If there are Governors or Ministers—in the last resort really Governors—who would not carry out the Governor General's orders no tenderness should be shown to them. They must be asked either to carry out the orders of the superior authority or to vacate their places. There is no time, Sir, now for hesitation or for showing undue consideration to the Provincial Governments particularly in those provinces which are governed under section 93.

Sir, if these steps are taken and if at the same time it is seen that purchases for the Army in deficit areas are made from outside and not in the deficit areas I trust that the present difficulties will be considerably relieved. The situation at present is harrowing. The tales that reach us from private sources from different parts of the country make us feel apprehensive lest the health and lives of the people be endangered on a very large scale. Let us realize, Sir, that unless the present grievances are remedied, whatever the power of the Government of India may be, we shall soon be faced with serious riots all over the country. Let Government wake up betimes, set aside legal technicalities and utilise the powers which were conferred on them in order to be used in times of emergency, so that they might stand before the people as the Supreme Government of the country and not as the servants of the Provincial Governments who have signally failed to discharge their responsibility in relation to the people of the country as a whole. (*Applause.*)

THE HONOURABLE SIR JWALA PRASAD SRIVASTAVA (Food Member): Sir, we have met today to consider a problem which brooks no delay and it is not, therefore, my intention to dilate on past difficulties. I do not propose at present to enter into any details of what has been done, or even to make any statement—categorical or otherwise—about what is going to be done in the future. I am sure, Sir, that this House cannot expect a two day baby—that is what I am in the Food Department—to make tall promises for the future.

You have been accustomed, Sir, to see me in this August assembly as an A. R. P. Warden, whose task it was to ensure that the country stood prepared to meet any attack that the enemy made on our cities and fellow-countrymen. Thanks to the victories of the Allied arms, in which the sons of India have played no mean part, this danger has now receded, but a greater danger looms ahead of us—the danger that in the midst of victory we may suffer a defeat on our home front; that in a country where 75 per cent. of the population are farmers, in a country of 7 lakhs of

villages and farms, we may not be able to make available to every man, woman and child the food which they require. This danger, Sir, must be fought as ruthlessly and as courageously as our soldiers have fought against the Germans, the Japanese and the Italians and as successfully I hope, and in this struggle I consider myself a humble recruit determined to march to victory with the help and co-operation of all who hold the country's welfare above everything else. I realise, Sir, only too well the grave responsibilities that I have taken upon myself from my predecessor, the Honourable Sir Aziz-ul-Huque, who, in spite of the heavy burdens resting on him has during the last three months or so striven without rest to tackle this extremely difficult problem of food. I know personally that ever since he took over this Department he and his whole staff have been working day and night to see that relief went to the deficit areas. I can assure the House that I shall follow the example so worthily set. As I have already said, I consider myself a baby in the Department. But believe me, Sir, when I say that this baby is determined to grow up, and that quickly, to man's stature.

I do not propose to give a detailed analysis of the food problem, as this has already been done by the Honourable General Wood. But I would like to put it in the perspective as it appears to me. The task before us is not only one of feeding 400 million of our countrymen, but also of providing supplies to do so from millions of small cultivators, and seeing that they pass to the public without profiteering. Our task is not only to bring the food supplies into the open market, but also to make them available in every part of the country which cannot support itself otherwise. In the face of the immensity of this problem, it is inevitable that mistakes should have been made. To have committed none would, to my mind, have been a miracle. And we are living, Sir, not in an age of miracles, but at a time when the mind and the muscle of man is striving against obstacles and difficulties of every kind to attain peace and prosperity.

Sir, whatever was possible in the time available and in the circumstances has been done. The Government of India have been striving in right earnest, in the face of difficulties both inherent in the problem and man-made, to see that food is made available to every one in the country, whether by making the hoarders disgorge, by encouraging the growth of more food, or by imports. My colleague Sir Jogendra Singh yields to none in his determination to increase the outturn of food; and, indeed, his efforts have already met with considerable success. I will try and yoke myself to Sir Jogendra Singh's plough and establish a liaison between his Department and mine—

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : Without producing anything !

THE HONOURABLE SIR JWALA PRASAD SRIVASTAVA : As I said before mistakes have been made—

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : They still continue to be made — and deliberately continue to be made.—

THE HONOURABLE SIR JWALA PRASAD SRIVASTAVA—but the Government have learnt many valuable lessons from these mistakes. It has been so even in better organised countries like England, where preparations to tackle the food problem were started as early as in 1936. I can assure you, Sir, that the lessons thus learnt will be made full use of and will not be forgotten. I ask you : Is there anyone who could grapple with this problem, a problem of this immensity, without making these mistakes ?

I will not attempt to deal with the points raised in the debate. I have listened to the debate with the attention and the respect which it deserves ; and, speaking for myself, I do not wish to conceal that I have greatly benefited from what has fallen from the Honourable Member here. Their suggestions will receive my most earnest consideration. I may refer here only to two or three of the more important suggestions. My Honourable friend Rai Bahadur Lala Ram Saran Das proposed that we should have a policy committee to advise the Department on all major matters. I suppose that is what he meant. This proposal is after my own heart. I am all for associating non-officials with this important work, and I hope to be able to do something in this direction at an early date.

In regard to the suggestion made by my Honourable friend Mr. Dalal, and also referred to by the Honourable Pandit Kunzru, that we should augment our supplies of foodstuffs by imports, I entirely agree, and I will use my best endeavours to that end. The House knows that the matter does not rest with me.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : May I interrupt the Honourable Member ? Have the Government of India approached His Majesty's Government on this point, and have they received any reply from them ?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JWALA PRASAD SRIVASTAVA : Yes. The provision of shipping and foreign exchange have been the bottlenecks.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : Am I to understand that His Majesty's Government have turned down the request of the Government of India for the importation of foodstuffs into India from outside ?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JWALA PRASAD SRIVASTAVA : No ; they have not.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : What is the precise position at present ?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JWALA PRASAD SRIVASTAVA : The position is that as soon as shipping is available—

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : That means, after the war !

THE HONOURABLE SIR JWALA PRASAD SRIVASTAVA : Not at all. There will be no need to import foodstuffs after the war, I hope. We are doing our best, and I hope our efforts now will meet with greater success than in the past.

The provision of more consumer goods for the cultivator is also a matter which has my support, and I will pursue it with alacrity.

Sir, attention has also been drawn to the constitutional position as between the Centre and the Provinces. I am not a constitutional or a legal Pandit but I wish to assure the House that I will not be deterred by academic considerations and I will see to it that the provinces do not flout our wishes. I am determined that an all-India policy shall be followed by all.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : May I put a question to the Honourable Member at this stage ? Do Government propose to have a central purchasing organisation or do they propose to allow the present state of things in regard to purchase to continue ? In other words, do they mean to let the Provincial Governments still remain their purchasing agents ?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JWALA PRASAD SRIVASTAVA : As I have said, I am only a baby, two days old. I believe the matter has been discussed by a Conference of Provincial representatives and non-officials and I am awaiting their report.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : That Committee, I understand, recommends that the present state of things should continue.

THE HONOURABLE SIR JWALA PRASAD SRIVASTAVA : I have not yet seen the recommendations of that Committee, I wish to assure the Honourable Member.

Lastly, Sir, I welcome the suggestion that landlords and those who have a stake in the countryside should take a larger and more direct interest in the growing and procurement of food and it is my intention to see how best we can utilise them to this end.

Before I conclude, Sir, I crave the indulgence of the House to strike a personal note. It has been my ambition, Sir, from my younger days, to see India a country where every one has a square deal and four meals a day, if we can. I have tried in my humble way to help towards this aim just as I know the Honourable Members in this House and the political leaders of this country have tried. Sir, the problem which faces us today is not one which has any political tag attached to it. Whatever may be our aspirations as to the future of our country, we all are united in our endeavour to see that no one starves in our midst. We may have our differences in this House but surely we have always met in amity at the dining table. Let us meet in the same spirit, Sir, to tackle this problem. But in this task, Sir, without the help of my colleagues here, without the fullest co-operation of the public and their leaders, without the wholehearted support and assistance of the provinces and their

Governments, without the help of the States, without the goodwill and patriotic sense of individuals, nothing can be accomplished and in the name of our country, I appeal, nay I demand, Sir, that co-operation and help. I repeat, I wish to democratise this Department in the sense that it must work in accordance with the wishes of the people for whose benefit it exists. At the same time, Sir, I will not hesitate to reinforce ruthlessly any measures which may be necessary and to crush any individuals or corporations or vested interests which may seek to profit from the sufferings of the many, and I will also not hesitate to enforce an all-India policy in a vital matter of this kind. I admit, Sir, that the job could very well have been entrusted to abler hands than mine. But I assure the House in all humility that I am determined not to give in to complacency or defeatism, however hard the task may be. Sir, hunger is not a thing to be toyed or trifled with and the Government of India is resolved that it shall not be trifled with. I assure the House and the country that with God's help—I promise—that nothing will be left undone to get the results that the country demands and I am sure, Sir, that I have your support and the support of my Honourable colleagues here and their blessings in this tremendous task. (*Applause.*)

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Honourable Member, I would like you to enlighten the House on one point. In the course of his speech, the Honourable Pandit Kunzru made a charge against the Government of India that a Provincial Government was buying grains at a much cheaper price and selling it at a colossally high price to the Government of India. Is it a fact?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JWALA PRASAD SRIVASTAVA: That will be dealt with by the Secretary (Major General Wood) in his closing speech, Sir.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU: Is it a fact?

THE HONOURABLE SIR JWALA PRASAD SRIVASTAVA: I have not got the details and the Secretary will give them.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: That is most important information which the Council would like to have and I shall expect the Honourable the Food Secretary to give us that information.

THE HONOURABLE MAJOR-GENERAL E. WOOD: It is a fact, Sir.

THE HONOURABLE MR. V. V. KALIKAR (Central Provinces : General) : Sir, the Honourable the new Food Member, who said that he was two days old in the Department, has created some hopes in our mind. He has said that he will take drastic action against the profiteers and try to give food to the 400 millions of India. We shall all be obliged to him and he will be fulfilling his duty to himself and to his countrymen if he does so. Sir, the Government of India have not, up till now, even in the speech made by the Honourable Member, disclosed their plans and laid their cards on the table. It is a matter of deep regret to us, Sir, that this Government as well as the Provincial Governments have not taken any steps in the right direction to see that the food situation does not develop to such an extent the result of which is that people are dying in the streets of Calcutta of starvation.

Sir, in the United Kingdom the Government have learned the lesson from the last war and I understand that the people are getting nutritious food and on the average more food than they used to get before the war. Here after the outbreak of the war the Government of India till now have not laid down any policy. There was no co-ordination between the Government of India and the Provincial Governments; no systematic plan was made out for meeting the situation, and the result is that a crisis has come in many tracts of the country which practically weakens the home front as it is hard to keep our home front strong.

Sir, the spokesman of the Government of India in this House and the other House as well as Mr. Amery have taken to task certain zamindars and certain consumers who they say are hoarding foodgrains and that this situation has been brought about by them. Sir, I want to apply my mind for a moment to the implications of the word "hoarding". It seems, Sir, that Mr. Amery and the spokesmen of the Government of India do not really understand the situation in the villages. My Honourable friend General Wood told us yesterday that if the big zamindars were to sell their foodgrains the small zamindars would follow. If I understand him correctly, he implied thereby that the big zamindars were hoarding foodstuff.

[Mr. V. V. Kalikar.]

If that is so, I must bring to his notice the position that exists in my province and with which I am intimately connected. I am not a big zamindar ; I am a very small zamindar. If the small zamindar produces a certain quantity of foodgrains that quantity is first required by him to pay in kind the wages of agricultural labour, and also he has to advance loans in kind to the farmers. These loans are returned back to him at the time of the next harvest. If a zamindar or a malguzar keeps a certain amount of grain with him, that is no hoarding ; that is quite necessary, in the interests of agricultural operations. If this is called hoarding, then I plead guilty to that charge. But it is an immemorial custom among zamindars to make provision for agricultural operations till the next harvest. So, Sir, I submit that he should not say that zamindars hoard grain and make profit out of it. If he wants to know who is making profit out of the situation, I had better refer him to the speech of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee made the other day in the Legislative Assembly in Bengal. There he charged the present Government with having given a contract to a certain company for purchasing foodgrains and the company purchased at a very small rate and sold it at a very high rate. Sir, as my time is limited, I do not want to quote the whole of it. I will merely refer him to page 13 of the pamphlet where Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee has given the figures.

Sir, my Honourable friend Pandit Kunzru has stated today who are profiteers. It was stated in the other House also and I have also received reports that there are certain Provincial Governments who are making purchases for meeting their outside commitments, which want to export foodgrains out of India and that their agents are purchasing foodgrains for the Defence Services at a very low price and selling it at a very high price. I am very glad to know from the Honourable the Food Member that he was a baby of two days but that he was going to grow quickly. I wish he would put his foot on these profiteers and not on the small landholders or zamindars who want to keep foodgrains for their own needs. Will he have the courage to put his foot on the head of a Governor who disregards the advice of his Ministers and exports foodgrains outside ? Will he have the courage to take strong and drastic action against Provincial Governments which purchase foodgrains at a very low rate and sell it in the market at a high rate ? Sir, the theory has been trotted out here and in the other House that the Government of India could not do anything on account of provincial autonomy. This tall talk of provincial autonomy is nauseating. We have heard a lot about it. If any constitutional lawyer wants to know what is provincial autonomy, what sort of provincial autonomy exists in Bengal where so many people are dying of starvation, he should read the speech of the then Prime Minister Mr. Fazl-ul-Huq and Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee. Their statements have not been contradicted. The head of the province sent out of Bengal a large quantity of rice without consulting the Ministers and with the help of the permanent officials, knowing that Bengal was in need of rice, knowing that Bengal requires rice for her own needs. What is the use of talking about provincial autonomy ? Could not the head of the Government of India take steps against the head of that Government ? Sir, we have heard enough of this provincial autonomy. Our charge is that in the past the Government of India have not taken any definite action, any drastic measure, so that the situation may not develop to this state of affairs. If anybody is responsible it is the Government of India and the Provincial Governments who have brought about this situation. No tall talk of provincial autonomy will convince us that the Government of India could not interfere in the doings of the provinces because there was provincial autonomy.

Sir, I have nothing to say further except that the Government of India in their own interests and in the interests of the country as such should disclose their plans to the House so far as the food situation is concerned. If the new Food Member wants the co-operation of this House we are ready to co-operate with him, provided he also abides by the advice tendered by this House.

Sir, my friend the Honourable Dr. Kunzru—I do not want to repeat his arguments here—has already told us and cited figures to show that the deficit provinces are not getting sufficient quota from the surplus provinces. Sir, I have figures before me to show that the normal quota that was supplied to the deficit provinces

from the surplus provinces of wheat and rice is not yet supplied. Either this is due to the obstructionist policy of the Provincial Governments or to want of transport we do not know, but as the new Member in charge desires to give food to 400 millions he must see that this obstructionist policy of the Provincial Governments is done away with and that the Government of India enforces its authority so that the deficit provinces may get sufficient from the surplus provinces to meet their needs.

I want now, Sir, to say a word about the Grow More Food campaign. I do not share the view of my other colleagues that this campaign would not in any way solve the situation, but I want to impress upon the mind of my Honourable friend Sir Jogendra Singh—and I know that he is very keen on that point—that to create more enthusiasm amongst the cultivators for growing more food they must be supplied with all the facilities that they need; I mean, fertilizers, the smaller instruments and also that their crops should be taken to the market and they should get a fair price. Sir, you cannot create enthusiasm amongst the cultivators unless you provide them with all the facilities that they need. I therefore submit, Sir, that in this matter of Grow More Food the Provincial Governments ought to be informed by the Government of India that in those provinces, or in those tracts of the provinces where owing to the vagaries of nature crops have failed there ought to be suspension and also remission of land revenue and that whatever amount is given by the Government of India now by way of grant for this Grow More Food campaign should be increased so that the cultivator may get some facility.

Sir, I congratulate the new Member for the conciliatory way in which he put up the case before us. I hope he will take courage in both his hands and put down the profiteers—not only the private profiteer, but also Provincial Governments, big Corporations, etc., if they happen to be profiteers—and take drastic action against them.

(The Honourable Saiyed Mohamed Padshah Sahib Bahadur rose to speak.)

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: How long will you take?

THE HONOURABLE SAIYED MOHAMED PADSHAH SAHIB BAHADUR (Madras : Muhammadan): About a quarter of an hour, Sir. I shall be as brief as possible.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Would you like to begin your speech after lunch or just now?

THE HONOURABLE SAIYED MOHAMED PADSHAH SAHIB BAHADUR: I would like to finish before lunch. It will not be possible for me to be in time after lunch. Today is Friday and I may be late in coming to the House. If instead of time being wasted you will allow me to speak now I will finish my speech in 10 or 15 minutes.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: It is in order to save time that I am making this request.

*THE HONOURABLE SAIYED MOHAMED PADSHAH SAHIB BAHADUR: I will do my best to finish my speech within a quarter of an hour.

Sir, before I make my observations I would like to congratulate the Honourable and Gallant Mover of this Resolution on the lucid manner in which he has recounted all the measures that the Government of India has been adopting in respect of the question which is now under discussion.

Sir, before actually making my criticism of the present policy of Government I should like to refer briefly to the background. I should like to state at once that much of the difficulties with which we are faced at present is due to the gross negligence and indifference that the Government has shown in this matter in the years past. Sir, Honourable Members are aware that within these 40 or 50 years the population of India has considerably increased but it is also a matter of common knowledge that the Government never did anything to help the production of the country to keep pace with the increase in the population. Sir, if only the Government had not merely rested content with collection of revenues but had also taken some steps to see that the acreage under food cultivation was also gradually increasing in order to keep pace with the increase in population, things would have been much better and much of the present difficulty would have been avoided. But that is past history.

1 P.M.

What has been the conduct of the Government even in recent years? We find that even the occupation of Burma, even the fact that this country was deprived of one of its very great and important sources of supply of

[Saiyed Mohamed Padshah Sahib Bahadur.]

rice, did not succeed in waking the Government of India to the full realisation of the seriousness and urgency of the food situation. The Food Department was started only a few months ago, even though Burma was lost about a year and a half ago. Even though after the establishment of this Department Government have been trying to tackle this problem in some seriousness, it has got to be admitted that the steps that the Government have taken have not brought about the desired results, partly because things have been allowed to drift in the past so much that it is not possible to bring them under control in a brief period, and partly also because of want of firmness on the part of the Government of India in seeing that its instructions were carried out. This is not the moment when these things could be allowed. The present need for improvement in the food situation is great and pressing. It does not admit of any dilatory action. It does not admit of decision and action to be taken in the usual leisurely fashion to which the Government of India is accustomed. Decision upon action has got to be taken immediately, and this decision has got to be put into effect promptly and relentlessly. And I am glad that the Honourable the new Food Member has told us that in carrying on his business he will try to enforce his decisions in a ruthless and relentless manner. I am glad also that the Honourable Member has raised some hopes in us that he will try to induce foodstuffs to move from the myriads of villages in the country to places where they are badly wanted.

But on one point he has failed to give us any information. He has not told us how those foodstuffs would become available to the rural man for whose welfare and for whose convenience all this trouble has got to be taken. After all, Sir, it is not the rich upper classes who need assistance in this respect ; it is the poor man, the man in the street, the common man, who has got to be helped to get necessaries of life. Therefore we had a right to know from the Honourable Member as to whether the food which would be made available would become available to the people in the places where it would otherwise and but for the efforts of Government it would not have been available, and whether this food would be available at a reasonable price. My Honourable friends who preceded me have told us at what exorbitant prices food is sold in places like Calcutta, and in other places in Bengal. But it is quite obvious that it is no use taking all this trouble and making much ado about the efforts of the Government of India to procure food if it is not available at a reasonable price, at a price which will place it within the reach of the common man, the man in the street.

Again, Sir, some difficulties have been put forward as having thwarted all attempts of the Government of India in this direction. First of all, it was said that it was the Provincial Governments that had set their face against the attempts of the Government of India to bring about improvement in the situation. It is a pity, Sir, that we have heard in this House and in the other House that this opposition to the efforts of the Government of India comes in the most rigid form, in the most strenuous form, from those provinces where bureaucratic government in its most undiluted form is functioning. It is a pity that the Governments of provinces where section 93 is in operation are the Governments who have set their faces against the action of the Government of India. It is not only pitiable ; it is something which is humiliating to the Government of India to come to us and confess that they are not in a position to do even this—that they are not able to make those Governments which are directly under their supervision and control and direction take proper action in this matter. If the Government of India is helpless, if it is not in a position to induce even those Governments which are merely to carry out the instructions of the Government of India, if even those Governments cannot be induced to obey the Government of India, we can imagine to what pitiable straits the Government of India has been reduced. I hope the Government of India will not take shelter behind this excuse and that it will use all its powers in this respect. Attention has been drawn by my Honourable friend Pandit Kunzru and many other speakers to these powers, which should be used by the Government of India promptly and ruthlessly.

Government have said that they will try and put down all obstruction in the most relentless manner. But we find that no real and proper kind of firmness has been shown by the Government of India in this respect. We were told in the other House that the Government of India tried to bring about a free flow of goods from

one place to another to encourage free trade, and that impediments were placed in the way by some people. It was stated that cartmen were not allowed to carry grain, that post offices and station masters and everybody else were influenced to see that they put some obstacle in the way of the free flow of goods. This appears to have been done about three or four months, and until now the real culprits have not been found and punished. If this is the way in which the Government of India is going about the business, we fail to see what relief we can hope to get from the efforts of the Government of India in this respect.

One word about my own province. I understand that the Province of Madras is classed among the surplus provinces. I am very much surprised to see this, in view of the fact that in most parts of my province people are dying from starvation and that in many districts people are falling a prey to cholera and other epidemics merely on account of malnutrition, because they have not the stamina to resist the disease. Almost all the Ceded Districts have been declared to be famine-stricken, and in most parts of the western districts there is cholera raging. Numbers of people fall a prey to the disease only because of the fact that they have not the proper strength and the stamina to resist it. It is a wonder, in these circumstances, how my province has been declared a surplus province. My province has been deprived of the two or three million tons of rice which it had been getting from Burma, and of about half a million tons of rice which it had been getting from Indo-China. In the face of these facts, I simply wonder whether in fact my province is a surplus province, or whether it is so only in the records of the Government of India.

Just one word about some Provincial Government which seems to have tried to sell grain to the Central Government at a price higher than the price at which it had purchased it. I want to put only one or two questions on this point —

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: The Honourable Member has already spoken for fifteen minutes. The Honourable the Food Secretary has to reply.

THE HONOURABLE SAYIED MOHAMED PADSHAH SAHIB BAHADUR: I want information on just one or two points, Sir.

I should like to know the price charged by this province which seems to have defaulted—I want to know whether the price charged by the province to the Central Government was higher than the price which it paid to the other provinces which have not tried to make this sort of profit. Another thing is, whether the action of these Governments in purchasing food in their own provinces has not been to the advantage of the people in the provinces to the extent that it has kept down the prices in their own provinces.

Sir, I do not want to inflict any further speech on this House as it seems to be a little too impatient for its lunch.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT (to Major-General the Honourable E. Wood): How long will you take?

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD: About 20 to 25 minutes, Sir.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, what is your desire—whether to finish the debate now or after lunch?

SEVERAL HONOURABLE MEMBERS: We had better finish now.

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD: Sir, I have listened to this debate with very great interest but I must confess to being a little dazed by the remarks that have been made; remarks crediting me with things that I have never said, and there has been a certain amount of comment about my trotting out "this old excuse or that old excuse". Well, if I may continue the simile in terms of this horse language of "trotting out", may I congratulate my Honourable friend Mr. Hossain Imam on his brilliant equestrian feat? Starting off down the food race-course, he soon left it, galloped rapidly across country and gave us a brilliant steeple-chase display.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: That is always his habit.

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD: But he eventually met a broad ditch which his horse was not good enough to cross and came a cropper. That ditch was exports. He quoted some financial figures of exports of foodstuffs in March, 1941, March, 1942 and March, 1943 respectively of 2.15 crores, 3.37 crores and 3.15 crores and so demonstrated that all the protestations of the Government of India about reduced exports were false. He did not, however, make mention of the fact

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that out of this large total, 213 lakhs was for tea, 62 lakhs was for fish, fruit, spices and oilman stores and the balance probably consisted of liquor, tobacco and sugar, leaving residue of 29½ lakhs for grain, pulses and flour. The figures for the two previous years were 80 lakhs and 85 lakhs and this has descended to 29½ lakhs and that despite the fact that the cost of these commodities has gone up by four, five or six times. The Food Department, by press notices, by press conferences and in other ways have tried to give publicity to the truth in this matter of export figures. It was repeated in another place the other day that the totality of exports of foodgrains from this country in the first seven months of this year was substantially less than 100,000 tons against a normal annual export of 750,000 tons. This continued harping on this vast export programme that does not exist is coupled with another charge and here I would refer to the remarks made by my Honourable friends Mr. S. K. Das, Mr. S. K. Roy Chowdhury and Kumar N. N. Sinha who, taking this as the starting point, laid the blame for the ills of Bengal to vast exports from the province, vast army purchases and the vast denial transactions. I should like to quote the figures of exports from Bengal, figures which it was stated on the floor of this House have never been denied. I will take the privilege of denying them. The total amount of foodgrains exported through the port of Calcutta from April, 1942 to February, 1943 was 48,480 tons. Substantively none of it was the produce of Bengal. It is not the responsibility of the Provincial Government to control exports from the province by sea. The responsibility is that of the Central Government. With regard to denial rice, to which so many ills are ascribed, the total of the whole of this denial purchase was 30,000 tons. Of this quantity, there was resold in Bengal, for consumption in Bengal, 27,400 tons. The balance of the denial rice which has caused all this tribulation to Bengal was 2,500 tons! This 2,500 tons was exported to Ceylon and probably mostly eaten by Indian labour on rubber estates in Ceylon, and out of the totality of this denial rice, there was handed over to the Army the great quantity of 100 tons!

As regards the immense purchases for the Army, there was, during the calendar year 1942, the immense quantity of 7,000 tons of rice purchased in Bengal for the Army, and in 1943, nil. So much for these fables and stories of exports and gigantic purchases. There have been no exports from Bengal by land for at least ten months and the Government of India have now prohibited all exports of rice from India.

Many Honourable Members, particularly those coming from Bengal, have asked what more help can be given to that unfortunate province. At the present moment we are raising the despatches as fast as we can. There are difficulties owing to railway communications having broken down. We are raising the despatches from 60 to 90 wagons a day. We have two ships at sea at the moment bound for Calcutta and we have two more ships that will soon be loading. We are doing all we can for this deficit area and for others. I am grateful to my Honourable friend Mr. Kunzru for drawing attention to the fact that if matters are gauged by the question of how much you have and how much you have not, what are your domestic resources and what you must have, then the real deficit areas in this country are the two States of Travancore and Cochin which produce only 33 per cent. in their country of what they need. I am pleased to tell my Honourable friend that we have maintained our supplies throughout the whole period, occasionally with very great difficulty. We had very great misfortunes, because it is a long way to take them, and more than once the ships have broken down *en route*. But we are sending in the future something in the region of 20,000 tons a month and we hope that this will be sufficient to see them round the corner until the next crop season.

There has been some conflict of opinion, Sir, on the question of free trade or control. My Honourable friends Colonel Sir Hissamuddin and Sir Buta Singh expressed themselves strongly in favour of free trade but other Honourable Members, Maulvi Ali Asghar Khan, Mr. N. K. Das and Sir Ramunni Menon, were against free trade. It would be well to remember and to recognise that free trade does not merely mean the free buying or selling of goods; it also means freedom in the matter of transport, availability of transport and every other consideration and to talk of free trade in conditions that obtain in war, and as applying in this country today, is a misnomer. It would only be partial free trade and under these partial free trade conditions the easiest outlet, the longest purse, will win. Under those conditions unless some form of the control is applied the poor man will come off second best. But—

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : May I put a question to the Honourable Member ? Is he confusing control over the imports into a province with price control ? Does he mean to say that if there is a controlled organisation for the purchase of food for deficit areas that will automatically lead to control of the prices prevailing in that area ?

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD : No, Sir, I do not mean that. And since the Honourable Member has mentioned it I would draw his attention to the fact that the quantities of food that may be imported into a province are but a tithe of the domestic resources and in that ratio will they have effect on the domestic resources if there is a free trade play of interests. If the domestic price for 90 per cent. of the goods is 10 and you import rice at 12, is that going to influence the price by more than a few annas ? But the exponents of free trade always vitiate their case by demanding that this must be done or that must be done. In other words, they themselves always end up by demanding actions which in themselves mean control.

Another point, Sir, and a point that was raised by many speakers, Rai Bahadur Ram Saran Das, Sir Buta Singh and Sir David Devadoss, concerned non-official help. We are fully conscious that in this matter of food administration we stand in need of, and we require, any and every help we can get from whatever direction or source it may come. As things are turning and developing, the greatest centre and focus of the non-official help that can be given will be, as has been given in Bombay, strong, enthusiastic and energetic committees of non-officials to advise the authorities on rationing. Since we have set ourselves towards rationing, I hope that what takes place in Bombay will be repeated everywhere else and that we shall have a link of committees all over this country to advise the officials responsible for rationing and from those committees we shall be able to draw representatives into a panel for consultation at the Centre. But I do not want to anticipate this matter. The Food-grains Policy Committee have this matter of non-official help under their consideration and I hope that if a recommendation of some kind for non-official help to the Central Government is made and is accepted by the Central Government, if we approach my Honourable friend Rai Bahadur Ram Saran Das, he will be willing to give us his valuable help. I have found too many cases where people are not ready to come forward to mix themselves up with the difficulties of food administration.

Perhaps the most important matter brought into this discussion was the statement that action was required to enforce a common plan, or, stated in another way, that the Central Government had been feeble and weak in imposing its will and wish on the provinces. I beg to suggest that the conception underlying these accusations is wrong. It is not sufficiently appreciated that this is not a matter of ' I will not ' but a matter of ' I can not '. Beneath all the past differences of opinion between the Central and the Provincial Governments is the matter of statistics ; and when we are being urged to take swift action here and swift action there, particularly when the matter touches on statistics, I would remind the House that the perfection of rationing and food control in England was made possible at the outbreak of the war because there had been appointed special machinery to deal with the whole basis of statistics, which was suitable for such control purpose, in 1929. It is not that the provinces do not wish to conform and assist in a general policy. It is that our statistics have little validity. They feared, felt and believed that they had not got what we thought they had. Haven't we found an echo of it here in this House ? How many Honourable Members have argued " My province had nothing ? " One Honourable Member passionately claimed that Orissa is a deficit area. You will see from statistics that Orissa has consistently exported year after year unflinching and in unbroken succession, an amount which speaking from memory, is about 275,000 tons of rice a year. Why has Orissa suddenly become a deficit area ? It is those arguments, those beliefs, that have led to the differences of opinion ; and the only point at which force might have been applied was at the point where we could have said, " Well, let us now suspend discussion and let us move to action ". But I draw the attention of the House to the fact that argument has now ceased and that action is being taken all over this country to try to secure certain levels of procurement, certain quantities of goods, which can be passed to the deficit areas.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : May I put a question to my Honourable friend ? What has the inaccuracy of statistics in general to do with

[Pandit Hirday Nath Kunzru.]

the supply of the quantities which the Provincial Government themselves have agreed to give to the Central Government ?

MAJOR GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD : Since the position I have explained and from the 1st of August forward, a modified Basic Plan has come into operation and it is based on figures that the provinces themselves have volunteered. Now statistics is not merely a question of figures. It is the interpretation of figures and we get back to the old saying that "there are lies, worse lies and statistics", and I would like to tell the House of two instances out of many that have recently occurred in this matter of statistics so that they may appreciate more closely what is at the bottom of this question of "Have you got so much or have you not ?" There was one deficit area that required an amount of foodgrains so large it was difficult for us to understand. Arguments went on till the advent of the monsoon. They explained that because it was the Bikrami year 2000, and because three noughts are most unlucky, they thought that the monsoon must fail and so asked for everything that would be required for the year. Another deficit area suddenly reduced its deficit from 75,000 tons to 5,000. We had been pressing them because their case seemed very weak and when we demanded their reason they said, "Well, on closer investigation we have discovered that most inhabitants of this country have got three years' supplies". In elucidating facts, in securing agreement in a field where so much is unknown, where there is so much ignorance, those responsible for feeding the people must be actuated by the fear that derives from ignorance which in turn generates caution and hesitancy before they will say. "We can spare so much". It is not a question, and has never been a question, of defiance by one Government of another.

My Honourable friends Mr. Kunzru and Mr. Das have made certain comments on the price at which grain is sold. It is quite true, Sir, that the Sind Government buy at a controlled price and sell outside at a higher price.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT : 100 per cent. higher ? At what price ?

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD : The Sind Government buy Sind rice at Rs. 9 and sell it at Rs. 14-8-0.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT : Is it not high enough ?

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD : They buy wheat at Rs. 7-11-0 and sell it to deficit areas at Rs. 10-0-0.

But the reason, Sir, is this. By the accident of geography Sind is virtually an island, bound on three sides by desert and on the fourth by the sea with only two entrances and exits : a port and a railway. They are largely uninfluenced by the accidents and incidents of food administration elsewhere occurring in this country. Moreover, they have consumer goods—consumer goods in the form of land—and the peasantry are land-hungry. Therefore, there is no question in Sind of the cultivator hanging on to his grain. It is possible in these circumstances to impose, and impose successfully, a price control on foodgrains at a comparatively low level, but the Sind Government take the view that it would be unfair to the Province of Sind that, because they are successful in controlling the price of their commodities, they should be called upon to buy imported commodities at a much higher price.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT : Do you agree that their argument is sound ?

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD : We are in argument at the moment, Sir.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : And will continue to be so during the war !

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD : I would mention, Sir, though, one point and that is that the Sind Government is at present placing this margin in a suspense account with the direct object of benefiting the cultivator. The two objects are : improvement of rural communications and also contributions to future irrigation prospects.

As regards the allegation that Bengal is buying rice at a cheap rate in other places—Orissa was mentioned—and selling it in Bengal at a higher price, it has got to be remembered that Orissa is not the only place that is providing rice to Bengal today. It is coming from the United Provinces, from the Punjab, from Bihar, from the

Eastern States, from Assam and in order to sell it a pool price has got to be struck—an average price. That is the answer to this allegation that the Bengal Government is making vast profits at the expense of Orissa rice.

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : What is the profit which the Bengal Government charge per maund ?

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD : On what foodgrains, Sir ?

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : Rice.

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD : They charge no profit as far as I know.

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT : On what basis do they strike the average ?

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD : Sir, if the anticipated purchases, the quantities to be purchased in any given month in accordance with what the programme may be, are set against the prices as you hope they will be, you strike the weighted average price and that is the declared pool price of the commodity for the month ensuing.

One Honourable Member has mentioned the fact that we are attempting to secure imports into this country. Efforts are going on now, but I should like to reply to the question of my Honourable friend Mr. Kunzru who enquired, "What is His Majesty's Government's attitude ?" and of this I can speak authoritatively. It is an attitude of the greatest sympathy, the greatest understanding. We have been given since this House last met a total import of wheat of over 200,000 tons and that was to which my late predecessor referred and we have hopes—high hopes—of securing this and more but there is a war on, there is shipping difficulty —

THE HONOURABLE PANDIT HIRDAY NATH KUNZRU : Can the Honourable Member tell me whether any representations have been made to His Majesty's Government on this point and whether any reply has been received from them ?

MAJOR-GENERAL THE HONOURABLE E. WOOD : I have informed the Honourable Member that we are at present trying to get wheat, which implies that messages have gone and replies have been received, the purport of which I am not prepared to state.

In the debate, Sir, questions were asked as to what assistance might be given to South India and other places. I should like to inform my Honourable friend Sir A. P. Patro that in the next few months we hope to secure and despatch over 100,000 tons of foodgrains to Madras. I was asked also certain questions by my Honourable friend Pandit Kunzru as to what supplies had been imported into Bengal from outside. As far as my memory serves me, the figures are in the region of 15,000 tons of rice from Assam, and, on the Orissa figure, 80,000 tons of rice. But the totality of all imports into Bengal from the 1st of January to the 31st of July was 242,000 tons. I should like also to inform him that the Bengal Government have already built up stocks, and are on the point of introducing a rationing scheme.

Sir, in conclusion I should like to mention three points. So many of the remarks made in the debate do not appear to have taken account of the fact that the Central Government is, as it were, the wholesaler, the wholesaler who deals up to, but not beyond, the boundary of a province, and that it is the Governments of the Provinces and States that are the retailers and operate within the boundaries of the Province or State.

Another point is that we were accused of having no future plans. I am at a loss to understand quite what that means. If the announcement of rationing is not in itself a policy all-embracing, with all that it entails, I am at a loss to know what is future policy. It means that the Government have turned their back on free trade. It means that Government have set their feet on the path of control and more control until complete rationing in all urban areas of consequence has been achieved. With rationing are linked the ultimate consequences of control over the domestic resources in a province—control over distribution, control over prices, and the prevention of hoarding.

My third and last point, Sir, is that I would commend to the notice of the House the instrument and weapon for the physical control of foodgrains in this country is the Foodgrains Control Order. I repeat what I have already said, that without physical control no other controls will be effective. The Foodgrains Control Order

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has within itself the seed of physical control and is the framework around which the food administration must build itself. It is the basis of price control, it is the basis of distribution Control, and it is the basis of anti-hoarding.

Sir, I would like to say that we are greatly indebted to the House for their many suggestions, which, as my Honourable Member has mentioned, will be given consideration. And, as this is the first and probably the last occasion I shall appear in this House, Sir, I should like to express my gratitude for the kind and sympathetic treatment that has been accorded to me personally. (*Applause.*)

THE HONOURABLE THE PRESIDENT: This concludes the debate on the food situation.

STATEMENT OF BUSINESS.

THE HONOURABLE SIE MAHOMED USMAN (Leader of the House): Sir, it is expected that the Legislative Assembly will pass the War Injuries (Compensation Insurance) Bill today. I, therefore, suggest that for the purpose of laying the Bill on the table of the House we may meet at 11 A.M. on Saturday, the 14th August. The Motions for the consideration and passing of the Bill will be taken up on Friday, the 20th August. If, however, any more Bill is passed by the Legislative Assembly in the meantime, the House will have to meet earlier than Friday to lay it on the table and the date of such meeting will have to be intimated by circular.

The House then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Saturday, the 14th August, 1943.