

[Kumari Mamata Banerjee]

slums. Development of slums is also the responsibility of the Delhi Municipal Corporation as it comes under its jurisdiction.

I won't say much on it. As this area falls under the jurisdiction of the Delhi Municipal Corporation, they are duty-bound to attend to and solve the problems of the people. The tax burden is most felt by the poor and the middle class, and it has not that bearing on the affluent. Hon. Shri Santosh Mohan Dev is a capable person and worker of the grass-root level. I would request him to pay more attention to the working of the Delhi Municipal Corporation. With these words, I thank you and conclude.

[English]

SHRI SANTOSH MOHAN DEV: Sir, I fully appreciate the suggestions given by the hon. Member and we shall try to act on some of the suggestions given by her.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: The question is:

"That the Bill be passed."

The motion was adopted.

18.01 hrs.

HALF-AN-HOUR DISCUSSION

[English]

Short Supply of Foodgrains

SHRI SHARAD DIGHE (Bombay North Central): Sir, I raise the discussion on the points arising out of the reply given by the Minister of Food and Civil Supplies on 15 March, 1989, to Starred Question No. 304 regarding short supply of foodgrains.

Sir, on 15th March my Starred Question No. 304 was listed and the question was:

- "(a) whether Government are aware of the acute shortage of essential food items supplied through Public Distribution System in Bombay from February 1989 due to the short supply of rice and wheat by Central Government; and
- (b) if so, what steps are proposed to be taken to improve the supply position?"

The reply was in the form of a Statement laid on the Table of the House and the Statement said:

"The Central Government makes allocations of wheat and rice to States as a whole. Internal distribution to different cities/districts is decided upon by the concerned State Governments. The Central allocations for Maharashtra in February and March, 1989, and allotments made by the State Government for Bombay/Thane Rationing Area are given below:"

Then the figures are given. As far as the Central allocation to Maharashtra in February 1989 was concerned, wheat allotted was 94,500 Metric Tonnes, and Maharashtra State's allocation to Bombay and Thane Rationing area was 34,000 Metric Tonnes. Similarly, rice allotment was 52,000 Metric Tonnes and Maharashtra State's allocation to Bombay/Thane Rationing Area was 17,000 Metric Tonnes. In March 1989, wheat allocation by Center to Maharashtra is one lakh Metric Tonnes and Maharashtra State's allocation to Bombay/Thane Rationing Area is 36,000 Metric Tonnes. Similarly, Central allocation of rice to Maharashtra is 52,000 Metric Tonnes and State's allocation to Bombay/Thane Rationing Area is 20,000 Metric Tonnes.

The Statement further said:

"Central allocations of wheat and rice are made to States/union Territories taking into account the overall availability of stocks, relative needs of different States and other related factors. They are supplemental in nature."

This was the answer given in writing to my Starred Question. Unfortunately there was no time and it did not reach for the Supplementary questions.

Sir, the thrust of my question was not the short allocation made by Maharashtra to Bombay area, but the main grievance was the short supply of foodgrains in the rationing shops of Bombay city due to the short allocation of foodgrains to the Maharashtra State by the Central Government. That was really the thrust of my question.

Sir, as far as the food situation is concerned, all the documents of the Central Government show that it is satisfactory and it is improving. Even in the latest speech of the Finance Minister at the time of presenting the Budget, he stated in paragraph 4 that the performance in the agricultural sector in these past two years gives grounds for hope. Last year despite the severe drought and floods, foodgrains production was 138 million tonnes, only marginally lower than in the previous year showing that our policies to contain the impact of drought were successful. This year, foodgrains production is expected to exceed the target of 166 million tonnes. Therefore, it has been stated that the performance of agricultural sector is very good and even the production is also to the satisfaction. According to the Finance Minister, it may exceed the target also.

Similarly, the Economic Survey which was presented to this House before the Budget was presented also states in Chapter II - Agriculture Production, at para 1:

"The current year marks a period of strong recovery in agriculture. Following the run of poor monsoon which retarded agricultural growth during the last few years, the country has had excellent rains this year. As a consequence, foodgrains production which declined to about 138 million tonnes last year, is likely to exceed the target of 166.57 million tonne of set for 1988-89 and may even cross the 170 million tonnes mark. The agricultural sector as a whole is likely to record a growth of between 17% and 20%."

So, the Economic Survey also reiterates the hope of the Finance Minister. The figures given at page 11, Table 2.3 shows that the rice production in 1987-88 was 56.46 million tonnes and wheat production was 45.10 million tonnes, as against the previous year production of 44.32 million tonnes. Therefore, this shows that even wheat production has gone up. Even the figure in 1987-88 has exceeded the previous year's figure. Now in spite of all this good performance of agriculture, the position as far as the allotment to different States and particularly to Maharashtra is concerned, it is very much dismal. Maharashtra State mainly depends upon these allotments because it is a deficit State in rice and wheat. Formerly there were good supplies or good allotments given by the Central Government. For example, monthly requirement of rice is 80,000 m.t. and wheat is 1,40,000 metric tonnes (m.t.) These are the requirements of Maharashtra. As against this, in March, 1988, the Central Government was giving 60,000 m.t. of rice from March, 1988 to August, 1988; 80,000 m.t. of wheat per month from March, 1988 to June, 1988. Then, the allotments were increased also by 5,000 lakh m.t. from July, 1988 in respect of rice. In September, 1988 also, the allotment was increased further by 5,000 m.t. of rice. But I do not know what has happened after that. Suddenly from February, 1989, there

[Sh. Sharad Dighe]

was curtailment of the allocation of rice by 13,000 lakh m.t. for the month of February, 1989. Therefore, the public distribution system has been experiencing great pressure from the consumers.

The present figures which are obtained by me from the Maharashtra State shows that from January, 1989, the requirement of rice by Maharashtra is 85,000 lakh metric tonnes whereas the allotment is only 65,000 lakh metric tonnes. In February, the requirement of Maharashtra is 90,000 MT whereas the allotment is only 52,000 MT of rice.

Similarly, in wheat also, the requirement in January and February is 1,25,000 MT whereas the allotment is only 90,000 MT.

In February also, even though the requirement remained the same, the allotment has just increased to 94,000 MT.

In March, though the requirement is 2.25 lakh MT, the allotment is only one lakh MT.

There is drastic reduction in the allotment of wheat and rice to Maharashtra from the month of February, 1989. I would, therefore, like to know why this drastic cut has been introduced in the allotment to the States as far as foodgrains is concerned even though the over-all production position has been very satisfactory and very hopeful. As far as wheat is concerned, even the requirement of Maharashtra in January was 1,25,000 MT and the allotment was only 90,000 MT. In February also, even though the same requirement continued, the allotment was 94,000 MT. Therefore, the point is, in spite of the over-all good production of foodgrains in the country, why are there constantly drastic cuts as far as the allocation to Maharashtra State is concerned? I

would like to know this from the hon. Minister.

Secondly, the quality of the foodgrains which are being sent in this allotment quota is also very poor. It is not fit for human consumption. Quality is very bad. It is mixed with stones, mud and even rodent excreta. These are the complaints of all the consumers who take foodgrains from these ration shops from Bombay and they are bitterly complaining about the quality of the foodgrains especially wheat and rice that is being supplied by the Center to the States and, in their turn, by the State to the Bombay city. Therefore, from these points of view, I urge upon the hon. Minister to increase the quota of Maharashtra so that the quota of Bombay city will be consequently increased as far as wheat and rice are concerned. There is a wide gap between the requirement and the allotment made by the Center as far as wheat and rice is concerned. As far as this State is concerned, it is a deficit State in foodgrains.

I urge upon the hon. Minister to look into the quality of the foodgrains which are being supplied under this Government allocation.

With these words, I conclude my remarks.

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF FOOD AND CIVIL SUPPLIES (SHRI SUKH RAM): The allocation to the State Governments for FDS is supplemental in nature. It is not substitution in the open market. That reply was given to the question of the hon. Member. As a result of the spill-over of the last drought, the open market prices are slightly higher and that is the reason why there is a pressure on the FDS. The hon. Member is right in saying that the production this year is much better and there has been a bumper crop and production is no doubt much higher than even the estimated level. But the question is that

whatever support price is given by the Government is meant to save the farmers from the distress sale. As I said earlier, because of the spill-over effect of the drought, open market prices are higher and farmers are not bound to sell their produce to the Government i.e. to the FCI at the support price. If they get higher price, they can sell their produce to the private traders or anywhere. But even we have tried our best to purchase maximum quantity of wheat and rice. As far as Maharashtra State is concerned, if you look at the demand, allocation and off-take regarding wheat for the last two years, then you will realise that Government of India have not reduced the allocations. For instance, in the year 1987, from January to December, the total demand was 11,10,000 tonnes and as against this demand, the allocation was 10,80,000 tonnes and the off-take was 10,06,800 tonnes. In the year 1988, from January to December, the demand was 14,25,000 M. Tonnes and against that the allocation was 10,45,000 M. tonnes. Against that, the off-take was 10,26,100 M. tonnes. So, the allocation was not reduced. The hon. Member has rightly pointed out that thing. As far as wheat is concerned there was no reduction at all. In fact from the month of October, from 85,000 tonnes it was raised to 90,000 tonnes and in the month of February 89, from 90,000 tonnes it was raised to 94,500 tonnes. In the month of March, it was raised to one lakh M. tonnes.

As far as rice is concerned, here also in the year 1987 from January to December, against the demand of 7,70,000 M. tonnes the allotment was 7,20,000 M. tonnes and the off-take was 6,30,000 M. Tonnes. In the year 1988, against the demand of 9,55,000 tonnes, the allotment was 7,50,000 M. Tonnes and the off-take was 7,24,800 M. Tonnes. So, generally the demand from all the State Governments is always on the higher side. We make allotment on month to month basis keeping in view not only the demand of

the particular State but demand of all the other States as a whole and the availability in our stock and various other factors, like availability in the open market etc. This year, because the Kharif and Rabi crop has been very good, rice and wheat are available in the open market. Keeping in view the availability in the market, I had to reduce the allocation to the States by 20 per cent. In the case of rice, when the Chief Minister of Maharashtra met me, then, against the allotment of 60,000 M. tonnes from the month of September, it was raised to 65,000 M. Tonnes. And out of the enhanced allotment, this reduction was made in the case of all States except the special category States in the North-Eastern part of the country because their the source of supply is at a very distant place. Except for these small hilly States, reduction was made in all the States. No discrimination was made in the case of Maharashtra. I may just bring it to the notice of the hon. Member that I requested the Maharashtra Government some time back before this rice procurement season started, stating that they should impose levy in Bhandara and two three adjoining districts of Madhya Pradesh. They took the decision. But then, I do not know, what compelled the Maharashtra Government, they withdrew that decision. Traders bring this paddy from Madhya Pradesh to this Bhandara and two three other districts in order to avoid levy. I am told that there are more than 100 rice mills in these areas and we lose levy on rice in Madhya Pradesh because of transportation problem from Madhya Pradesh to Maharashtra. I requested the Maharashtra Government to impose levy there so that our procurement is increased in Madhya Pradesh. I made it clear that 70 thousand to one lakh metric tonnes would be procured by FCI in those districts. I assured the Maharashtra Government that this quantity would be issued to the Maharashtra Government in addition to the normal allocation which we have been making. But they did not do so. Here also in Haryana, because of the restric-

[Sh. Sukh Ram]

tion in the transportation movement, Delhi Administration did not impose levy on the paddy which used to be transported to Delhi. I requested the Delhi Administration to impose levy in Delhi. With the result, our procurement level went up in Haryana and we could procure smaller quantity in Delhi. I do not know why they reversed the decision in Maharashtra. But I am told that even the Maharashtra people did not get advantage of it in the open market. And that rice is being exported to Kerala and other States and the traders are making lot of money. Had the Maharashtra Government got the subsidised rice, they would not have faced the situation. If the State Governments do not agree to our requests for the imposition of this levy, then how will we procure foodgrains. Seventy per cent of our procurement is done from Punjab, Haryana and U.P. and rest of it is done from Andhra Pradesh. In view of it, I think, in future, Maharashtra Government will think over it.

As far as the complaint of the hon. Member regarding the quality of rice is concerned, I am not aware of it. I have not received any complaint from the Maharashtra Government. I have been visiting Bombay and meeting the Food Minister and others.

DR. DATTA SAMANT (Bombay South Central): That is the problem. People are coming on to the road by this bad quality of rice.

SHRI SUKH RAM: I presume, there is no truth in it. I may bring it to the notice of the Members that in the last Kharif, there were heavy floods in Punjab. There was a lot of devastation and Punjab contributes more than 60% to the Central Pool. We had to, under compulsion, relax the norms in Punjab. Under these relaxed norms the quality is not so good as it used to be and as

it is elsewhere. But I don't agree that this rice is unfit for human consumption. If there is any such complaint or any such instance, the Hon. Member may bring it to my notice. He can give me the sample and I will get it analysed. I can assure that action will be taken against the people who have supplied the rice unfit for human consumption.

As far as wheat is concerned, there is no problem about the quality. But in case something has come to the notice of the Hon. Member he may send me the sample and I will get it analysed.

SHRI SHARAD DIGHE: I will take you to the ration shops in Bombay when you come to Bombay next time.

DR. DATTA SAMANT: There is a lot of shortage also. About 500 people always stand in the queue and for about two months the shop keepers are not getting the materials.

SHRI SUKH RAM: We have to keep in mind that the food commodities particularly foodgrains are meant for the poorer section of our society. Primarily it is meant for them though normally the entire population is covered under the PDS. But I have been requesting the State Governments to ensure that the subsidised foodgrains is distributed to the poor people. However distribution is with the State Government and they have to see to it.

I realise one thing and I agree that as far as Maharashtra is concerned, I think, 40% of its population live in cities and towns. Maharashtra deserves sympathetic consideration. Since a lot of foodgrains are available in the market, the entire population of Bombay also should not depend on public distribution system. But when there was such a problem the Chief Minister also met me last time. That is the reason why the allocation was enhanced in the case of Maharashtra. Now, the

reduction is from the enhanced allocation. That does not have a big effect also. I am told that against the per head allotment of 12 Kgs., they had to reduce it to 10 Kgs. In other States also, it is 8 Kgs. to 10 Kgs. distribution to the card holders. But I think that in view of the availability in the open market and moreover Maharashtra being a prosperous State—its per capita income is the highest in the country—they can afford to purchase foodgrains from the market.

DR. DATTA SAMANT: You are talking about big industrialists.

SHRI SUKH RAM: Anyway, industrialists are also there and poor people are also there. But we have to take care of the poor people. When there is an acute shortage something has to be done. We have to give equal treatment to all the States.

There was some misunderstanding in the mind of the Hon. Member and I have tried to remove it. I will so that if something has to be done, at the appropriate time that also will be done.

SHRI ANOOPCHAND SHAH (Bombay North): I would like to know categorically from the Hon. Minister, as he has stated in his speech that there is a gap between the allocation and the off-take, why and for what reason the off-take is less than the allocation.

According to me, it is because of the non-availability of foodgrains in time. It is because there is no co-ordination between FCI and the Civil Supply Department of the State. It is because they are not having stock in their godown. Is it true or is it a fact that this lifting of less foodgrains than the allocation to the State is the fault of the Central Government and the FCI and not the fault of the State Government? So, I would like to know something about this.

Secondly, as our hon. Minister has stated, the State Government should cover the people who are on the poverty line or who are living in the slums. In fact, in Bombay and Thane, people of the higher society are not lifting. They are having their ration cards. If they start lifting, foodgrains, then our shortage will be much more than what is shown by the hon. Member, Shri Dighe. Lifting is only by slum dwellers and the poor people. And that is why this shortage is there. So, the Minister should not be under the impression that the State Government is giving these foodgrains to all other people.

Thirdly, off-take has gone up by the consumers because market prices have gone up. Maharashtra is a deficit State. Maharashtra is not having its own Food Corporation to procure the foodgrains because they do not have access to do so. From where will they procure? If they procure from other States, it is very difficult for a State to bear that burden also. If the Central pool does not give sufficient foodgrains, then the public distribution system in Maharashtra will definitely wind up. It will go to such a low level that there will be no possibility to come back again to the real stage. So, I request the hon. Minister to please see the allocation which he is making is made in time.

SHRI V. SOBHANADREESWARA RAO (Vijayawada): Sir, first of all I thank you for admitting this half-an-hour discussion on this very important item of short supply of essential food items through the public distribution system. I would not repeat what has been said by my friend, Shri Dighe and others. I would like to seek some clarification from the hon. Minister. He has confirmed the news which appeared in a section of the Press that 20 per cent cut is imposed in the allotment of rice to the States to be available for the public distribution system. In view of the record production of rice this year, I ask the Minister whether the Government will

[Sh. V. Sobhanadreeswara Rao]

reconsider the situation and take a decision and not impose any reduction on the allotment of rice to the different States fund in particular, to the rice-consuming states. The issue price of rice has been enhanced with effect from 25th January, 1989. My information is issue price of wheat has not been enhanced. I would like to seek clarification from the Minister whether it is a fact or not and if so, how is it that the issue price of rice has enhanced while the issue price of wheat is not enhanced, while the procurement prices of paddy and wheat have been enhanced in the current season? The Minister, during his reply to the points raised by Shri Dighe, said and admitted that the FCI has purchased damaged stocks of paddy in Punjab due to some compulsions.

I ask the Minister whether this has happened earlier also. You are showing more favour to Punjab. You are giving more relaxations in the matter of procurement of paddy or rice from Punjab. But you are not allowing the same relaxed guidelines for procurement of damaged paddy from Andhra Pradesh or any other State. Why is the Government doing like this? I seek an assurance that whatever relaxation you give for purchasing paddy or procuring rice to any State, that would be uniformly applied to all States, whether it is Punjab, or Andhra Pradesh. I hope you will clarify this and see that the discrimination is removed.

My information is that there is a differential of Rs. 40 in the matter of issue price and procurement price of rice from the FCI for public distribution system is concerned. Out of this Rs. 40, about Rs. 35 are due to the transportation cost. Most of the rice, or at least a considerable part, purchased in Punjab and Haryana is sent to Kerala, putting a lot of pressure on the rail and road transport system. Andhra Pradesh is quite nearer to Kerala. After meeting the require-

ments of the people of Andhra Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh would be in a better position to supply the stock it can spare. Thus, the transport losses to the FCI would be minimised and at the same time, a large number of wagons would be available for other goods.

Finally, you are imposing some income tax on the organizations which take stock from the FCI and supply the essential commodities to the public distribution system. The Andhra Pradesh Essential Commodities Corporation is levied about Rs. 40 crores as income tax and advance tax. Already we are burdened in this matter of supplying essential commodities to the people; specially we supply rice at the rate of Rs. 2 per Kg. to one crore card holders, or 4.5 crores of people. This is not a profit-earning organizations, but it is doing service to the people.

In the 9th meeting of the Council on the Public Distribution System, recently held in Delhi, representatives from various States suggested that the Central Government should withdraw the levy of income tax and advance tax on these organizations not only in Andhra Pradesh, but other States also. It will go a long way in ensuring efficient functioning of these organizations..

Further, you should make available more rice to Andhra Pradesh. We need 25 lakh tonnes rice every year to satisfy the needs of the people. Now, you are giving only 10 lakh tonnes per year. Please give us five lakh tonnes more to enable us to meet the requirements of the States.

SHRI SHANTARAM NAIK (Panaji): Sir, distribution of essential commodities and other commodities is an important aspect of the food administration. As the internal distribution lies with the State Governments, I would like to know whether the Central Government have issued any guidelines to be followed by the State Governments in

respect of internal distribution to the various distribution centres. Unless such guidelines are there, various States may follow different systems. There cannot, therefore, be equal distribution of essential commodities.

I would like to know whether there is any monitoring system of the Government to see that a fair distribution is maintained internally in all the States. If the Government finds that there is no fair distribution, what are the measures the Government will take?

My next question is this. Ten years back when the Essential Commodities Act came into force, we used to hear that so many people were being convicted and in so many cases prosecutions were launched and so many people were sent to jail because under the Act there was compulsory imprisonment. In recent years, we hear no such cases either because there are no convictions or they are not reported or there is no publicity given.

As far as essential commodities are concerned, my humble submission is this. Even in the open market a substantial part of the price of essential commodities is on account of advertisement in the sense that whatever is spent on advertisement becomes part and parcel of the price structure. I would like to suggest that there must be a restriction on advertisement to a certain extent as far as essential commodities are concerned so that people do not buy a commodity which may cost more due to advertisement on T.V. or in newspapers. Therefore this should be contained by banning advertisement of essential commodities on TV or newspapers to a certain extent.

[Translation]

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE
(Jadavpur): Sir, it has been stated here that it is not possible for the Central Government to concede all the demands of the State

Governments as all the States have to be taken into consideration.... (*Interruptions*).... Hon. Shri Sharad Dighe has raised this Half-an-Hour Discussion because the demands of the Maharashtra Government have not been conceded. This is very important. Demands for each State cannot be fulfilled as the quota for each State has not been increased in proportion to the increase in population. This has created a gap. A survey should be conducted in each State to find out the extent of increase in population so as to increase the quota of the respective State. Otherwise, the supply of foodgrains and other essential commodities can not be made to the States. Each and every State has been complaining of the non-release of quota by the Centre. This is a must in case of Maharashtra, Tripura and my state of West Bengal. Although, Tripura is not my State but I know that people of that State are very poor and they are not getting the supply of essential commodities, from the fair price shops. A Minister of the West Bengal Government has also alleged that the Centre does not release the quota of these things. The Centre must stand up to its commitment in respect of each State otherwise it is the poor who have to face problems.

I would like to know the quota of foodgrains fixed and released in respect of each State till now and in case the same has not been released, time by which the same will be released? My second question is about the quality. To ensure the supply of quality foodgrains, surprise visits should be made to the fair-price shops in every State. It should be confidential. If the information in regard to your visit gets leaked from the office itself, it will be a set show for one day as the fair price shop owners will immediately replace their usual stocks with 'Basmati' rice. But a genuine surprise visit will expose the quality of the rice available with the fair price shops which is generally not even fit for consumption by rats. This is not the fault of the Government but it has been so managed by the middlemen.

SHRI DATTA SAMANT (Bombay South-Central): People themselves are nibbling on the Food Corporation of India.

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE: I am mainly concerned with the grass-root level. People from that grass-root level contact us so I would like to request you to pay surprise visits.

My third point is about the availability of adulterated items at the Fair Price Shops. The foodgrains supplied through the fair price shops is sub-standard. Even though the Government is well equipped with the Essential Commodities Act, no such charts are displayed at these shops. As regards the supply of adulterated rapeseed oil through fair-price shops, I would like to mention that in my constituency, i.e. in Behala, 1000 persons were paralysed as they had consumed such a rapeseed oil. How does the Government explain the position in respect of the availability of adulterated rapeseed oil in the fair-price shops? It is all happening inspite of the Government agency of Vigilance Department and other Enforcement agencies to check such malpractices. I would like to request you to review the situation and lay the information and figure in the House regarding the number of persons arrested under the Essential Commodities Act and the detail of punishment in case it is given to them. The House should be seized of it as to what action had been taken against them. I won't go into the details of all these things but there is acute scarcity of kerosene oil in my State. The Centre should release the quota fixed for my State. As hon. Shri Dighe has already explained in his speech, the position in regard to Maharashtra but as regards the border areas of north-eastern region of my State, large quantities of spices, kerosene oil and rice is being smuggled into Bangladesh. Attention should be paid to this problem. If foodstuffs needed in our country are taken outside our borders, it will create an unmanageable situation in future. This

too is a serious problem. The hon. Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Shri P. Chidambaram has himself visited North Bengal and witnessed situation in that part. This problem concerns the Home Ministry also. An inquiry should be made in this regard and action should be taken thereon. With these words, I conclude.

[English]

SHRI SUKH RAM: Sir, I do not agree with the hon. Member's complaint that lifting of foodgrains in Maharashtra was very poor, because the FCI could not supply the required quantity. As a matter of fact the lifting off-take in Maharashtra is the best in the country, that is, 98 per cent as compared to others where it is less than that in Maharashtra. I can say that coordination between the FCI and the Government is the best in Maharashtra.

Some complaints were brought to my notice a few months ago, that rice was not available, or that rice was not made available by FCI to Maharashtra Government and as a result of these complaints I decentralised the power. Whatever quantity was not issued to Maharashtra Government, the entire backlog was revalidated and the entire stock was made available to Maharashtra Government. The latest position is that on 1-3-1989 2.24 lakh tonnes of wheat was available in Maharashtra, and 1.06 lakh tonnes of rice was there. In addition to it, 1.54 lakh tonnes – 80,000 metric tonnes of wheat and 74,000 metric tonnes of rice – of foodgrains were despatched to Maharashtra. Out of this, 1.33 lakh tonnes has been unloaded and the rest is in the pipeline. So, there is no basis in the complaint that the off-take was poor because the FCI could not make available the foodgrains to Maharashtra Government.

The issue price is the same throughout the country and it had to be increased in order to neutralise the additional burden on the

exchequer because last year the support price was increased, Rs. 10 for the common variety of rice, Rs. 16 for the refined variety and Rs. 22 for the super-fine variety of paddy. The entire burden works out to Rs. 300 crores and this had to be neutralised. In order to save the interests of the poor people the increase in respect of rice of common variety was only Rs. 5 per quintal, and of course in respect of foodgrains of fine and super-fine variety the increase was from Rs. 40 to Rs. 45. So, throughout the country, there is no discrimination.....(Interruptions)

SHRI V. SOBHANADREESWARA RAO: What about the issue price of wheat?... (Interruptions)

SHRI SUKH RAM: Wheat procurement will start with effect from next month. So, I cannot say what will be the position and now at this point of time I cannot say what will be the issue price of wheat. So far, we have not decided to increase the issue price.

I have already stated that the damaged stock was not really damaged. The relaxation was only in the case of broken rice and this colour is permissible under the PFA Act. The complaint of the hon. Member was that the same relaxation was not given to Andhra Pradesh. I wish there should not be floods in Andhra Pradesh like in Punjab.... (Interruptions)

SHRI V. SOBHANADREESWARA RAO: Actually in the current season there were greater floods and Rs. 100 crores worth of paddy was damaged... (Interruptions)

SHRI SUKH RAM: As far as I am concerned, there was no request during my time from the Andhra Pradesh Government for relaxation of the norms. So, the question of relaxation does not arise. (Interruptions)

SHRI V. SOBHANADREESWARA RAO: The Government of India had given

Rs. 28 crores towards flood damages...(Interruptions)

SHRI SUKH RAM: Giving relief to flood damage is a different matter. Giving relaxation in the norms is a different matter. Another complaint was that the Andhra State should be given more rice and more allocation should be made to Andhra Pradesh Government. We are procuring 15 lakh tonnes of rice from the Andhra State and against that we have been giving 11 to 12 lakh tonnes to the Andhra Pradesh Government. Now it is reduced to some extent, ten lakh tonnes or so. Under the scheme, 'rice two rupees per kg.', Andhra Pradesh Government is covering five crore population out of six crore population. This is the baby of the Andhra Pradesh Government. In case this is the pre-condition in every surplus State that we have to meet first their demand and thereafter supply to other States, then how can we meet the demand of the other deficit States. It is only half a dozen States which are surplus at present, from whom we procure. Only about seventy per cent of the procurement is done from Punjab, Haryana and U.P. and the rest of the procurement is from Andhra and other two or three States, which hardly contribute about 1 lakh tonne. Andhra is a surplus State. Andhra Government can also purchase rice and they are doing it. Andhra is meeting fifty per cent requirement under this scheme. Then the hon. Member has said that the surplus rice should be transported from Andhra to Kerala. We are doing it. It is only three for four lakh tonnes we save in Andhra and we give it to Kerala State. In Kerala the procurement is one lakh tonne per month. We have to meet the additional requirement of Kerala State from Punjab and other States.

Now there was a point whether some guidelines have been issued to the State Governments. We have issued certain guidelines and we have been requesting all the State Governments that the allocation

[Sh. Sukh Ram]

under public distribution system should be only for the poor people of our society. We have always been emphasizing that there has to be monitoring and there has to be surprise check also. We are also doing it. The Secretary of my Ministry and I myself have visited certain States and made surprise checks also. But this is the responsibility of the State Governments and we have been requesting the State Governments to make surprise checks. I do not have the figures but a number of shops have been raided and some people have been prosecuted under the Essential Commodities Act. Goods worth crores of rupees have been confiscated. If I remember right, essential commodities worth Rs. 40 crores were confiscated during the last year.

There was a point that ads also should not be from part of the price structure. As far as essential commodities, that is, wheat and rice are concerned, I do not think there are ads for them. There may be other items on which ads may be there. But as you know, the Consumer Protection Act, which is the most progressive law in our country, takes care of it. As far as wheat and rice are concerned, there are no ads and no price is added on account of ads.

Kumari Mamata Banerjee has raised one point that since the population is increasing, we also should increase the allocation of foodgrains. As I stated earlier, this support price is to save the farmers from distress sales. If it is a sellers' market, then the Government also has to compete and purchase the foodgrains at the price prevalent in the market. But we are just saving the farmers from distress sales. Since lot of foodgrains is available in the open market, people have to depend on the open market also. Food is a State subject and the State Governments also should take care of the shortfall. It should not be expected and

should not be the responsibility of the Central Government to meet the entire gap in the demand and supply in a particular State. There is no zonal system here and people are purchasing from the surplus States and taking it to other deficit States also.

I am not aware of the scarcity of kerosene oil. I can pass on this complaint to my colleague who is dealing with the subject.

As far as West Bengal is concerned, I do not have the figures as to how much quantity is given. But West Bengal is the second highest taker of foodgrains in the country. We have been meeting the demand of the West Bengal but it is not possible to meet hundred per cent of the demand because they have to depend on the open market also.

So, sir, I think I have met all the points that were raised here. I have tried to remove whatever misunderstandings for apprehensions the hon. Members had.

18.57 1/2 hrs.

BUSINESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

[English]

Sixty-eighth Report

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI H.K.L. BHAGAT): Sir, I beg to present the Sixty-eighth Report of the Business Advisory Committee.

18.58 hrs.

MESSAGES FROM RAJYA SABHA

[English]

SECRETARY-GENERAL: Sir, I have to report the following messages received from