

will continue tomorrow at 200 p.m and there will be very few speakers on this tomorrow.

17.27 hrs.

HALF-AN-HOUR DISCUSSION

SALE OF PADDY AT LOW PRICE IN ANDHRA PRADESH

[SHRI N. K. SHEJWALKAR in the Chair]

SHRI K. SURYANARAYANA (Eluru): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I rise to raise a discussion on points arising out of the answer given on the 4th December, 1978 to Unstarred Question No. 2089 regarding the sale of paddy in Andhra Pradesh at low price. The answers given under the question are vague and unsatisfactory.

The farmers in the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh are facing considerable difficulties in disposing of their stocks at the support price fixed by the Government of India. Due to the failure of the Food Corporation of India in purchasing their stocks, they are forced to dispose of their paddy at very low prices to the local traders. The Corporation has not opened sufficient number of purchase centres in Andhra Pradesh, in particular in the coastal districts. As no assurance has been given in the answers that the genuine difficulties of these farmers will be looked into and that arrangements will be made for the purchase of their stocks at the fixed support price, the matter needs further consideration of the Government and I demand an assurance from the Government that they will make suitable arrangements for the purchase of paddy in Andhra Pradesh and other States, if necessary.

The Government is aware that the cost of inputs for agricultural production has gone up tremendously in the recent past. The farmers throughout the country, irrespective of their

political affiliations, have been demanding that remunerative prices should be fixed for agricultural products keeping in view the rise in prices of inputs. The farming community, kisan organizations and political parties have urged for fixation of paddy price at Rs. 100/- per quintal. It is unfortunate that this unanimous demand has been rejected by the Union Government. The price of Rs. 85 per quintal fixed by the Government is not at all remunerative price. The hon. Minister is aware of this and it has been raised in the conferences several times. Not only the Andhra Pradesh Government but various rice-producing States also are unanimous in their demand for a hike in the procurement price of rice.

In the past, when the prices fixed by the Central Government were not remunerative, the State Governments had fixed higher procurement prices on their own. Last year, the Governments of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala have fixed the procurement price at Rs. 5 to Rs. 10 more than the minimum price fixed by the Central Government. This year, Kerala Government has decided to pay Rs. 120 per quintal. Last year, the Gujarat Government paid a higher price for wheat, than what was fixed by the Central Government.

At a conference held at Vijayawada on 9-12-78, I met thousands of farmers from the rice delta districts of Krishna and Godavari. They have complained that though paddy has been coming to the market for the last one month, the Food Corporation of India has not opened enough procurement centres to buy paddy on a large scale, even at the procurement price. Besides, FCI is not willing to buy Surekha and Hansa varieties of rice. They are also refusing to buy the kharif crop that is, a new high-yielding variety, on the ground that there is a black spot. It is not their fault. Every grain has a fault. At some centres, they are buying only one variety of rice, rejecting other

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varieties. Price-cuts are effected, or the rice is completely rejected on the ground of being sub-standard. This is causing distress to the farmers. That is why I feel it my duty to bring this to the notice of this august House.

I learn that FCI has already procured 13 lakh tonnes of foodgrains, which is nearly half of the surplus, in Punjab. I am surprised that in Andhra Pradesh, they have bought only 30,000 tonnes so far, according to my information; and this indicates the discriminatory attitude shown by FCI.—Earlier also, in fixing sugar prices, the States in South India were neglected.—As a result of this, the farmers are deprived of even the low procurement price fixed; but in some cases there are distress sales at prices Rs. 15 or Rs. 30 lower than the floor price, per quintal. The State Government has already been requested that the Civil Supplies Corporation of the State and the Marked should also enter the market to buy rice, in addition to the Food Corporation. The Centre should guide the State Government in this respect and help the State Government financially to enable them to buy the surplus rice.

To-day I met the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister. He said that not only the Basmati variety, but other varieties are also being accepted by other countries. There are finer varieties from our areas also. They should be allowed to be exported to other countries.

The Union Minister of Food and Irrigation has appealed for the State Governments' cooperation in procurement; and he has also declared that foodgrains procured by the Civil Supplies Corporations of the State Governments would be bought by the FCI if they are of the requisite standard. The standard should be fixed by the FCI and the farmers. The Centre should act according to this announcement. The ryots are not in a position to pay the taxes or re-pay loans

—I mean the ryots in the delta areas of my State—taken by them from scheduled banks or cooperative banks until the paddy is procured at the support price. They should be advised to stop all these collections. But complaints are being received that pressure is being brought on farmers, particularly the small farmers, to repay loans, despite their financial difficulties. This is so, not only in Andhra Pradesh but in the entire country. Foodgrains are not being taken by the FCI at proper prices. As a result, a great despair has spread among the farming community, and the Centre should advise State Government not to precipitate matters. The realization of loans and taxes should be kept in abeyance till the procurement of paddy at the support price is over.

As a result of the successive cyclones and other natural disasters during the last 3 to 4 years, loans from ryots have accumulated to a great extent. Penal interest has been imposed on the arrears. This penal interest should be waived and the loan should be recovered in easy long-term instalments. I would request the Union Government to intervene in the matter and advise the state governments wherever defects are found. I would also urge upon the central and state governments to form all party committees at procurement centres to prevent injustice and unfair practices perpetrated on the farming community. The farmers who responded to the call of the government to grow more food should not be put to difficulties and unless a remunerative price is paid to them there will be a great set back to the food production in the coming years. Recently I visited my native district. They have already sown and transplanted 4.5 lakhs of acres in the delta area, without any grumbling; they have mortgaged their entire property. I am blaming not only this government but I blamed the previous government also that they had not taken much interest in the develop-

ment of agriculturists and safeguarding their interests. The Andhra government tried to export our finer varieties introduced by the small farmers. You should allow the Andhra government to export the finer variety either through central STC or the state STC. We are interested in disposing of our finer varieties. The hon. Minister may please depute a technical man and I will go with him. The FCI have rejected. Two days after our society had had sold our stock to a merchant, immediately they accepted that. That was the experience three or four years ago. I am not blaming this government or that government. I want the government to fulfil its promise to the people, particularly the agricultural community. It is not only the farmers; seventy per cent of our people depend upon agriculture. If they are ignored the country cannot survive. They are making sacrifices for the benefit of the country. I therefore request you to consider the Andhra Government's proposal to allow them to export rice to other countries.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Before I call the hon. Minister, I have to inform Shri R. K. Dhawan and Rajagopala Naidu that their names could not come before the sitting. I am sorry I told Mr. Dhawan that his name may be called. It can not be called. Only four names, Shri Chitta Basu, Mallanna, Yuvaraj and Venkatasubbiah will be called.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATION (SHRI BHANU PRATAP SINGH): The hon. Member has referred to many issues; some of which are not directly related to the sale of paddy in Andhra Pradesh at low price, nor is it within my competence to give any assurance on those questions which are not directly related to this. The half an-hour discussion is on

slow procurement in Andhra Pradesh. I shall explain the position; I concede the point that there has been slow procurement in Andhra Pradesh; it could have been faster. The slow rate of procurement has been due to many misunderstandings. The first and foremost of the misunderstandings has been that the state government has been under the wrong impression that they have no role to play in the procurement of foodgrains.

I would like to say it very categorically, not only for Andhra Pradesh but for all other States, that they should come and supplement the efforts of the FCI in procurement of foodgrains, for which the support prices are fixed. The example of Haryana and Punjab has been given. May I remind the hon. Members that in those States the State Governments are actively engaged in helping the FCI. In fact, their own agencies are procuring foodgrains. I have been writing letters to the Chief Ministers that they should come and supplement the efforts of the FCI.

Now, for arguments sake suppose the FCI machinery is inefficient, corrupt and all that, then there was all the more reason why the State Government should have come to the rescue of the farmers. There was nothing to stop them from making purchases. We have assured them repeatedly that whatever they purchase, they can utilize for their own consumption needs in the State. And if they cannot consume the whole quantity procured, then we will take the surplus quantity from them and pay them the price at which they purchased plush incidentals.

So, there was nothing to stop the Andhra Pradesh Government from entering the market and making purchases for the relief of their farmers. I am very happy to say that as soon as I came to know that the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister is in town, I contacted him and went to see him

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day before yesterday and explained the whole situation. He has now agreed and, in fact, before me he has directed his subordinates that the State machinery should start purchasing immediately in the State. That is a very welcome decision and I hope it will go a long way in accelerating the pace of procurement.

There has been another difficulty on account of a disease in a particular variety of paddy, which they call black tip disease. In the case of rice suffering from this disease, the black tip remains even after it is cooked. So, the consumers are not willing to purchase that. So, the FCI as a public sector organisation cannot purchase foodgrains which it cannot sell, we have repeatedly made it very clear that we cannot purchase anything which we cannot sell. There is no demand for that kind of rice in any part of the country. May be there is some demand in Andhra Pradesh, but there is no demand for that kind of rice outside Andhra Pradesh. In fact, the State Government should very strongly advise the farmers to give up the cultivation of that one variety in which that disease occurs... (Interruptions)

SHRI K. SURYANARAYANA: In fact, it is the Government of India that supplied those seeds as high-yielding varieties. So, it is the fault of the Government of India.

SHRI BHANU PRATAP SINGH: May be it was evolved by our Rice Research Institute, but the disease developed later on. Once a seed has been recommended, you cannot say that it will always remain and in that condition in which it was recommended. As we evolve new varieties of seeds, new diseases also come up. In fact, nobody knew about this black tip disease at that time

Even in regard to this variety of rice, a way has been found out in my conversation with the Chief Minister and we are working on that. I suggested that the Andhra Pradesh Go-

vernment should purchase this rice and utilize it for the Food for Work scheme in Andhra Pradesh, and whatever price they pay for that according to the grade that is prescribed, we will subsidize them up to Rs. 20 per quintal. Whatever foodgrains are procured for Food for Work, we subsidise them to the extent of Rs. 20 per quintal. If the Andhra Pradesh Government accepts that view—and I have gained the impression that the Chief Minister has accepted that view—the modalities are being explored, I feel confident that if the Andhra Pradesh Government procures at that price and uses in for Food for Work, then perhaps that problem too would be solved.

There has been some difficulty about the other two varieties of paddy. It is again a very peculiar phenomenon that the same variety has been kept in a higher category in one district and in a lower category in the neighbouring district. This can happen. Soil and climatic conditions do bring about changes in course of time in the quality of paddy. The farmers are demanding a higher price, but it has degenerated into a lower grade. I have only today despatched one of our senior quality control officers to go there and bring the report. If it is a very minor relaxation that is required, we may relax. I am at it, and I can assure you that as soon as we receive the report, we will take a suitable decision. In fact, I want to give the maximum help and support to the farmers and the slow rate has been simply because of the misunderstanding that the State Government has nothing to do with procurement. That is not the correct situation. In fact, in most States only the State Government is the purchasing agency.

SHRI RAJ KRISHNA DAWN (Burdwan): They are not purchasing through the FCI?

SHRI BHANU PRATAP SINGH: I have already said that the FCI enters any State with the permission of the

State Government. There are States which have not allowed the FCI to operate in them. But in Andhra Pradesh, the FCI is allowed, but that permission does not preclude the State Government from doing its own part, especially when they complain that the FCI has not been performing well. If the FCI has not been performing well, that is all the more reason why the state Government should have started purchasing on its own. I hope that within a few days the situation will improve. The State Government on my initiative has already agreed to enter the market.

As far as the black tip is concerned, we have found a way of utilising that also. As far as the other two varieties are concerned, I think we will have to wait for the report of the quality control officer.

SHRI K. SURYANARAYANA: What about export?

SHRI BHANU PRATAP SINGH: Let it be done in a proper manner. I do not say it will not be allowed, nor can I say that it will be allowed, but the proper course is that the Chief Minister should write to the Government of India, and we will certainly consider it.

SHRI K. MALLANNA (Chitradurga): I have heard the hon. Member and also the hon. Minister. Though this question refers to Andhra Pradesh only, the principles involved apply to the whole country. The paddy growers are very unfortunate. They are not only exploited by the big traders and; the middlemen, but also by the official procurement agency. I am saying this because this agency does not go to the small and marginal farmers. They are the worst suffers in this because they have to sell away their paddy at uneconomic prices which do not even meet their cost of production. The official agencies are not going to the small and marginal farmers.

The hon. Member made out that the prices of agricultural inputs are increasing every day. The electricity charges are increasing; the water charges are increasing; there is a surcharge on water, etc. The cost of production has increased. No amount of Government formula is going to increase the price paddy.

In this context, may I know from the hon. Minister what is the percentage of paddy purchased by the mill-owners and official procurement agencies; whether the cost of inputs for production of agricultural products have increased lately, more than those of foodgrains, and, if so, whether the Government is thinking of any process to bring down the prices of agricultural inputs? They are sandwiched between the two agencies. It is only one agency which can help, that is, the State trading. May I know from the hon. Minister whether the Government is going to take the wholesale trade in paddy?

श्री युवराज कटिहार : सभापति महोदय आन्ध्र प्रदेश के सम्बन्ध में जो आठ घंटे की चर्चा हो रही है, इसके साथ एक आम सवाल निहित है आज-कल किसानों की मुख्य समस्या उनके कास्ट आफ प्राइवशन में कमी करने की है। आज खेती की लागत इतनी बढ़ गई है कि जब तक आधुनिक टेकनालोजी का इस्तेमाल नहीं किया जायेगा, तब तक उत्पादन नहीं बढ़ सकता है। मंत्री महोदय को पता है कि खाद, पेस्टीसाइड्स-कटनाशक दवाओं, सिंचाई और कृषि के शउहकों के मूल्य पहले बहुत अधिक बढ़ गये हैं। इसके अलावा लागत में भी वृद्धि हो गई है। इसके कारण कृषि की लागत बढ़ रही है। यद्यपि एग्रीकल्चरल प्राइसिज कमीशन की सिफारिश है कि मोटे धान का मूल्य निर्धारित

[श्री युवराज]

हो, लेकिन मंत्री महोदय इस बारे में अधिक करने की साधारी बताते हैं। जब 13 नवम्बर को प्रधान मंत्री जी बिजयकाड़ा गए थे, तो वहां जनता पार्टी के एम०एल०ए०, श्री बी०एस० राज, न उन्हें एक मेमोरेण्डम दिया था जिसमें इन तमाम बातों का उल्लेख किया गया था। मैं मंत्री महोदय से यह जानना चाहता हूँ कि ग्रान्द्र जैसा जो धान-प्रधान प्रांत है जहां कृषकों की मुश्किल पदावार घात है, क्या उदासन-नाय को देखो हूँ, तमाम उपकरणों और खाद की बढ़ती हुई कीमत को देखते हुए सरकार वहां के मूल्य में वृद्धि करने का विचार रखा है।

SHRI P. VENKATASUBBAIAH: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the hon. Minister of State for Agriculture is a practical agriculturist. The symbol of their party is, farmer with plough. But, unfortunately, the farmers are the worst sufferers under their regime.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think, it is enough introduction. You come to the question.

SHRI P. VENKATASUBBAIAH: I am asking only a few questions arising out of the answer that he has given.

The black tip variety rice is not edible. The people are refusing to buy it. In this connection, the rice research institutes have been evolving a hybrid type of paddy to increase the per acre production in the country with the result that there has been a green revolution and there has been a spurt in rice production. I want to know whether there is any sort of coordination between the research Institute and the extension programme. When the seeds have been taken by the farmers—they have been supplied by the Seeds Corporation—do they take proper steps with the help of the State Government

to take preventive measures, to see that these seeds which have been supplied and which are put into the soil do not suffer from diseases. What preventive steps do this Government propose to take in this regard in coordination with the State Governments?

Secondly, with regard to slow procurement in Andhra Pradesh, may I draw the attention of the hon. Minister to the fact that the slow procurement is due to two main reasons: one is the slow process of the FCI, not procuring paddy at the right time when the farmers can get a remunerative price; and the other is, which is the main hitch, with regard to the unremunerative price the farmer is getting. The Agricultural Prices Commission...

MR. CHAIRMAN: That point has been made by Mr. Yuvraj; please do not repeat that.

SHRI P. VENKATASUBBAIAH: The Agricultural Prices Commission has come in for severe criticism by the rice-producing areas, that there has been a discrimination in price-fixation between wheat and rice, that there is a powerful wheat lobby that is operating in Delhi and that is the reason that the paddy-growers are at a disadvantage. I want to know whether this imbalance will be corrected by the Government.

Another point is this. I am glad the Minister has said that rice will be allotted for Food for Work Programme. But the Central Government is insisting that wheat must be taken by the Andhra Pradesh Government. On some representation, they have said that 30 per cent might be given as rice. May I ask the hon. Minister to take a decision that in Andhra Pradesh, for the entire Food for Work Programme, paddy will be given; let at least the predominant part of it be paddy.

My last point is whether this Government, in order to rescue the farmers from distress sale, will in cooperation with the State Governments try to give remunerative price to them

and also, when the request comes from the Chief Minister for export of rice—I want him to give a categorical answer here—whether he will accept the recommendation of the Chief Minister and allow the rice to be exported from Andhra Pradesh.

SHRI BHANU PRATAP SINGH :
One question has been put, whether the Government is contemplating to take over the wholesale trade in paddy. The reply is 'no', and that is for a very good reason. Today they are complaining about the FCI. If the foodgrain trade had been taken over, then there would have been only one agency. Today, besides the private traders, the others are also operating and can operate. There would be no remedy if there is only one agency and that agency does not perform well.

18 hrs.

Secondly, I would like to say about the price. The price has already been decided. There can be difference of opinion whether it is remunerative or not. But the decision has been taken and is not likely to be changed till the next season. Whenever our friends on this side complain about price, I am quite willing to listen to them. But when the Members opposite complain about the price, I feel that they have completely forgotten what they were doing to the farmers when they were in power. (Interruptions) There is a large difference between what you were doing and what we are doing. In your case there was compulsory procurement from the producers and at a rate which was lower than what we are giving today. Ours is only a support operation. Farmers are free to sell their produce at a higher price if they can. We go to their rescue when they cannot. On the other hand, you used to send coercive forces to their houses to take delivery and at a much lower price. So, while I am prepared to listen about the prices from the members sitting on that side. I am not prepared to take any advice from you because you were so tyrannical in the days when you were in power (Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN : How can anybody force his advice?

SHRI BHANU PRATAP SINGH :
Thousands and thousands of farmers were taken to court for non-delivery of their levy. Is that not tyranny? You should be ashamed of those days.

SHRI DARUR PULLIAH (Anantapur) : Are you not ashamed of the present position?

SHRI P. VENKATASUBBAIAH :
What about the cane-growers? Are you not ashamed of that?

SHRI BHANU PRATAP SINGH :
We are talking about paddy but you are going to sugar cane.

Another question has been raised that there should be parity between the price of wheat and the price of paddy. May I know when in the history of this country there was ever any parity between the prices of paddy and wheat?....

SHRI P. VENKATASUBBAIAH :
Please don't misquote me. I said 'remunerative price'.

SHRI BHANU PRATAP SINGH : If you say that you did not ask for parity. I withdraw my remark. But I can tell you that never in the history of this country, paddy was sold at the same rate as wheat.

SHRI K. SURYANARAYANA : In Andhra Pradesh the Janata Party MLAs have passed a resolution.

SHRI DARUR PULLIAH : Why not you increase the price of paddy?

SHRI BHANU PRATAP SINGH :
About the disease, I would like to make it clear that a variety which has been evolved today may be found to be susceptible to a new disease 2 years afterwards. In fact there is a race between the scientists who are evolving seeds and the diseases. It is not perhaps relevant but I may inform the House that in Pakistan they have

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lost their wheat crop and are in difficulties only because they were using old seeds which were destroyed by the rust disease. Now our scientists have been evolving wheat which are rust-resistant and therefore, we have escaped. But the fact that these varieties have escaped last year does not mean that we will escape again. Therefore, newer and newer varieties are always being evolved. It is a continuous process. The new varieties after some time become susceptible to some new variety of disease also. There are also different varieties and strains of disease. So you cannot put the blame that because we released that sometime back, therefore, we are

guilty. I have been producing paddy myself for the last 38 years and I have never heard about the black-tip disease....

SHRI DARUR PULLIAH: How can the ryots be held responsible for that?

SHRI BHANU PRATAP SINGH: It is part of the game. Ryots are not held responsible for many things but they have to suffer. So it is one of those cases.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now the House stands adjourned till 11 am. tomorrow. 18.05 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Wednesday, December 13, 1978/Agrahayana 22, 1900 (Saka).