

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI ANNASAHEB P. SHINDE): I beg to lay on the Table:—

(1) A copy each of the following Notifications (Hindi and English versions) under sub-section (6) of section 8 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955:—

(i) G.S.R. 196(E), published in Gazette of India dated the 29th April, 1974.

(ii) The Fertilizer (Control) (Amendment) Order, 1974, published in Notification No. G.S.R. 292(E) in Gazette of India dated the 28th June, 1974.

[Placed in Library. See No. LT-8071/74].

(2) A copy of the Annual Report of the Maharashtra Agro-Industries Development Corporation Limited, Bombay, for the year 1972-73 along with the Audited Accounts and the comments of the Comptroller and Auditor General thereon, under sub-section (1) of section 619A, of the Companies Act 1956 [Placed in Library. See No. LT-8072/74].

NATIONAL WELFARE BOARD FOR SEAFARERS (AMNDT) RULES, 1974 AND STATEMENTS RE DELAY IN LAYING CERTAIN NOTIFICATIONS

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT (SHRI PRANAB KUMAR MUKHERJEE): I beg to lay on the Table:—

(1) A copy of the National Welfare Board for Seafarers (Amendment) Rules, 1974 (Hindi and English versions) published in Notification No. G.S.R. 444 in Gazette of India dated the 4th May, 1974, under sub-section (3) of section 458 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1958. [Placed in Library. See No. LT-8073/74].

(2) Two statements (Hindi and English versions) showing reasons

for delay in laying *Notifications Nos. G.S.R. 339 and G.S.R. 374 published in Gazette of India dated the 30th March, 1974 and 6th April, 1974, respectively. [Placed in Library. See No. LT-8074/74].

CENTRAL EXCISE (SEVENTH AMNDT) RULES, 1974

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI K. R. GANESH): I beg to lay on the Table a copy of the Central Excise (Seventh Amendment) Rules, 1974 (Hindi and English versions) published in Notification No. G.S.R. 336(E) in Gazette of India dated the 27th July, 1974, under section 38 of the Central Excises and Salt Act, 1944. [Placed in Library. See No. LT-8075/74].

12.40 hrs.

CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

REPORTED STARVATION DEATHS AND DISTRESS SALE OF CHILDREN IN DIFFICULT PARTS OF ASSAM.

MR. SPEAKER: Calling Attention, Mr Ajit Kumar Saha,

श्री अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी (ग्वालियर):
प्रध्वंस महोदय, मैंने देश की सख्त स्थिति के बारे में काम रोक प्रस्ताव दिया था। यह ध्यान-दिनाथी सूचना केवल आसाम के बारे में है। लेकिन मध्य प्रदेश, उत्तर प्रदेश और देश के अन्य भागों में भी खबरें आ रही हैं कि भ्रष्ट के अभाव में मौतें हो रही हैं। आपने पता होगा कि आदिवासी क्षेत्रों में एक आदिवासी ने अपने दो बच्चे बेच दिये, क्योंकि पेट भरने के लिए उस के पास धनाज नहीं था। कल में हरिद्वार में था। वहाँ बाजार में घाटा नहीं है।

श्री कृ० कृ० कलसी (कानपुर):
इस बहस में दो तीन घंटों की डिस्कशन का मौक़ा दिया जाये।

*Notifications were laid on the Table on the 30th April and 3rd May, 1974, respectively.

श्री अजित कुमार साहा : या तो आप एडजर्नमेंट मोशन को ले लें, या आप इस कंसिलिंग एग्जामिन नोटिस में देश के और हिस्सों के बारे में भी सवाल करने की इजाजत दें और या आप "विशेष चर्चा" का मौका दें ।

अध्यक्ष महोदय : इन बारे में विज्ञान एडवाइसरी कमेटी में बातचात करेंगे ।

SHRI AJIT KUMAR SAHA (Bishnupur): Sir, I call the attention of the Minister of Agriculture to the following matter of urgent public importance and request that he may make a statement thereon—

"Reported starvation deaths and distress sale of children in different parts of Assam, particularly in Uttar Taram area bordering Nagaland, Goalpara and Kamrup districts"

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI ANNASAHEB P. SHINDE)
A news report about starvation deaths and distress sale of children alleged to have taken place in certain parts of Assam, has come to the notice of Government. The State Government has reported that no cases of starvation death or distress sale of children have taken place, particularly in the Goalpara and Kamrup districts of Assam, as alleged. However in order not to leave any doubt in the matter, State Government is making thorough enquiries in the cases reported in the press.

The overall food availability in Assam, which is generally surplus in rice, is reported to be normal, though the prevailing level of prices of foodgrains is high and recent floods have also caused some distress in the affected areas. During the first half of 1974, the State Government had distributed about 1.31 lakh tonnes of foodgrains through the fair price shops. The availability of coarse grains and wheat in the market has also improved this year,

as some stocks have already moved and are moving on trade account.

With a normal monsoon, kharif sowings have taken place under favourable conditions. The conditions of standing crops is also reported to be satisfactory in Assam. The food situation, however, is being kept under constant review in consultation with the State Government and assistance to the extent required will be extended to the State Government to meet the situation as and when necessary.

***SHRI AJIT KUMAR SAHA:** Mr. Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister in his statement has said that there has been no starvation deaths. I am really surprised, because we read every day about it in the newspapers. After all what definition the hon. Minister would like to attribute to the term? Starvation deaths are not party matters nor they are political weapons to be used by one party against the other. Why should not the Government make a clean breast of the matter. Now people are dying because they are being forced to eat weeds and other uneatable things and as a consequence they are dying. What is this? Is it not a starvation death, if not what is it exactly please tell me? (Interruptions)

Sir the Congress Government proclaims that they are taking the country towards socialism. But what is the result of this journey towards socialism? The result is starvation and starvation deaths, mother selling her children for food, people losing purchasing power and the ever increasing prices are every day throwing all essential goods beyond the reach of poor and the working class. Hundreds and thousands of villagers are unemployed—they have no jobs to do and all these have resulted from the anti-people policies of the Government.

Not only in Assam but in all the States in Eastern region the news of starvation deaths is appearing in newspaper every day. The situation is

*The original speech was delivered in Bengali.

particularly deplorable in Assam and in some of the districts of West Bengal namely, Bankura and Purulia. Rice is selling at Rs. 4/- per Kg. The entire rationing system has crumbled down. The modified rationing in rural area ceases to exist. People are eating tree leaves and weeds and many are dying as a result of this "Main Stream" in its issue July 20, has stated "In West Bengal one boy was found eating dog's meat" This is the situation prevailing in West Bengal

Sir, both the Government of Assam and West Bengal have totally failed to procure enough foodgrains as per their targets. But these foodgrains have been conveniently cornered by the Joidars and profiteers and they are being assisted by the local Ministers and MLAs. The Government is totally helpless and the poor people are at the mercy of profiteers and black marketeers.

I would now like to quote from some newspapers to show you Sir how alarming and serious is the situation. The Indian Express in its issue dated the 26th July, 1974 has stated Reports of starvation deaths and 'distress sale' of children continue to pour in from different parts of Assam. This situation is particularly alarming in Goalpara and Kamrup districts with fair price shops even at Gauhati having to go without stocks for weeks at a stretch and the price of coarse variety of rice in the open market rising to Rs. 4/- per kilogram." This is the situation prevailing in Assam which speaks truly of the distress of the people there. Now I will come to West Bengal. The Times of India in its issue dated 27th July, 1974 have stated, "The State Government is itself to be blamed for this near-desperate situation because the quantity of paddy it had procured is no more than a third of the target. Even so to fail in its aid immediately may have disastrous consequences, according to official

sources. The average minimum price of rice is Rs. 3 a kilo. In heavily deficit area it is Rs. 3.50. This is more than the daily wage of landless labourers who constitute one-third of the total population.

There are reports of starvation and semi-starvation conditions prevailing even in pockets within surplus districts. The situation is worse in such deficit districts as Bankura and Purulia. The State Government is thinking of opening gruel kitchen in some areas.

Paucity of funds has, however, been a major constraint. In some parts of Bankura and Purulia, hundreds of men, women and children are going round villages looting food from affluent houses, Congress legislators recently told the Chief Minister Mr. Siddhartha Shankar Ray. Every railway platform is crowded with migrant destitutes from villages. Crime is on the increase.

Sir, Bengali newspaper Ganashakti in its issue dated the 14th July 1974 while describing the condition of the people Bankura has stated that already 40 persons have died of starvation in the different places of the district. In the city of Vishnupur, those who have committed suicide are Shrimati Nidubasin, Bosu, Shephali, Chatterjee, Bibhuti Nandy, Shri Kiritidutt and Prahlad Nandy. In the Municipal area a lady from Rajgram sold her three year old child for Rs 5/- and a saree. This is how the people of Assam and West Bengal are suffering Sir.

THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AND SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND AGRICULTURE (SHRI C SUBRAMANIAM): This Motion is with reference to Assam. The hon. Member is going on saying about West Bengal.

SHRI AJIT KUMAR SAHA: Are we to deal with only the case of Assam, Sir?

SHRI C. SUBRAMANIAM: My point is this. The Calling Attention Motion is with reference to Assam. He is dealing with West Bengal. This is what I am pointing out.

SHRI AJIT KUMAR SAHA: How can you deny reference to the eastern region, Sir? The whole of the eastern region comes in this connection. You cannot help it.

MR. SPEAKER: You have taken more time. Kindly conclude.

***SHRI AJIT KUMAR SAHA:** Yes, Sir, I am now concluding. I would now put the question. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what urgent steps are being taken by the Central Government to rush adequate food grains to deal with dreadful situation that has arisen; what steps are being taken to run efficiently the rationing system both in urban and rural area; whether the Centre has directed the State Government to open free kitchen in Assam and in West Bengal particularly, in Bankura and Purulia and to give doles to 20 per cent of the population and whether Government would declare all those areas as famine areas wherefrom reports of starvation deaths have been reported in newspapers?

SHRI ANNASAHEB P. SHINDE: I will confine myself to Assam

MR. SPEAKER: This is a Motion about Assam

SHRI ANNASAHEB P. SHINDE: Sir, the hon Member made a number of observations which are not borne out by facts. The point is this. The Government of India went into the matter and when the report appeared in the Press, this was referred to the Assam Government. The Assam Government enquired and they reported to us that there are no starvation deaths. But even then, in order to remove any doubt, they are going further into the matter. If any additional information is available, we will be glad to share the informa-

tion with the House. Our present information shows that these newspaper reports are not true.

Then, the hon. Member made a statement that there are no fair-price shops. I may tell this for his information that there are about 11,500 fair-price shops operating in Assam. I may also say that the public distribution system; is on the same level as compared to any previous year or any previous month. And, even the local stock position with the Food Corporation and with the State Government is of the order of 85,000 tonnes. The stock with the Food Corporation is 52,000 tonnes; the stock with the State Government is about 33,000 tonnes. This is the position as on 1-7-74. The normal distribution is 20,000 to 25,000 tonnes monthly and therefore this shows that the stock position is satisfactory and this will take care of the immediate requirements.

But there is one difficulty, and that is, that the prices are high. But this is a part of the general phenomena in the country and not confined to Assam only. Although I can appreciate the concern of the hon. Member and the other Members about the high price.

The hon. Member also made a statement which, I think, he should not have made about the M.L.As. and Ministers supporting the black-marketeers. It is a very unfair statement. Actually, in Assam, the wholesale trade in rice has been taken over by the State Government and, therefore, to make such statements against those policy-makers who have taken a decision is very unfair. (Interruptions).

The hon. Member wanted to know what steps are being taken. We are in constant touch with the State Government. When the Chief Minister came over here, he met my senior colleagues. Also he met me and we reviewed the position. We are constantly in touch with them and as

*The original speech was delivered in Bengali.

and when required, we shall try to see what maximum help can be given to the Assam Government.

SHRI SAMAR MUKHERJEE (Howrah): The statement made by the Minister here is the usual statement regarding starvation deaths which we were accustomed to get from the British period. Whenever there had been a news of starvation deaths, the Government used to deny it. This is also the same stereotyped reply. This shows the complacency on the part of the Government and the bureaucracy to hide the reality for which this type of statement is made. This is not our report—the report of the Communist Party (Marxist)—in order to discredit the Government in making this statement that there are starvation deaths. This is the paper which is the supporter of the ruling party. It is they who are publishing this statement. (Interruptions).

It is the monopoly controlled press which always supports the ruling party because it is the ruling class which is the defender of the monopolists (Interruptions). It is obvious. This is the report published in the Indian Express—Starvation Deaths in Assam (Interruptions). Whenever they publish the report of starvation deaths, they become the supporters of the Opposition and whenever they support the Government that they are fairing well. In relation to food and other policies, they do not support us. The reality cannot be suppressed for every concrete name is given—not general accusations. I have the names before me who have died of starvation.

SHRI D. BASUMATARI (Kokrajhar): Not at all.

12.55 hrs.

(Mr. Deputy-Speaker in the Chair)

SHRI SAMAR MUKHERJEE: The position in Assam is very serious. If

you go through the statement made by the Minister, it is clear that there is no crisis in Assam. The statement says 'No cases of starvation deaths or distress sale of children have taken place'—a categorical reply. That means everything is all right—good. This is the statement of the Government.

SHRI D. BASUMATARI: Who saw that?

SHRI SAMAR MUKHERJEE: You do not know it. You are commenting.

The second part of it says:

'Overall food availability in Assam is reported to be normal'.

So, the situation is normal. This is the attitude on the crisis affected people of Assam. The attitude of the government is that everything is normal. The rice is selling at Rs. 4/-. It is also normal. This is the attitude of the government that everything is normal; foodgrain is available in the market. So, everything is bright and nothing is abnormal. But, the press reports of starvation deaths and distress sale of children continue to pour in from different parts of Assam. The latest in the series is the alleged starvation deaths of women and two children in Uttar Taram area bordering Nagaland. This shows crisis in leadership. You are even not reacting to the reality of the situation. The report says in greater Gauhati card-holders get a meagre 28 kg. of rice and 2 kg. of atta per head per month. This is the situation in Gauhati where there is rationing system but the situation in the villages is worse where the entitlement is 300 gms. of rice and equal quantity of atta per month per head.

13 hrs.

What in effect the Assam Government did was take-over of wholesale trade linked only with the public distribution system which caters to barely 5 to 7 per cent of the total requirements of 1.60 crore people of

the State from 616 private dealers for handing over to 663 gram panchayat level wholesale cooperative societies. Thus in reality the Government took an insignificant 5 to 7 per cent of rice and paddy trade. In one of the replies the Minister for Food stated that in Assam the Government has completely taken over the rice trade. As I stated earlier what is the actual position of taking over? It has made no change in the situation. The Government procurement is absolutely a failure. Their target of procurement was 24 lakh quintals whereas the actual procurement was 16 to 17 lakh quintals. If they had achieved the procurement target they would have covered 6 to 8 per cent of the population but even that target has not been reached. So, it is obvious that food crisis is bound to be accentuated. There is no fixed supply to tea garden workers. It is true the production last year was 24 lakh metric tonnes. Had there been procurement and proper distribution system then 1.60 crore people of Assam would have been supplied with 500 gms. of ration daily. As the State machinery is in the grip of the hoarders and the profiteers despite this production they failed to achieve the procurement target. I can quote the names of cases where starvation deaths have taken place. In their issue of 25th May the Times of India reported that Shri Abdul Mannan of Patacharkuchij village in Kamrup district of Assam died of starvation. A report received here said that villagers had submitted a statement to the authorities about the alleged starvation death. It was further reported that this was the second starvation death in the locality this year. Several persons of the area are reported to be starving. *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, November 24, 1973 reports of starvation deaths. *The Tribune*, Chandigarh, November 24, 1973 also speaks of starvation deaths. 89 persons died of starvation in Goalpara and Kamrup districts. This statement has been made on the floor of the Assam Assembly by Mr. Dulal Barua also.

My own information is that Nirode Das of village Bagbahar Part II (Bonbasto), P. O. Bagbahar, P. S. Silchar, District Cachar, died of starvation during the last week of April, 1974. Thirdly, Dhan Khan of village Rupoirbali, P. S. Lakhimpur, District Cachar, died of starvation on 20th June, 1974 after a protracted illness. There are various other reports in detail, and I do not want to mention all of them.

Then, I would like to refer to the Supply Minister's statement which has been published in *New Age* dated July 7, 1974. The report is:

"The Supply Minister said that the Government will continue to supply as at present only 750 gms. of rice per head per week in the urban areas and 150 gms per head per week in the rural areas and there was no possibility of raising this quantity till November next."

This was the Supply Minister's statement in the Assam Assembly. But the hon. Minister here has told us just the opposite.

So, I would like to ask Mr. Shinde whether Government will take it seriously and investigate into all the concrete cases to verify whether there were actually any starvation deaths or not. The reports that are coming in should also be attended to. The hon. Minister has stated there that the required supply is not there. Will Government take into consideration the total need of Assam and rush the supply as required so that so many lives can be saved?

SHRI ANNASAHAB P. SHINDE: I would appeal to the good sense of the hon. Member not to introduce an element of politics in the food management of Assam, because by exaggerating things nothing is going to be gained and that blackmarketseers will benefit out of it. I have mention-

ed earlier in my statement that we have requested the Assam Government to furnish us the details about these things, and they have informed us that the reports which have appeared in the press are not true.

The hon. Member also made a reference to procurement, we know, and we are aware that their procurement was not according to expectation. Even then, to say that it was an utter failure as compared to the last few years is not correct. For instance, in 1970-71 they procured 83,000 tonnes, in 1971-72, 87,000 tonnes, in 1972-73, 89,000 tonnes, and in 1973-74, they had procured 112,000 tonnes.

So, it is correct to say that procurement was a total failure, and that would be a wrong assessment of the position. As I had mentioned earlier the distress appeared to be mainly because of high prices and the fact that recently there have been some floods. In Assam, floods are not unknown. Every year, because of the fury of the Brahmaputra, there is some distress and some difficulties do develop. But the Assam Government is in touch with the situation and they have been providing relief wherever required. As I said earlier while replying to the other hon. Member, Government would like to be in constant touch with the Assam Government and review the position from time to time, and if any help is required by the Assam Government, we shall not fail to help the Assam Government.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: The Assam Government's reply in respect of each of these individual cases mentioned in the papers or just a blanket statement that there was no truth in all that?

SHRI ANNASAHAB P. SHINDE: As far as the *Times of India* report about Abdul Mannan is concerned, they have specifically gone into it and they have said that this is not true and he had died due to some other reason. One more case had also been

referred to by the *Times of India*. They have enquired into it and said that he had died due to lung disease. So, they have gone into the individual cases and given the report.

SHRI R. K. SINHA (Faizabad):

It is a sight to see the leaders of the ultra-left parties discovering virtues of companionship with the editors of right reactionary papers which have a design to plant a JP-type movement in every State in India. The proprietor of the *Indian Express* is also an illustrious member of this House. They are determined to give publicity to JP-type movements; they give publicity to starvation deaths thereby trying to create a certain trend against the Government in this country. I would like to read to you the news item in the *Indian Express* and analyse it. Our godfathers of leftism in this House have said that the procurement target....

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: 'Godfather' in the American context has a special sense.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU (Diamond Harbour): When Shri R. K. Sinha speaks with his topi on his head, he is off his head and he talks through the back of his hat.

SHRI R. K. SINHA: You talk through the front of your hat.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: I am only trying to point out the meaning of the word 'godfather'. In the American context, it has a very special meaning. Nowadays we are not sure whether we are speaking English English or American English. Therefore, we should avoid words which may have different connotations.

SHRI R. K. SINHA: It is stated that against the khariff procurement target of—24 lakh quintals of paddy only 17 lakh quintals were achieved. The national target last year of food procurement was achieved by half and that was a success. Here the Assam

[Shri R. K. Sinha]

Government must be grilled because out of 24 lakh quintals target only 17 lakh quintals were achieved. It is made out as if telegrams are pouring into the Indian Express office, that there is a flood of telegrams. But no names are mentioned, no particulars are given. But it is said that these things are happening, in Nagaland this is happening and in some other place that is happening. It is stated in the body of the news:

"In greater Gauhati, card-holders get a meagre 2.8 kgs. of rice and 2 kgs of atta per month...."

which compares with the situation in Bombay or Calcutta. It is a very interesting story of condemning the Government. The first speaker spoke as if there was a famine in India no one in India was alive and everybody was dying. I would like to ask my friends: Are you speaking against the takeover of foodgrains in India? Are you against the food distribution system in India? Are you speaking against the co-operative system in India? Or are you opportunists who want the people of India to die.... (Interruptions). This news has been fabricated out of all proportion in order to malign Government.

I understand the situation is difficult. I understand prices have gone up. I understand that this has to be fought. Opportunism should not have a price. If Government want to take over foodgrains, it must be condemned. If the co-operatives sell food through their agencies, that must be condemned. If the Assam Ministry succeeds, it has also to be condemned. If in the fair price shops 2.8 kgs. of rice and 2 kgs. of atta are given per head per month, that has also to be condemned. The sinister design of these people must be understood in order to understand the basic meaning of all this. The basic purpose of

all this is to create a scare in the country, the Indira Gandhi Government must be attacked right and left and Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan's movement must succeed.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: You have refuted them. Any questions?

SHRI R. K. SINHA: Will Government take the necessary steps to fight such fabricated news items? Will it be vigilant enough to fight these publicity items because as against the bourgeois-reactionary forces who are in the company of ultra-left vested interests we find ourselves in this difficulty.

MR DEPUTY-SPEAKER: That is for Shri Gujral. Can you fight this kind of publicity? I am asking the Minister whether it is his responsibility or Shri Gujral's responsibility to fight against this publicity. He happens to be in the House. Anyway, you can answer if you want.

SHRI R K SINHA: This is all a motivated speech.

SHRI ANNASAHAB P SHINDE: It is true that scare stories do create and spread panic and will do harm to the interests of the poorer sections. But I would say only to our CPI(M) friends since the Assam Government took the decision to take over rice, we expected co-operation from them and not opposition. Even in the news item which has been published, there is a lot of political overtones.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU: You are a Purushottam Sena man.

SHRI ANNASAHAB P. SHINDE: We are in touch with the Assam Government. In regard to procurement, they have done a good job, though not to our satisfaction. Our interest is to see that the public distribution system continues to function.