

12.05 hrs.

**CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER
OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**REPORTED NON-AVAILABILITY OF FOOD-
GRAINS AND OTHER ESSENTIAL COMMO-
DITIES IN TRIPURA**

SHRI AJIT KUMAR SAHA (Vishnu-
pur): Before I call the attention of the
Minister, I would like to point out that
I have not been supplied with a copy of
the statement.

MR. SPEAKER: It is there already.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU (Diamond
Harbour): It is a very deplorable state
of affairs. It is not the usual practice.

MR. SPEAKER: We can postpone it,
if you like, and take it in the afternoon.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU: I think
2 O'Clock would be better.

**THE MINISTER OF AGRICUL-
TURE (SHRI F. A. AHMED):** It may
be taken up in the afternoon at 5
O'Clock.

MR. SPEAKER: If we take it up in
the afternoon, it will encroach upon other
business. It is quite obvious that the
statement has come so late. Anyway, let
him read out the statement.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU: Why this
sort of attitude towards the House, which
has become the custom now?

MR. SPEAKER: If we take it up in
the afternoon, it will encroach on the
time of Private Members' Business.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU: I am not
suggesting that. You must find out the
reason.

MR. SPEAKER: I am going to get the
information.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU: Explana-
tion.

MR. SPEAKER: So far as the Calling
Attention is concerned, I think we should
proceed with it. I would ask the Minis-
ter to read the statement. I will find out
the reason for the delay later on.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU: He owes
an explanation to the House.

MR. SPEAKER: If we take it up later,
it will encroach on the time allotted for
private members' business.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU: This is
utter disrespect to the House.

SHRI F. A. AHMED: I would like
to point out that we have absolutely no
intention to show any disrespect to the
House. This matter was brought to my
notice after I came back this morning.
I am told that this statement has been
sent. Unfortunately, it could not be
given to the hon. Member. I would like
to read it, so that hon. Members may
know the actual position.

SHRI AJIT KUMAR SAHA: I call
the attention of the Minister of Agricul-
ture to the following matter of urgent
public importance and request that he
may make a statement thereon:

"The reported serious situation in
Tripura arising out of the non-availabi-
lity of foodgrains and other essential
commodities due to the Indian Airlines
lock-out and dislocation of train ser-
vices and the abnormal fall in prices
of agricultural products such as jute
and other commodities."

SHRI F. A. AHMED: During the year
1972, about 14,000 tonnes of foodgrains
were supplied to the Tripura Government
as against 55,000 tonnes supplied during
the year upto the end of October, 1973.
With the stocks available with the Cen-
tral Government, the requirement of the
State Government has been met fully.
The State Government had a stock of
over 8,000 tonnes of foodgrains in the
beginning of November, 1973. Public
distribution of foodgrains has gone down
considerably with the arrival of kharif
crops and improved availability of food-

[Shri F. A. Ahmed]

grains in the market. There has been a noticeable decline in the prices of foodgrains.

The production of jute is reported to be better than last year. In view of the increased production, there has been a fall in prices. The Jute Corporation has purchased a quantity of 14,911 quintals of raw jute through their Departmental Purchase Centre and Co-operative Societies in Tripura, under commercial purchase operations.

The Hon'ble Members are aware that there has been a lock out declared by the Indian Airlines which has disrupted the air communication. However, some alternative arrangements have been made permitting the Jamair Company to operate their passenger services thrice daily between Calcutta and Agartala. The dislocation of air services has no doubt caused inconvenience to the public but it does not in any way affect the availability position of foodgrains in Tripura.

*SHRI AJIT KUMAR SAHA: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the notice for this call attention motion was addressed to the Minister for Shipping and Transport. But the Minister for Agriculture is replying to it. I do not know how far he will be able to deal with it. In fact, Sir, the Minister for Shipping and Transport as well as the Commerce Minister are concerned with this subject and they too should have said something in this regard.

Sir, the rail communication, road communication and air communication with Tripura have been totally dislocated. The IAC had daily six to seven flights in Tripura earlier which have been totally stopped now. The daily services that the IAC had to Kailash Sahar etc. through Tripura have also been discontinued. The rail services to and from Tripura have also practically stopped due to acute coal shortage. Five to six goods trains used to run through Assam daily; although that was a circuitous route. Those too are not running for want of coal. The

road transport to Tripura over a long route have also declined due to petrol shortage. The situation is very serious there. Due to this total stoppage of all kinds of transport, the prices of essential commodities of daily need like medicines, dal, oil, spices, soap, etc. have sky rocketed in Tripura. Only one train is going to Tripura and all other goods trains have been withdrawn for want of coal. Sir, all kinds of road transport have suffered drastically in Tripura due to non-availability of petrol and diesel oil which are supplied to Tripura through the Railways. As a result of this the prices of agricultural products of Tripura like cotton, jute etc. have practically crashed. The growers of these crops are compelled to sell their products for a song in the market. The growers are practically ruined. On the other hand the essential goods of daily consumption have become very costly. Due to non-availability of items like cement, tin etc., for want of transport, many factories in Tripura have been forced to close down. All this have in their turn created a serious employment situation. The small cultivators, who constitute almost 80 per cent of Tripura's population, have no alternative outlets to earn their living. The agricultural labour, who number about 30 per cent, have also become idle, they have no other employment opportunities. The small shopkeepers and traders in the villages have also become idle as they are forced to close down their business.

Sir, the towns of Tripura can be easily connected with some towns of 'Bangladesh' by Railway. For example, the town of Agartala is within 2 miles of the Jatkaria railway station in Bangladesh. Other places like Feni and Kailash Sahar are situated within a short distance. These can be conveniently connected by Rail for promotion of trade and commerce with mutual benefit. I understand that talks have been held between our Government and the Government of Bangladesh for providing rail links between such places and both Governments are in agreement over this issue. But no action has been taken to imple-

*The original speech was delivered in Bengali.

ment the same. I do not know what is holding up. Sir, you will be surprised that Agartala, the capital of Tripura is not connected by rail. The railway system goes up to Dharma Nagar only. I had raised this issue earlier also during my speech on the Railway budget. The railway line from Dharmatala must be extended upto Agartala. The survey for the Dharmatala-Agartala railway link have been long completed. It has also been estimated that this will cost about 70 crores of rupees. But no work has actually started on this project so far.

The subsidy that Tripura used to enjoy previously for the transport of goods has now been withdrawn. The people of Tripura have protested against this step in all manner of peaceful methods like holding mass satyagraha etc. But the Congress Government there have tried to stifle their democratic agitations and replied with lathis, bullets and have committed other atrocities on them.

Sir, I will like categorical and clear replies from the Minister on the following questions:

Whether urgent steps will be taken for the supply of essential commodities of daily need to Tripura. Secondly, whether the earlier subsidy system will be restored in Tripura. Thirdly whether the Government will take steps to purchase jute and other like products from the growers in Tripura at a just and fair price and lastly whether steps will be taken by the Government to introduce passenger and goods traffic with Bangladesh for the prosperity of the people of that area.

SHRI F. A. AHMED: Sir, I have very carefully listened to the statement made by the hon. Member before he put two or three questions.

Most of his statement is concerned with the dislocation of railway service, transport and also air service. So far as I am concerned, I have indicated that there has been some inconvenience caused on account of the disruption of air

service. So far as my information goes, whatever is possible is being done by the transport authorities as well as the railway authorities to fill up the gap which has been there on account of the disruption of air service.

As I have already indicated, so far as foodgrains are concerned, there has been no demand for the supply of rice and wheat, by the Tripura Government. But, because there is sufficient stock of wheat and rice in the stocks of the State Government and also because the new crop has come in, instead of their asking us wheat and rice, they have entered into bilateral arrangements to give some out of their stock to the West Bengal Government. So, there is no difficulty whatsoever.

The other question which has been raised is about the low price which the jute cultivators are getting. I have ascertained the position from the Foreign Trade Ministry and I am told that so far as the Jute Corporation is concerned, they are in the market, they are purchasing jute from the cultivators, but, because the market price is higher than the price fixed for purchase by the Jute Corporation, they have not purchased jute in a very big quantity.... (Interruptions) They have already purchased, as I have indicated, over 14,000 quintals of jute and I shall verify whether what the hon. Member has stated is correct, that the price is lower than the price offered by the Jute Corporation. If it is so, we shall see that the Jute Corporation goes in a big way to purchase the jute from the cultivators.

*SHRI BIREN DUTTA (Tripura West): Mr. Speaker Sir, through you I would like to raise a few points which are of vital interest to the State of Tripura. The Jute Corporation of India has not appointed any agent for the purchase of jute in this State nor they have made any purchase in a big way. They have given some money to some individuals and some companies for making this purchase. Unfortunately, Sir, these very persons and companies and some of the *dalals* of the Congress party on

[Shri Biren Dutta]

behalf of some cooperatives are operating in the field and with the aid of the police they are driving away the common traders from the market. When these traders go away these agents and *dalals* purchase jute at the rate varying from Rs. 8 to 10 per maund and they are selling the same to the Jute Corporation of India at the rate of Rs. 41 per maund and making a fabulous profit out of the whole transaction at the cost of the poor jute growers. I would therefore request the hon. Minister to kindly institute a high level inquiry into such transactions to find out the truth of the matter. I can produce hundreds of jute cultivators before the Minister if he so likes to prove the veracity of my statement. Sir, the position is no less deplorable in regard to the purchase of rice by the Food Corporation of India. The Corporation has not appointed any agent for such purchases and as in the case of jute only a few people have been entrusted to make the purchase on behalf of the Corporation who are not their official agents. Owing to transport difficulties and rise in price of petrol it has become virtually impossible for the cultivators to bring their rice to the market place and as a consequence they are being compelled to make a distress sale of their produce. You will no doubt be taken aback Sir, that these so called agents are buying rice at the rate of 70P per Kilo from the cultivators when the prevailing price in the market is between Rs. 3 and 4/- per Kilo. This only explains how the poor cultivators are being exploited. Tripura is a very small State with roughly an area of 4000 S.Q. miles and in the town the rice is selling as I have already stated is selling for Rs. 3/- to 4/- per kilo while the cultivators are being given only 70 P per Kilo as the sale price for one kilo of rice. In fact, Sir, the entire administration, Secretariat and the Ministerial Council of the Government are hand in gloves with the black marketeers and they are making hay while the poor cultivators are being fleeced.

As a result of good rains this year the mustard crop is good. Previously this

mustard used to be crushed locally for the manufacture of mustard oil in the *ghani*. It used to be sold for Rs. 5/- a kilo. It is indeed ironical that the local crushing of mustard has now been banned by the administration and as a result the sale price of mustard oil has gone up from Rs. 5/- to Rs. 9/-. It is still more unfortunate that while on the one hand the oil traders have been allowed to make huge profits out of this ban order, the cultivators are not being given any enhanced price for their mustard. In this way Sir, the price of all agricultural produce has been reduced and the cultivators are being paid much less than they should actually get keeping in view the rise in the sale price that has been effected by the traders. There is no medicine available in the State and people have but no alternative than to suffer and die because the train and plans communications have been completely disrupted. This disruption of communications and non-availability of commodities of every day use have pushed up the prices sky-high. You will be surprised to know Sir, that a cultivator has to sell 10 maunds of paddy if he has to purchase a pair of dhoti. This is the state of affairs prevailing in the State of Tripura today. The small traders have been forced to close down their shops and big traders are operating like sharks and making huge profits at the cost of people's miseries. Whatever little is left out, is being exported to Bangladesh. During October and December 14, quite a few thousand of cultivators have been arrested by the police. They have been beaten up mercilessly and a good many of them have been admitted to hospitals and the only crime of the agitators was that they were raising their voice of protest against this injustice and this intolerable situation that have been imposed on them by the local administration. The people have resorted to peaceful satyagraha but it seems that it has failed to create any impact on the administration. The export of tea from this State has virtually come to a stand still leading to the closure of many factories causing unemployment among the workers. It is an

intolerable situation. The picture that has been painted by the hon. Minister is completely misleading. When Tripura was an integrated State it used to enjoy subsidy on railway fare for export of jute, tea etc. This subsidy has been withdrawn and I would once again urge that the Government must forthwith grant this subsidy so that the export of these agricultural commodities is facilitated and benefit of it reaches the poor cultivators. I once again assert, Sir, that the Jute Corporation has made no direct purchase of jute in the State and I would urge upon the hon. Minister to institute a high level inquiry in regard to the purchase of rice and mustard oil also as I have mentioned earlier.

I hope the hon. Minister will reply to all the points that I have now raised.

SHRI F. A. AHMED: I have already indicated the position regarding jute. I got the information from the Foreign Trade Ministry and they have informed me that so far as the price of jute is concerned this is the position. But then, since hon. Members have raised a doubt about this matter, I shall again have a talk with the Minister in charge and find out the position with regard to jute.

About rice, there is no misleading statement. I have indicated the position at present. At the time of October there was a stock of over 8,000 tonnes of rice and wheat and the Tripura Government have not made any demands in the month of November and December. Sufficient stock of rice and wheat was there. With regard to certain other points raised, they relate to other Ministries concerned and whatever points have been made by hon. Members, I will find out the position and see to what extent the allegations are correct and what can be done by us to improve the situation.

SHRI JAGADISH BHATTACHARYYA (Ghatal): Tripura is a backward State and the supply position of essential commodities in that State has always been far from adequate. The transport system is not up to the mark. We have

made consistent and repeated demands in this House and also outside about these things and requested for the improvement of the distribution and transport systems but so far such demands have only fallen on the deaf ears. The situation has worsened because of the bottleneck of the transport system. The essential commodities are imported into the State of Tripura from neighbouring Calcutta and other places of India. They are not being rushed immediately to Tripura and because of the railway system's failure the foodgrains are not rushed there to the satisfaction of the people there. The Indian Airlines' strike has aggravated this present situation. In this context and in this situation, what is happening is this. The output of the peasants is being sold at a very low price. (*An hon. Member: At a low price?*)... at a low price in the rural areas, whereas in the towns and urban areas, the consumers have to pay a higher price. Low price is being used by the hoarders for their own purpose and they purchase and sell it to the consumers at a higher price and make profits. It is something like a double-edged sword and both the producers and the consumers are suffering at the same time.

The hon. Minister has also mentioned in his statement that a part of the rice allotted to Tripura had been supplied to West Bengal. We very much appreciate this gesture of our friends from Tripura. But I would like to know whether this has been done only because there was not sufficient transport available and the Tripura Government were not in a position to have it from the Centre and therefore, as an alternative, they had to give it to West Bengal.

A serious situation prevails regarding the tea gardens and also cotton production in that State. The prices of these things have also fallen. Tea gardens have closed down because there are no supplies from that quarter because of want of transport facilities. In this context, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether Government are ready to pay compensation to the peasants who have suffered loss because of distress sales

[Shri Jagadish Bhattacharyya]

at abnormally low prices. I would also like to know whether the hon. Minister would advise the State Government and provide them with sufficient finance to grant cash loans to the peasants till their output is lifted by Government agencies at a future date.

I would also like to know whether the subsidy that was being paid to the consumer goods sent from Calcutta, that is, from outside Tripura, since road transport required 1500 miles of travelling and therefore the price was very high, would again be reviewed.

SHRI F. A. AHMED: Again, the very same question has been raised. While raising this question, my hon. friend has mentioned about things being scarce in the State, because they are not going outside the State and therefore, the peasants are selling their produce at a much lower price. I have not been able to understand this; if there is a shortage because of less import, the price that producers should get should be much higher. Therefore, I am not able to appreciate that argument.

SHRI JAGADISH BHATTACHARYYA: Because it varies from one place to another.

SHRI F. A. AHMED: So far as jute is concerned, my information from the Ministry concerned is that the price of jute now prevailing in Tripura is higher than the price at which the Jute Corporation has been asked to purchase the jute from the cultivator and that is why they have purchased about 14,000 quintals. But I can assure the hon. Member that I shall make further inquiries and ask the hon. Minister concerned to see whether the allegation made by the hon. Member here is correct and whether some further action has to be taken in this regard.

So far as the question of subsidy and other matters are concerned, when we hear from the State Government, we shall certainly examine it and see to what extent we can help the people there.

PAPERS LAID ON THE TABLE

TEXTILE (PRODUCTION BY KNITTING, EMBROIDERY, LACE-MAKING AND PRINTING MACHINES) CONTROL AMENDMENT ORDER, 1973 AND RUBBER BOARD (SERVICE) AMENDMENT RULES

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI A. C. GEORGE):

I beg to lay on the Table:—

- (1) A copy of the Textile (Production by Knitting, Embroidery, Lace making and Printing Machines) Control Amendment Order, 1973 (Hindi and English versions) published in Notification No. S.O. 2533 in Gazette of India dated the 8th September, 1973 under sub-section (6) of section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. [Placed in Library. See No. LT-5927/73].
- (2) A copy of the Rubber Board (Service) Amendment Rules, 1973 (Hindi and English versions) published in Notification No. G.S.R. 1122 in Gazette of India dated the 13th October, 1973, under sub-section (3) of section 25 of the Rubber Act 1947. [Placed in Library. See No. LT-5928/73].

NOTIFICATIONS UNDER CUSTOMS ACT

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRIMATI SUSHILA ROHATGI):

I beg to lay on the Table:—

- (1) A copy each of the following Notifications (Hindi and English versions) under section 159 of the Customs Act, 1962:—
- (i) G.S.R. 1258 published in Gazette of India dated the 24th November, 1973 together with an explanatory memorandum.