

RAO BIRENDRA SINGH : Am I to reply both the questions or one question ?

SHRI SATYASADHAN CHAKRABORTY : I have put the question. He is helping me.

SHRI CHITTA BASU : Kindly take up Question No. 616 along with this because it is similar to Question No. 608.

MR. SPEAKER : I do not know whether it is similar.

RAO BIRENDRA SINGH : This question has come up in the House many a time. I will again reply it, Sir.

Central Study Team to visit West Bengal

*608. SHRI SATYASADHAN CHAKRABORTY : Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Food Minister of West Bengal drew his attention for the visit of a Central high-power study team to tour West Bengal and try to solve the State's problems which have arisen due to the policies of the Food Corporation of India ;

(b) if so, details thereof ;

(c) steps taken by Government in this regard ; and

(d) if no steps have been taken, the reasons thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND CIVIL SUPPLIES (RAO BIRENDRA SINGH) : (a) and (b). The Food Minister of West Bengal in his letter dated 22nd January, 1982 complained about the failure of the Food

Corporation of India to supply food-grains for public distribution system in the State during the period which, according to him, was critical because of loss in production due to absence of rain during September and October, 1981, pest attack in some districts and the cyclone disaster.

(c) The Union Food Secretary visited Calcutta during the second week of February, 1982 and had detailed discussions with the Chief Minister, Food Minister and Chief Secretary to the Government of West Bengal and the local officials of the Food Corporation of India. Steps to remove the various bottlenecks in the smooth functioning of the public distribution system in the State of West Bengal have since been taken.

(d) Does not arise.

SHRI SATYASADHAN CHAKRABORTY : The Hon. Minister said that this type of question has come up earlier for discussion. The basic problem is allocation. Then there is the question of quality and also distribution. The West Bengal Government has requested him to send a high-power team and he was good enough to send his Secretary, who had discussions with the West Bengal Government. But he has not specified the exact steps taken, even though the food shortage still persists. As will be seen, the allocation to West Bengal has been drastically reduced. The supply of foodgrains dropped from 3,55,000 tonnes in July to only about 2,20,000 tonnes in January 1982. There is a drastic cut in both rice and wheat.

MR. SPEAKER : I do not see any slimming on your part!

AN HON. MEMBER : He is living in Delhi.

SHRI SATYASADHAN CHAKRABORTY : This is part of the problem. Secondly, FCI is not able to supply foodgrains to different parts of West Bengal, although 355 blocks are covered. We have statutory rationing and modified rationing. Now the problem has arisen because of the drastic cut of supply of foodgrains. The second problem is that of distribution. The third is the quality of the rice you have supplied. You will be astonished to learn that roughly 42 per cent of the rice supplied is sub-standard, which cannot be consumed. This has been established by a joint inspection of your officers and the West Bengal officers. Yet, surreptitiously this is being supplied to the ration shops, and the people of West Bengal are compelled to consume it, because they have no other alternative except to depend on modified and statutory rationing. You have stated in your reply that steps are being taken. What concrete steps have you taken? What have you done to augment the supply, to ensure its distribution and to improve its quality?

RAO BIRENDRA SINGH : When I was passing through Calcutta in the beginning of this year, the West Bengal Food Minister met me and pointed out certain difficulties and problems they were facing. During discussions he did not ask for a Central Team to visit West Bengal. It was on my own that I asked the Food Secretary to visit Calcutta, stay there for two days and sort out the problems. It was on our initiative. After the visit of the Food Secretary, all the problems disappeared.....(*Interruptions*) The Hon. Members from West Bengal seldom appreciate what we are doing for West Bengal. They only try to take some political advantage, and they have always failed in it in the past. Every time they have tried it.....(*Interruptions*) Please listen to me.

SHRI SATYASADHAN CHAKRABORTY ; Why are you so angry?

RAO BIRENDRA SINGH : We are having three months' stock of wheat in West Bengal. They have also got two months' supply of rice. Compared to earlier periods, the movement of foodgrains to West Bengal in the last few months is a record. In January itself we despatched 2,82,000 tonnes of foodgrains and in February 2,45,000 tonnes.

SHRI CHITTA BASU : What is their requirement?

RAO BIRENDRA SINGH : I will give that information also.

Sir, allocation to them is 1,30,000 tonnes of rice per month and allocation of wheat...

SHRI SATYASADHAN CHAKRABORTY : Previously it was 1,75,000 tonnes. Every time the Minister is saying like this. This is the record. Are you going to challenge it? (*Interruptions*). Sir, I have given you...(*Interruptions*).

MR. SPEAKER : Professor, he is explaining. Let him explain. (*Interruptions*).

RAO BIRENDRA SINGH : Sir, upto the month of November last year West Bengal's demand for rice was 1,75,000 tonnes per month, and we had been allocating the same quantities upto November last.

SHRI CHITTA BASU : What about wheat?

RAO BIRENDRA SINGH : You wait for wheat. But the lifting by West Bengal for utilisation out of this quantity that was allotted upto November last year...(*Interruptions*).

MR. SPEAKER : Let him reply, You cannot interrupt. (*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER : Question Hour is over.