

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**FIRST REPORT**

Shri T. N. Singh (Chandauli): I beg to present the First Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Appropriation Accounts (Posts and Telegraphs), 1954-55, and Audit Report 1956, Part II, and Audit Report (Posts and Telegraphs), 1957, Part I.

**CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER
OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORT-
ANCE****FOOD SITUATION IN WEST BENGAL**

Shrimati Ila Palchoudhuri (Nabadwip): Under Rule 197, I beg to call the attention of the Minister of Food and Agriculture to the following matter of urgent public importance and I request that he may make a statement thereon:—

The drought conditions prevailing in various districts of West Bengal, its repercussions on prices of foodstuffs and measures taken to cope with the situation.

The Minister of Food and Agriculture (Shri A. P. Jain): As I stated in the House, I have visited West Bengal to study the food situation. During my two days' stay in Calcutta, I have met the Ministers and the officials of the State Government, the representatives of the consumers' societies, traders, millers, organised industry and numerous public men. My assessment of the situation is as follows:—

In the middle of last year, parts of Bengal, in particular, the Sunderbans area had been affected by cyclone. Then, in September, 1956, followed the floods which severally affected a number of districts, in particular, Murshidabad, Nadia and Burdwan. Although, large-scale relief operations were undertaken by the State Government, yet the economic condition of these areas greatly suffered. The rabi crop in West Bengal this year was affected by rust etc. Later on, rains were belated

and owing to drought conditions, sowing and transplantation of paddy was delayed causing unemployment to agricultural workers. The recent rains, however, came as a great relief and have improved the situation. The two districts of Nadia and 24 Parganas, between themselves, have just less than half the population of displaced persons, many of whom are not fully rehabilitated. The problem of food has been aggravated by that of refugee rehabilitation. In this background it is natural that there should be suffering and the districts of Bankura, Murshidabad, Nadia and 24 Parganas have suffered most.

The Central Government had been supplying 10,000 tons of rice and 40,000 to 45,000 tons of wheat per month for consumption in West Bengal. After the ban on export of rice from Andhra became operative, the Central Government agreed to supply an additional quantity of 5,000 tons in the month of August. Although the import of rice, including paddy in terms of rice, from Andhra, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa to Calcutta has in the first eight months of this year, been of the order of 1,60,000 tons upto the end of August as compared to 96,000 tons during the financial year 1955-56 and 1,11,000 tons during 9 months from April 1956 to January 1957, the market continues to be difficult and prices rule high.

The West Bengal Government, keeping in view the overall rice position of the country, requested the Centre that they would need 80,000 tons of rice during the month of September, October and November. The State Government have a little more than 7,000 tons of the imported rice in stock and have requisitioned another 8,000 to 9,000 tons of rice from the millers, thus the total supplies available with the State Government are of the order of 15,000 to 16,000 tons. The Central Government have agreed to meet the demand of the State Government for the supply of the balance. There

[Shri A. P. Jain]

is enough stock of rice in the Central Godowns at Calcutta and there is no danger of the agreed supplies of rice falling short.

It is fortunate that the people of West Bengal, though primarily rice eating, have reconciled themselves to consuming large quantities of wheat. The demand of wheat for districts was assessed by the State Government at 25,000 tons per month for September and October and 15,000 tons for the month of November.

The Central Government have agreed to supply the full quantity. The Central Government had been supplying from their depots in Calcutta 800 tons of wheat per day to the roller flour mills, 200 tons to fair price shops and 200 tons to Chakkiwalas. About 25 per cent of the wheat products manufactured by the roller flour mills is exported to the districts of West Bengal, Assam and other places, three-fourth of this export being generally made to the districts of West Bengal. The supplies of wheat and wheat products to West Bengal is going to be of the order of 60,000 tons per month. To improve the stock position of wheat in the Central Godown, Calcutta, my colleague, the Minister of Transport, has been good enough to make available berths at the Calcutta port for the discharge of food ships and it is hoped that regular supplies of wheat will be maintained.

Of late the price of atta went up somewhat in the city and the industrial areas of Calcutta. Though it is financially more advantageous for the roller flour mills to produce more of fine maida and suji, they have been asked to adjust the production of atta and maida in such a manner that sufficient quantities of atta, which is the poor man's food, are always available in the market at the prescribed price. A system of licensing of roller flour mills has just been introduced and if necessary it will be possible for the Government to regulate in future the production of various kinds of wheat products by the roller flour mills. The Chakki-

wala's numbering between 1,200 to 1,500 have been given an additional quantity of 200 tons per day but the supply of wheat through the fair price shops has been stopped. A further quantity of 200 tons per day has been placed at the disposal of the State Government as a reserve for such use as they consider necessary.

The State Government have decided to issue identity cards which will enable the holder to get one seer of wheat or wheat products per week per adult. The holder will be entitled to substitute what for rice but not rice for wheat. Thirty-seven lakh identity cards have already been issued in Calcutta and the industrial area and 40 lakhs cards have been issued in the districts. The State Government are carefully watching the situation and they may, if need arises, issue 13 lakh more identity cards in Calcutta and industrial area and 10 lakhs in the districts, thus raising the number of identity cards to one crore.

On the basis of nine ounce per adult per day, a quantity of 65,000 tons per month of foodgrains would be needed to meet the demand of one crore identity cards. Thus, out of the quantities supplied by the Centre, about 25 per cent will be left over to the State Government to meet the demands for relief, test works and other requirements.

The State Government have established a system of approved shops through which all the supplies of rice, wheat and wheat products made by the Government will be channelled. The roller flour mills and Chakkiwalas, will be directly linked with the approved shops. In order to minimise the chances of passing governmental supplies as open market commodities, the approved shops will not be allowed to deal in rice, wheat and wheat products other than those supplied by the Government. However to ensure them a reasonable income, they will be allowed to deal in other commodities such as pulses, sugar, salt etc.

Propaganda for encouraging consumers' resistance against payment of prices higher than the prescribed ones will be intensified and strict action will be taken against any approved shop which indulges in malpractices. The overhauling of the distributive machinery and the intensification of inspection and check, it is expected, will minimise malpractices.

The hon. Members will agree that the West Bengal Government have, for a considerable time, been facing a very difficult and complex situation. In a little more than a month's time the *aus* crop will be reaching the market. It should give some relief. Nevertheless, until the main *aman* crop comes to the market, by the middle of December, the situation will have to be watched carefully. Both the Central and the State Governments are fully alive to the situation and it is hoped that with the co-operation of the people, who seem to fully realise the difficulties of the situation, undue suffering will be avoided.

Shri A. C. Guha (Barasat): May I suggest that copies of this statement may be made available at least to the West Bengal Members before the discussion on food is taken up today in the afternoon?

Mr. Speaker: Any more copies with the Minister?

Shri A. P. Jain: I do not know how many copies would be available. Within the short time available now, it will not be possible to print new copies, but whatever copies are available I am prepared to place at the disposal of the hon. Members from West Bengal.

Shri Tangamani (Madurai): This statement is about West Bengal. I have given a similar calling attention notice about Madras, because the imported rice is going to be stopped from 1st October. I do not know what has happened to it.

Mr. Speaker: I remember to have admitted it for the 13th. That is my recollection.

RULES COMMITTEE

SECOND REPORT

Sardar Hukam Singh (Bhatinda):
I beg to move:

"That this House agrees with the Second Report of the Rules Committee laid on the Table of the House on the 7th September, 1957."

In this connection I would like to make some observations also.

This question of some kind of credentials being required from a Member when he comes to take the oath or make a solemn affirmation has been engaging the attention of this House for some time.

As early as 1926, Sir Fredrick Whyte, the First President of the Legislative Assembly, had to observe:

"On the elected Members presenting themselves to take the oath or to affirm, no further authentication of identity is required. This is a lacuna in the Assembly procedure and might be used as a loophole for malpractices."

It was felt even at that time that there was some lacuna in our rules, and some kind of credentials might be required from the Members to be produced when they came here to take the oath or make the solemn affirmation.

In this period since we got our independence we have had two cases here. One was not of a serious nature. In that case, a Member, a gentleman I should say, walked into this House. I was in the Chair. That was also pointed out and also watched him when he was coming in to occupy some seat, and then arrangements had to be made there and then to escort him outside. It was discovered that there was something wrong with his brain. So, no serious notice was taken of that. Anyhow, we made enquiries as to how he had slipped in.