

power and fertilisers might affect to some extent the production which otherwise on account of the special efforts would have registered a substantial rise. According to present indications, total production of rabi foodgrains for the country as a whole is expected to be higher than last year.

OPEN MARKET PRICES AND PROCUREMENT PRICES OF RICE AND PADDY IN WEST BENGAL

332. SHRI DWIJENDRALAL SLN GUPTA ; Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that there is a big gap between open market prices and procurement prices of rice and paddy in the State of West Bengal; and

(b) if so, the reaction of Government in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI ANNASAHEB SHIN-DE) : (a) and (b) Except in a situation where price support operation is to be undertaken, the open market prices of rice and paddy are normally higher than the procurement prices which are fixed for the entire season. To bring the open market prices closer to the procurement price, several measures such as supply of foodgrains through fair price shops, and adoption of anti-hoarding and other regulatory and austerity measures have been adopted. As a long-term measure, a decision has also been taken to take over wholesale trade in wheat from the Rabi Marketing season followed by rice to curb considerably the rise in the open market prices due to speculative hoarding and trading by interested parties.

CONSTRUCTION OF MANSAI BRIDGE IN MATHABHANGA

931. SHRI SANAT KUMAR RAHA : Will the Minister of SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government of West Bengal have sent a proposal to the Central Government to construct the Man-

sai bridge in Mathabhanga Sub-division of Cooch Bihar District in West Bengal and

(b) if so, when the proposal was sent to the Central and whether this bridge will be constructed for development of Cooch Bihar and North Bengal ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT (SHRI M. B. RANA) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The proposal was sent in October 1972. It forms part of the proposals submitted by the State Government for assistance in the Fifth 5-Year Plan under the Central Aid Programme for State Roads/bridges of inter-State or Economic Importance. The proposal will have to be considered while formulating proposals for the Fifth Five Year Plan along with similar other proposals received from other States keeping in view the funds available for the purpose and the *inter se* priorities of the various proposals on an all India basis.

LARGE-SCALE HOARDING OF FOODGRAINS

932. SHRIMATI PRATIBHA SINGH : Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that immediately after Government's decision to take-over wholesale trade in wheat and rice, the traders resorted to large-scale hoarding causing an artificial scarcity in the market with foodgrains prices soaring high, the increase in prices being about 40 to 50 per cent within a month or so;

(b) if so, how the foodgrains prices as prevalent in different Zones towards the end of December 1972 compare with the corresponding prices in the beginning of January and February 1973; and

(c) the steps taken by Government to prevent this artificial scarcity in the face of drought conditions in different parts of the country, and how many hoarders in each State had been given exemplary punishment to effectively prevent these malpractices ?