

DR. SHRIMATI SEETA PARMANAND: May I know, Sir, . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Next question. There is display of too much interest on the part of hon. Members.

*356. [The questioner (Shri Baba Saheb Savnekar) was absent. For answer, vide col. 2716 infra.]

STEPS TO CHECK HIGH PRICES OF SUGAR

*357. SHRI SITARAM JAIPURIA: Will the Minister of FOOD AND AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of high prices of sugar in the country; and

(b) if so, what concrete steps are being taken to check the soaring prices?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (SHRI A. M. THOMAS): (a) Yes, Sir. There has been some rise in prices of sugar but these are now coming down.

(b) Price of sugar is sought to be maintained at a reasonable level by judicious releases of sugar for sale by factories. A higher release of 2.25 lakh tonnes of sugar was announced on 8th February 1963 as against normal release of 2 lakh tonnes. The release was also given a week in advance of the usual time of release. I may also add that release of 2.25 lakh tonnes has been made yesterday.

SHRI ARJUN ARORA: May I know, Sir, what is the source of information.

SHRI SITARAM JAIPURIA: It is my question, Sir. May I know, Sir, whether the proposed creation of the Sugar Marketing Board is not a prelude to the introduction of controls and, of course, with all its consequences?

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SHRI A. M. THOMAS: With regard to the question of controls, I am not going to oblige my friend by saying whether there would be control or whether there would not be control. It is not advisable to say whether there would or would not be controls.

SHRI SITARAM JAIPURIA: In view of the acknowledged fact that the total production of sugar this year is less than what it used to be in previous years and particularly when the demand is more than the supply, how does the Government propose to maintain the prices?

SHRI A. M. THOMAS: Same question. In the body of the answer I have given how the Government intends to maintain the price level. With regard to the question of controls, I have already made my position clear. It is not advisable to say whether there would be control or there would not be control because that would lead to speculation.

SHRI ARJUN ARORA: May I know, Sir, the source of information of the learned Minister when he said that the prices of sugar have come down. The experience of everybody else in the country is that sugar prices have risen during the last fortnight.

SHRI A. M. THOMAS: The figures with me indicate, for example, that in February, 1963 in Delhi the price was Rs. 42.68. It has come down now to Rs. 42.44. In Kanpur, which is a market of all-India importance, the price in February was Rs. 41.80. It has come down to Rs. 41.34. In Calcutta, the price was Rs. 41.62. It has come down to Rs. 41.43. In Bombay, the price was Rs. 43.63. It has come down to Rs. 43.

SHRI A. B. VAJPAYEE: May I know, Sir, whether it is not a fact that the price of sugar has gone up after the presentation of the Central Budget and in the rural areas sugar is being sold at Rs. 1.50 per seer?

SHRI A. M. THOMAS: In anticipation of an increased levy of excise duty there was some hoarding of stocks and the prices had gone up. After the presentation of the Budget the prices of sugar have come down.

SHRI B. D. KHOBARAGADE: May I know whether it is a fact that higher prices of sugar are sometimes artificially maintained in some areas by not releasing sufficient quota of sugar, as has happened in Maharashtra?

SHRI A. M. THOMAS: As far as Maharashtra is concerned, the Maharashtra Government was saying that the prices were going up and we made a special release of 10,000 tons of sugar in February for the Maharashtra area.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Being a worldly-wise man, may I know whether after getting . . .

SHRI DAHYABHAI V. PATEL: Question.

MR. CHAIRMAN: To whom does this apply?

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: May I know whether after getting this brief from the officials, the hon. Minister enquired from any Member of this House as to the prices at which they have been buying sugar for the last 2, 3, 4 or 5 days and whether such enquiry has been made as any intelligent person will make?

SHRI ARJUN ARORA: Also whether the Minister has bought any sugar?

SHRI A. M. THOMAS: The retail price prevailing in Delhi is Rs. 1.10 per seer. It is not the official brief. These are figures which we get from the various markets in the country. As far as my information also goes, and reports in the Delhi newspapers are also to the effect that the price of sugar was showing some decline.

MR. CHAIRMAN: If it has fallen, it has fallen so little that people think that it is rising.

SHRI PANNALAL SARAOGI: The hon. Minister referred to liberal releases in reply to an earlier question. Then in reply to another question he referred to releases under exports of over 4 or 5 lakh tons. Should not the Minister take into consideration that if these liberal releases are going to continue in the country for the sake of internal consumption as also for export commitments, is he not going to burn his hands because there will be very little sugar left in this country?

SHRI A. M. THOMAS: I do not know which section of the public the hon. Member is serving by saying that production is 22 lakhs or 21 lakhs and then by saying that by such large releases we are going to burn our fingers. I refuse to answer the question of my hon. friend.

SHRI A. B. VAJPAYEE: On a point of order. Can the hon. Minister refuse to reply to a question put by the hon. Member, particularly when the question has not been disallowed by you?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I have not disallowed the question but I have conceded the point made by the Minister. Otherwise I would have asked him to reply. When he said he did not want to reply, I did not say that he should. I allowed the question and I also allowed the Minister to say what he said and conceded what he said.

SHRI PANNALAL SARAOGI: He did not reply to the question without understanding the implications.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think he was right. You had the prospect of sugar disappearing from the country altogether which is not a very edifying prospect and he did not want to say anything.