

anybody else, and nor even the whole Government has any right to be discourteous to us and to ignore any communications sent from here.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It is true that at the Business Advisory Committee, the Leader of the House and the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs were both present and this particular thing was put through but unfortunately they did not consult the Minister for Food. Anyway, it was agreed and it was put by Mr. Krishnamoorthy Rao to the House and it was agreed to. The expectation, therefore, was that there would be a discussion but as I told you, on account of circumstances beyond the control of the Food Minister, this had to be postponed. Will you say something?

SHRI H. N. KUNZRU: No blame is attached to the Food Minister. We are not . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: I am saying what his difficulties were.

DR. R. B. GOUR (Andhra Pradesh): If such is the situation, then the Leader of the House must come and tell that the time has to be altered and the House has to agree to it.

SHRI V. K. DHAGE: (Bombay): Since the Business Advisory Committee was the one that has decided upon this, the Leader of the House should have at least placed the matter before the Business Advisory Committee again. That should at least have been done but even that has not been done.

DR. R. B. GOUR: He must submit it to the House.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER ON FOOD SITUATION

THE MINISTER OF FOOD AND
AGRICULTURE (SHRI A. P. JAIN):
Sir, in the very beginning I wish to

assure you and this hon. House that it was never and it can never be the intention of the Government to show any discourtesy to the House. The House is well aware that we have never fought shy of giving information with regard to the food situation and we have no intention at any time to withhold any information from the House. Now in this particular case, as you have given the brief outline, the facts are that the matter came up before the Business Advisory Committee and some decision was taken. My Ministry was informed of it. In fact initially I was not consulted as to whether I would be in a position to deal with this matter and whether I have the full information about it. As soon as I got the information, my Ministry put itself in touch with the West Bengal Government—its officials, the Chief Minister, and the Food Minister—and we tried to gather as much information as we could. Many of the points, as you will remember, which arose in connection with this short notice question, required investigation in the districts and in some far-flung areas of the district. We could not gather that information and for any effective discussion of the food situation in West Bengal, it was necessary that we should gather full information as to the stocks present there. Prices in certain parts have gone up and I stated in the other House that stocks are being rushed. We wanted to know the reason as to why proper stocks were not kept. We could not get that information. Then there was some talk about some starvation deaths. Those matters had to be investigated. There was also a talk about some children being sold. Enquiries in that connection had also to be made. Therefore when I came to know of the debate, I informed your Secretariat that I will try to gather the information but it does not look that we can get the full information. I made sufficient efforts to get as much information as I could but I felt that I could not get full information. Even so, I am here. As the House is aware, I made a statement in the Lok Sabha yesterday. That state-

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ment contains the information which we had till yesterday. After that we got some information which is not full information and I don't think that it will be fair to the House that I should make any statement on incomplete information which has been received by telephone, and about which my Secretary says that he is not sure whether the figures noted down by him are correct. So my submission is, while we don't want to shelve any discussion or fight shy of any discussion, in fact it is our duty to place all facts and figures of whatever is happening in any part of the country before the House, nonetheless the House will also realise that when a Minister comes before the House, he must have authentic information which he can state with confidence. I submit that I am not in a position to do that. We have scrappy information and that too has been collected on telephone. We have not got the complete picture. Nonetheless I am prepared to place the statement which I laid in the Lok Sabha yesterday on the Table of the House and I am also prepared to supplement that information with some of the subsequent information which we got. I am prepared to answer any question which I am in a position to do but I am not prepared for a full discussion. You will agree with me that within the short time which has been available to this Ministry, it was not possible to gather the information. So, I might place the statement which I made in the Lok Sabha yesterday, on the Table of the House, or if you so desire, I will read it out. It is a two-page statement.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You can read it.

SHRI V. K. DHAGE (Bombay): May I ask, before he reads out, something? The hon. Minister has stated that he has been in communication with the Government of Bengal ever since the Business Advisory Committee passed the agenda that the food situation....

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Ever since I got the information.

SHRI V. K. DHAGE: Do I understand that the Minister does not keep in touch with what happens in the Rajya Sabha Business Advisory Committee? The bulletins are printed.

MR. CHAIRMAN: After he got the information, he says he has been in touch with the West Bengal Government.

SHRI V. K. DHAGE: Do I understand from the Minister that the West Bengal Government has not been co-operating with the hon. Food Minister? The matter is very serious. The Government of West Bengal is also concerned in the matter and should take serious note of it and give as much information as possible.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: There is the time factor. The enquiries need some time and the result of the enquiry has to be examined. We have not had enough time. The West Bengal Government have been fully co-operating. In fact they have been giving half-baked information to which they have not been able to give a final thought.

SHRI V. K. DHAGE: That really means that the Government of Bengal has been very much indifferent to the distress that is prevailing there. They don't seem to have any information...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Such suggestions are not warranted.

DR. R. B. GOUR (Andhra Pradesh): The hon. Minister said that he had some information to lay on the Table of Lok Sabha yesterday. When the Business Advisory Committee of this House has decided to have a discussion on this particular question, then he could as well have taken the same opportunity to announce to this House yesterday itself that he could not accept the discussion because he had not got enough information on the subject while laying the same statement on the Table here. The problem was raised in this House and that statement was made there. That itself is a serious position...

SHRI A. P. JAIN: The statement which I made in the other House was in response to a definite motion 'Calling-attention' but there was not a similar motion here; if I had made a statement on my own in the other House, I might have simultaneously made a similar statement in this House but that statement has been made in response to a specific motion.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You read your statement.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: "I visited Calcutta on 28th April, 1958 and held discussions there with the Chief Minister and Food Minister of West Bengal on the food situation in that State.

The prices of rice at Calcutta had fallen by about Rs. 2 per maund during the past few weeks. Before the withdrawal of restrictions on inter-district movements, the prices of rice and paddy were ruling high in the deficit districts and important consuming centres like Calcutta. Since the withdrawal of those restrictions, prices in the deficit districts and consuming centres had started declining, but even so, the prices in the Northern districts of West Dinajpur, Malda, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Darjeeling were still ruling high. Efforts to keep the prices under check have to be continued, and the most practicable way of doing so is to continue the distribution of foodgrains on a substantial scale through the fair price shops, more fair price shops being opened as and when necessary.

The final estimate of rice production reveals a shortfall of about 4 lakh tons, and the total shortage may be of the order of 7 to 8 lakh tons. It is not possible to make good this deficit wholly by supplying rice, and it is proposed to cover the gap by supplying rice as well as wheat. The Centre has already expressed its willingness to supply between 5 and 6 lakh tons of wheat during the current year. If the State Government desire to have a larger quantity of wheat for distribution in the State during the year,

the Government of India are prepared to make an even larger quantity available for the purpose. As regards rice, the State Government have already procured about 50,000 tons from within the State and they expect to procure an additional quantity of 25,000 tons. In addition, the Government of India have agreed to supply a total quantity of 1,75,000 tons of rice during the year 1958. Considering the supplies which should be available in the open market and the supplies which the Centre has already agreed to give, it would be reasonable to take the view that there would be sufficient supply of foodgrains, either wheat or rice. Since my return from Calcutta, I have been informed that fairly large quantities of wheat and rice have been rushed to West Dinajpur and other parts of North Bengal for relieving distress in those areas.

In certain parts of West Bengal, particularly in the North Bengal districts, the need has arisen for increasing the purchasing power of the population. Test relief works have been undertaken in these areas and other relief measures have been taken. The District Magistrates of these districts have been directed to augment test relief works and to include among them the use of Chakkis for flour making, construction of open wells and ring wells, excavation of dried-up tanks and cleaning of derelict water courses.

The Government of India have also agreed to advance a sum of Rs. 1.5 crores to the West Bengal Government to enable them to make *taqavi* loans available to farmers.

The Government are confident that, with the resources at their disposal and with the willing co-operation of all, they would be able to keep the situation in hand."

Now, Sir, I will give some further information which we have received subsequent to this statement. I must say that this is not very accurate information because we have not

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received a formal communication. This information has been jotted down as a result of telephonic conversation. So this must be accepted with a certain amount of reservation. The Chief Minister of West Bengal has said that the prices were generally steady but in certain areas including West Dinajpur the prices have declined by annas eight per maund. The Food Minister of West Bengal has informed that about 2,50,000 persons are working daily on test relief works—this information relates to 16th April, 1958—of whom about 19,000 persons are working in West Dinajpur. On telephonic enquiry from the Collector of West Dinajpur he was informed that the number employed on test works in West Dinajpur has now gone up to 22,000. Then, Sir, on 16th April 1,22,000 persons were getting gratuitous relief of two seers of wheat per head. In West Dinajpur the number on 16th April was 2,666. This number has gone up to 10,700. The State Government have distributed agricultural loans of about Rs. 38 lakhs of which West Dinajpur got Rs. 3 lakhs, Malda 2 lakhs, Cooch Behar 3·4 lakhs and Jalpaiguri 2·5 lakhs of rupees. There have been no starvation deaths; that is the information of the Minister.

With regard to the report about the sale of a child in West Dinajpur they say that their information is that a poor Harijan found it difficult to maintain his child. And his neighbour who was better off—the first man was a poor field labourer and his neighbour had some 10 or 15 bighas of land—was prepared to take over the child and the father gave the child to his neighbour who was childless. He also accepted some money from the neighbour. An officer went to him and said that if he wanted to take back his child the Government was prepared to give him the money which he had received from his neighbour but he said that the child was better off there and he did not want to take the child back.

Sir, that is all the information that I have got and I must say that this is all very scrappy information on the basis of which I could not present a full picture.

SHRI JAI NARAIN VYAS (Rajasthan): Was the neighbour also a Harijan?

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Yes; he was the next-door neighbour.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA (West Bengal): Sir, I can tell you that after giving the motion I also got in touch with our Party telegraphically and by air packet I have received more material than he has given. If you like, you can read it; I have got copies. It seems that the machinery of Government is not working.

Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he is aware of the statement made by the West Bengal Food Minister on May 6th that out of Dinajpur's population of 9,00,000, about 1,04,890 were on dry doles and he added that another 14,000 were engaged in relief works. I did not see his statement containing this information which I got from the Press reports sent from there.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: You had said something about people engaged in relief works.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: I said that according to the latest information 22,000 persons were working on test relief works in Dinajpur and about 11,000 persons were receiving gratuitous relief.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: The State Food Minister's figure is 1,04,890.

SHRI V. K. DHAGE: You mean to say that the State Food Minister in West Bengal has given this information?

SHRI A. P. JAIN: I am making the statement on the basis of information

given on the telephone and as it has been recorded here. If his information is correct, I will be only too happy because more people are receiving relief.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Perhaps the person who received the telephone suffers from the same trouble that I have.

Sir, the second question that I would like to ask of the hon. Minister is whether he is aware that the people in the affected areas as well as the public in West Bengal are demanding that there should be some modified rationing in the entire affected area and that 50 per cent. of the ration should be in the form of rice, whether he is aware of any such demand being made by various public organisations, public men and by various political parties. I do not know whether the Congress has made it or not.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Sir, I read in the newspaper that Mr. Bhupesh Gupta's party is making a demand that the Centre should procure four lakh tons of rice—no matter how it does—and supply it to West Bengal and that some sort of modified rationing . . .

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Sir, I regret that statement. I have also got information and the popular demand there is that there should be an internal procurement by West Bengal Government of 4 lakh tons of rice and that the Centre should increase its quota of rice in its supplies to West Bengal. I would ask you to impress upon the Minister not to distort what the people are saying.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You are impressing.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Then I would like to know whether it is a fact that there is a demand that a sum of Rs. 5 crores should be allocated by the Centre and by the State Government for gratuitous relief in order to meet the emergency that has arisen

there. The deficit is of the order of 8 lakh tons and . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Gupta, you give the whole thing to him and he will verify and find out.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: He will be running away with this.

MR. CHAIRMAN: He won't run away; you have got copies.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Then I suggest that this note be circulated by the Secretariat. I have not brought it for him only. I consider the opinions and sympathies of other hon. Members are much more important than the sympathies of an individual Food Minister.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Mr. Bhagat.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Sir, I lay this statement on the Table and . . .

THE INDIAN STAMP (AMENDMENT) BILL, 1958

THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI B. R. BHAGAT): Sir, I move:

"That the Bill further to amend the Indian Stamp Act, 1899, as passed by the Lok Sabha, be taken into consideration."

Sir, the object of this Bill is to express the existing rates of stamp duty for the instruments falling under entry 91 of List I of the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution in terms of decimal coinage.

As the House is aware, Sir, the rates of stamp duty under the Stamp Act are to be fixed in respect of some instruments such as promissory notes and bills of exchange, by the Centre, and the rates in respect of the others are to be fixed by the State Governments. In this Bill we are dealing only with the former category. The