

RAJYA SABHA

Saturday, 1st June 1957

The House met at eight of the clock,
MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

THE ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 1957

THE MINISTER FOR FOOD AND
AGRICULTURE (SHRI A. P. JAIN):
Sir, I move:

"That the Bill further to amend
the Essential Commodities Act,
1955, as passed by the Lok Sabha,
be taken into consideration."

I must apologise to this House for the inconvenience caused by the extension of the session by a day, but the House will realise that this is a matter of great importance and urgency. The scheme of the Bill is that if the Government finds that the prices are going up, or there is excessive hoarding leading to a rise in prices, Government is endowed with the power to issue a notification under the first paragraph of clause 2 of the Bill. This notification will remain in force for a period of three months. That emphasises the emergency character of the provision. After the publication of the notification, Government will get some powers besides the powers which are already available to them under clause (c) of sub-section (2) of section 3 of the existing Essential Commodities Act. Even under the law as it is, Government have the power to acquire essential commodities, but under the existing provision the price for the acquisition has to be calculated at the market rates prevailing in the locality on the date of the sale. This emergency provision contemplates to meet the state of affairs which has arisen on account of the withholding of stocks leading to a rise in prices. Now, if a commodity is acquired, under the ordinary provisions of the law as it exists, it means that the person who had indulged in an anti-social activity by withholding stocks, will be reaping

the profit of his anti-social activities. It is, therefore, felt that some change must take place in that provision, and the change provided in this amending Bill is that, instead of the price being paid at the rate prevailing in the locality on the date of the acquisition, the price for the commodity acquired will be paid on the basis of the price calculated on the averages of the prices prevailing in the locality during the preceding three months. The price so calculated has been given finality.

I think that in the present state of affairs which has led to a rise in prices, this measure is a comparatively moderate one. It is none of my intention to cause consternation in the trade or to disrupt the trade. I am firmly of the opinion that the time has come when the trade must be controlled so as to avoid its acting in a freakish or irresponsible manner. I hope that the passage of this Bill will lead to the establishment of a state of affairs when the use of this Bill will not be necessary. Should it be otherwise, we shall have to take necessary action. At the moment we are arming ourselves with comparatively moderate powers but the Government is determined to see that the upward rise of the prices, the undue rise in prices, is arrested, and if it becomes necessary and we find that we have to take more powers, I may have to come before the House for vesting Government with greater powers. There is ample evidence to the fact that hoarding by big stockists exists on a substantial scale in the country.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA (Bihar): Why don't you take action against them under the Preventive Detention Act? That Act is intended to prevent such things happening. You could have collected the necessary information or statistics and got them hauled up under the Preventive Detention Act.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It is for him, he says. (Pointing to Shri Bhupesh Gupta)

SHRI A. P. JAIN: I have already explained that the power under the present Act is to acquire any food-stuff at the prevailing rates and that this existing power only enables the stockist to reap the profit of his anti-social activity. Therefore, we are taking this further power of paying not at the rate prevailing on the date of the acquisition but at a rate based on the averages of the prices prevailing during the previous three months.

DIWAN CHAMAN LALL (Punjab): It may be higher.

SHRI PYDAH VENKATA NARAYANA (Andhra Pradesh): Sir, the three months' average . . .

SHRI A. P. JAIN: These questions may be put later on.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let him finish his speech.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: This measure, while it attempts to curb the anti-social activities, is not meant to penalise the trade, and due consideration has been paid to the interests of the trade as well as the consumer. Here I might make it clear that it is not our intention to apply this law to the small trader or to the farmer. It is intended to be applied to the big stockists who have been responsible for this state of affairs. I think that this Bill embodies. . .

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Why don't you make your intention clear in the law itself?

MR. CHAIRMAN: You go on.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Now, Sir, this Bill embodies the strong sentiments of the House to arrest the upward rise in prices. I do not claim that this Bill by itself can absolutely control prices. This is one of the measures which will help us to control the prices. In fact, we have got many more things upon which we are working, and I do believe that as a cumulative effect of all the actions that we propose to take, the undue

rise in the prices will be arrested. Thank you, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, you wanted to ask some questions. You can do so now.

SHRI PYDAH VENKATA NARAYANA: Sir, if this average rate happens to be more than the prevailing or the current market rate, then what will happen?

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Sir, what he wants to know is this. Supposing the three months' average rate is more than the prevailing rate, then what will happen?

SHRI A. P. JAIN: That, Sir, is not a sign of the rise in prices. It is a sign of the downward trend of prices. And then I would not apply this provision.

DR. P. C. MITRA (Bihar): Sir, my question is this. Is it hoarding for getting excess profits in future and not for family consumption?

श्री ए० पी० जैन : इससे इसका वास्ता नहीं है ।

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is right, Dr. Mitra.

SHRI M. VALIULLA (Mysore): Sir, if a farmer happens to be the stockist also, is he going to be exempted simply because he is a farmer?

SHRI A. P. JAIN: No. Then he becomes a stockist.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Motion moved:

"That the Bill further to amend the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, as passed by the Lok Sabha, be taken into consideration."

Now I find that Mr. Bhupesh Gupta is already on his legs. But I have to announce that you take about ten minutes each, because we have got eight or nine speakers. Otherwise there will be no quorum.

SHRI H. N. KUNZRU (Uttar Pradesh): Sir, it is the business of the Government to maintain quorum. We are not bound to act in accordance with the convenience of the Government. They may have a hundred other meetings. But this House will go on in spite of these meetings.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Sir, you have been very magnanimous to the hon. Minister by helping him in so many ways to steer clear of the difficulties to which he was put. But at least you will be good enough to give us ample opportunity to express ourselves on such an important issue as the food question. And as my hon. friend has explained just now, it is for the Government to maintain quorum.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Sinha, I am merely saying that 9 or 10 speakers have given their names. Even if we give them 10 minutes each, it will go on till 10-30 or 11-00. Therefore, go ahead; ten minutes each.

SHRI H. N. KUNZRU: Sir, this is a Bill on which speeches cannot be limited under any rule to 10 minutes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: With the consent of the House.

SHRI H. N. KUNZRU: No, Sir. The House does not give the consent.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shall I find out whether the House consents or not?

SHRI H. N. KUNZRU: Sir, they have got the majority in the House.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA (West Bengal): Sir, I will not be in a position to say anything in 10 minutes. If it were the intention of the House that the speeches should be restricted to 10 minutes, I had better not speak.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You had better start speaking.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Anyway, Sir, I hope you have sensed the feelings of the House.

Now, Sir, day before yesterday, when the Government made the proposal that this Bill should be passed during this session, we agreed immediately despite the fact that we would not be getting enough time. We too, Sir, consider that a measure of this kind has to be passed and many more measures are necessary. Therefore, we are prepared to sit for the whole day, if you like, to arm the Government with the power required to combat the terrible food situation that is developing in our country. We cannot have the luxury of meeting somewhere and passing resolutions and other things when we know that we are asked by the people to devise ways and means and other measures to combat the famine conditions that are prevailing in the country today. And I hope, Sir, that the ruling party will understand its responsibility in this matter.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ruling party in Kerala or here?

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Sir, I am referring to the ruling party here, because I can tell you that if only it were a choice between discussing the food situation in the Kerala Assembly and a meeting of the Communist Party, the Kerala Assembly will have precedence and the people will have precedence.

Now, Sir, the situation is very serious and very drastic measures are necessary to handle the situation, and we are prepared to give the Government all the necessary powers that they require. But I find from the speeches made by the hon. Minister elsewhere that he is still suffering from complacency. I do not know whether these powers will be adequately and effectively used, if the Government does not shed its complacency. On the food front, Sir, there have been natural calamities; there have been hoarding and profiteering; there have been price speculations and there have been all kinds of things. But equally there has been the complacency on the part of the Government which has contributed to

[Shri Bhupesh Gupta.]

the aggravation of the situation. Now, Sir, this is only an empowering legislation which contemplates a certain type of action, whereas many more actions are needed.

Now, Sir, I would try to give the picture of the food situation as we see it today. Sir, the food index for wholesale prices in April 1956 was 360; in August that year it rose to 397. Then in December 1956 it jumped up to 413·9. In March this year it was 520. That is how the index of wholesale prices is steeply rising. Sir, in the beginning of 1956 the rice index stood at 547. In November 1956 it rose to 609. In the last few months you have got an average of 610. With regard to wheat, in April 1956, it was 501 and in January 1957 it was 607. In the case of jowar, in April 1956 it was 235 and in December 1956 it was 328. Then, Sir, in respect of bajra in April 1956 it was 248 and in January 1957 it was 376. In the case of *dal*, during the last few months it rose from 357·1 to 439·6. The annual average of cereals was 34 per cent. higher in 1956 as compared to the previous year. Now, Sir, pulses again rose by 37 per cent. Other food articles also rose from 235 last year to 247, an advance of another 5 per cent. Now, Sir, these are the figures taken from the various official statistics. This alone does not by any means give you the correct picture because the retail prices are much higher. So, Sir, this is the situation. And here is the hon. the Food Minister sitting before us. I would remind him of what he said in August last year on the floor of this House. He got up and said like a knight-errant "Wait for two weeks. The food prices will come down crashing." That was his utterance in the Parliamentary proceedings. Then again, Sir, he appeared in Parliament and made a tall utterance. I would ask the hon. Minister to explain what has come down crashing. What has come down crashing is his policy, is his attitude in this respect. That is all that I want to say. Since

he made that statement, hoarding and profiteering have increased and the prices have gone up. How is it that when such a powerful Minister of the Government was speaking in this House, the hoarders and profiteers could ignore him and could take steps not only to make a farce of what he had been saying, but also to create and aggravate the food crisis? An explanation is necessary, and he has to give it.

Now, Sir, I will offer that explanation. Government took a long time even to appreciate that the food situation was serious. We were making representations after representations, but they could not see that the food situation called for a drastic and a bold thinking. Sir, there were demonstrations and *hartals* in the streets and the cries of the starving people one could hear all over the country; starvation deaths began to be reported and famine conditions prevailed all over West Bengal, and the Eastern U.P.—he comes from U.P.—was in the grip of a terrible food scarcity. Bihar steadily drifted to scarcity and near-famine conditions. The Rajasthan Governor, in his speech, pointed to the difficult food situation. Bombay was again in the front-line for its quota of food. Himachal Pradesh presented again a picture of scarcity. It was all over India. They are not small pockets. Vast areas presented that picture. Our hon. Minister did not take proper note of it in time. Otherwise action would have been taken a long time ago. We have seen how they take action against movements and all that, but here the action was delayed. That contributed to that situation. I think if in last November, the Government had taken action, we could have really averted much of the things that followed.

Now, we are told here in this country by the hon. Minister that production is going up. Now, here I would not go into that. Lots of statistics are given. Recently, the Agriculture Ministry has circulated a

kind of cyclostyled statement in which we are regaled with statistics which tell that food production in the country is going up. Maybe the production has gone up or may not be so but here again they are complacent. The statistics are collected. I have consulted the experts in this matter who collect that. I cannot give their names because many of them might get the sack. I have consulted them. Two methods are followed. One is called the *annawari* method by the Revenue Department. That method is very simple. They go to the villages. They know that if the production is below a certain level, say six annas, then of course a remission has to be given, remission of rents and other things. Their tendency is always to show that it is above six annas when it is four annas or so. This *annawari* method is a method of under-stating the situation, is a method of statistical manipulation in order to help the Revenue Department in its activities so that the peasants, when they demand and deserve rent remissions, do not get it. So much about the *annawari* method. The other method followed by the Revenue Department is a sample survey method. That again is simple. They go to the villages, make a sample survey which does not show very much study of the situation and anyway does not cover vast areas. These two methods are being followed. You will find difference between the figures obtained by these two methods. Then there is another technique, namely, the reporting areas. Certain areas which had been producing food before were not reporting. Now they report on the food situation and the production. That also goes to inflate the food statistics. Actually, food production was taking place there even before all these things started. Therefore, this *annawari* method, this Revenue Department sample survey method and the so-called reporting areas and new coverage for statistical purposes, give us a somewhat exaggerated and inflated picture. Nobody should be misled by that picture. Beyond that I cannot say.

They say that rice production is all-time record now. How is it that precisely in the rice areas like Bihar, Eastern U.P. and Bengal you have got famine conditions? I would like to know why it is so. Rice production, according to you, has reached all-time peak. The figures are given and at the same time, it is precisely in the rice-growing areas that we find the shadow of famine lengthening out every day. An explanation is needed.

About wheat, again, I need not go into that. They say that the production is more than last year's. Now, they take the base year as 1950-51 in order to show how the prices have not gone up very high. All this is jugglery with statistics. You must look at those people who are hungry, semi-starved and starved. You must look at those people who are coming out in the villages and the streets of Calcutta in their thousands. You must take notice of the great general strike and *hartal* that took place the day before yesterday in Calcutta against not only high taxes but also against high food prices. In the other place some gentleman of the Treasury Bench said that he knew why this strike and *hartal* took place and he suggested that, well, if he did not know that, then it would be doing less than justice to his meagre intelligence. I don't want to cast aspersions on anybody's intelligence, but I do not again want that he should go with a wrong impression. Everybody knows that a whole State cannot go on general strike and *hartal* in this manner unless the situation is extremely serious. Everybody is moved. For the benefit of the Members opposite, I want to tell that here is the food front where Congressmen, Communists, P.S.P.—all men of goodwill, all men who stand by the people unite so that we don't have the repetition of the spectacle of famine of 1943. It is a common front of men who stand by the people, who swear by the people, who want to do service to the people. It is not a partisan or political question. This is the position. How it

[Shri Bhupesh Gupta.] happens? Hoarding started taking place and Government did not stop hoarding. Scheduled banks advanced money for food speculations. When we drew the attention of the House to it, nothing was done. Later on, an order was passed asking them to stop loans and advances against food stocks. Then again towards the end of last year, these orders were withdrawn, nobody knows why. Because the harvesting time came, the order was withdrawn. In the first three months the advances by the scheduled banks against food stocks went up from Rs. 12·85 crores to Rs. 24·85 crores an increase of about Rs. 12 crores in three months. This speculation has got to stop. The money that was advanced was utilised for holding the food stocks and holding the nation's food to ransom. When we drew the attention of the Government to this matter, the hon. Home Minister, who is a living example of complacency, told the country that these advances were meant to help the agriculturists. I think a lot of rubbish is said about the food situation from the official side, but never such a fantastic nonsense had been uttered as this because everybody knew that it is not the poor agriculturists, the tillers of the soil, who got the advantage of these advances. The money went to these speculators, hoarders and profiteers who used it for buying and cornering the foodgrains of the country to land our economy and our people into this abysmal situation. This is what happened. I would like to know why it happened. Therefore, let there be no mistake about it as to how it happened.

Then comes hoarding and profiteering. Now, they are taking powers. Could we not have taken action against hoarding and profiteering because the hoarders and profiteers are not elusive pimpinals whom you could not detect? They function in the villages, they are the big landlords, they are the big village sharks and known profiteers. They function in the big towns with their agencies and

they are well known firms in this country. Was it not possible for the Government to take action against them? If the Government was in need of the support of the people, they could have made an appeal to them at least. I can say that in a number of States we, of the Communist Party, would have shown how these stocks could be recovered from the clutches and the hoards of the profiteers, and would have helped our people. We would have done it. In every village we would have set up squads and volunteer brigades to protect the people's food from the hands of those people who bring about calamity and famine. Nothing of the kind happened. When we made appeals for popular cooperation, the Minister turned down the suggestion. They fight shy of us. They don't like to have anything to do with us. I don't know why. The Preventive Detention Act was not used against them. Personally, I am against Preventive Detention Act being used against anybody. The hoarders could be caught without resorting to the Preventive Detention Act only if. . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Fifteen minutes are over.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: . . . the Government will give up its present attitude of solicitude for the hoarder. This is how things happened.

Then again they decided to close the fair price shops. I think there were about 18,000 shops operating at that time. That decision was again a green signal to the hoarders. When the hoarders and profiteers came to know that the fair price shops would be closed, they thought that here was an opportunity to pile up stocks and make profits. I think in Andhra, Tamil Nad and Bihar they closed a number of fair price shops. That is how they encouraged it. I accuse the Government of direct abetment of profiteering and hoarding in the matter of food. Today they are taking powers but I am not sure whether they will be used against them. Unfortunately for our coun-

try and more unfortunately for the food policy, the poor hoarders and profiteers were seen at the time of the election as the greatest champions of the ruling party. I do not know how they feel about it. Now, that comes in the way and I may tell you frankly. They were the biggest campaigners. Having sat on the people's food they became overnight champions of the Congress Party and we were confronted with the gentlemen profiteers as the biggest campaigners and canvassers of the Congress Party. That embarrassed good men on the other side. I see their difficulty but I do not know how to help them. Probably, in the other place, in the Constitution House or the Club, they will be discussing this problem as to how to separate good Congressmen from the profiteers. Their party is endeavouring it.

MR. CHAIRMAN: "Now, Sir, to conclude . . ."

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: I am a little harsh about this matter, Sir. I know it and you will permit because the food situation requires a little plain speaking.

Now, Sir, this is the position. I need not go into that story again. I would ask the hon. Minister to hold an all party conference at the State level to discuss the food situation with us and other like-minded people who want to face the realities and I think we can devise ways and means of tackling the problem apart from this legislation.

Now, in regard to the other thing, what I would like to ask you to do is this. First of all, as has been very rightly said, in this Bill the price that is sought to be given would be too high. I think it is a premium on profiteering and hoarding. Why should we have the average of three months? Everybody knows that you are taking that period into consideration when the price of rice was speculative and high. I do not think this is right and I do not think that we should make a present out of the Exchequer to the

great men of the profiteering world because they had succeeded in holding the stocks of the country and denying the people their food. I would rather suggest that we should contact the big quarters, take over their stocks and, once the stocks have been taken over, discuss the question of money after the people have been fed. That is what should be our approach. It is no use trying to announce in advance that so much money would be paid for the foodgrains or that Government would be buying at this rate. We do not like such things. What is important today is to get hold of the stocks in the quickest possible manner and with the least possible cost to the Exchequer. I am talking about the big profiteers and the hoarders. What I fear is that this measure will be used on others leaving those people alone because they are on the right side of the Congress Party. They may go after the peasants and the peasants would be subject to all kinds of harassment. I would not like that kind of thing to take place. The big hoarders and the profiteers have got to be called to account and their stocks should be requisitioned. We had been suggesting Government to purchase in the villages but the Government did not accept our suggestion. The socialism of the ruling Party is a very interesting thing; I find it takes some of the things, if only in words, after two or three years we had spoken about them. Then again it falters. We want to protect those gentlemen from those faltering steps and we want them to understand socialism a little better and not to pride themselves with the idea that their socialism is up to date and ours is a hundred years old. I therefore say that it is very essential that Government should 'buy foodgrains at a price which is good from the point of view of the country and not in the interests of the profiteers. Fair price shops should be opened in large numbers and 20,000 is no good. Far more fair price shops are needed in distressed and famine-stricken areas. Not only should food supplies be rushed there but we

[Shri Bhupesh Gupta.]

should have a sort of modified rationing or some such thing introduced so that people can get food. This is also very essential. Fair price shops should be opened in the villages all over the country wherever they are called for and at the same time distressed areas should be given special attention. Tax relief and gratuitous relief should be provided for in those areas to fight the food situation. In some cases it will be necessary to remit the collection of revenue, water rates and other taxes. In other cases it may be necessary to put a moratorium. That is a matter which has to be discussed and I think we cannot go about collecting these taxes from the areas which are afflicted today.

Now, Sir, Dr. B. C. Roy . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: You better wind up without bringing in B. C. Roy. He is not here.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Dr. B. C. Roy, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, addressed a Press Conference last Tuesday and said that he did not think that the food prices would go down. He asked the people to live on vegetables and other things and that they should not go in for cereals. Sir, new dietary conditions are prescribed for the people. I think it is very demoralising and I would like to know why it is so. What makes Dr. Roy feel nervous about the situation there? I suggest that the Government should sell the foodgrains at a price which the people can afford to pay. The ruling price is over Rs. 10 in very many places and that price is beyond the reach of the common man. We want the foodstuffs, especially cereals, to be sold at a price which the common man can afford. We have put all kinds of burdens on him and it is good that some of the burdens have been removed as mentioned in the other House yesterday. Some little things have been withdrawn many other things remain—thanks to the efforts of the Members opposite and of this side and more so

due to the movement outside particularly the knock of the general strike. It is very good but still the cost of living is very high and people cannot afford to pay. People cannot live by looking at the food stocks that you have piled up or by looking at the statistics of your food imports or by reading about the wheat agreement and all that. They want food here and now. They are starving and famished. Therefore, it is necessary for you to supply food at a price which they can afford. That is an important aspect of the matter.

Sir, you are rightly impatient. I am sorry but I say the food situation needs drastic handling, and I would appeal to the hon. the Food Minister—one of our misfortunes has been that over the last twenty years in this country our Food Ministers have always been failures; I do not like this no matter to which party they belonged—even now to make an effort to make this a success. Even at this late hour it is possible for him to take drastic action because over this issue we do not bring any party line; we do not bring political barriers. In this issue we feel that there is scope for common work, common activity, provided the Government sheds its complacency and adopts a new food policy so that we can make an all-out drive on the food front to save our people from hunger and famine.

SHRI SANTOSH KUMAR BASU (West Bengal): Mr. Chairman, I propose to be very brief on this measure which has been brought before the House not one day too soon. In the course of my observations on the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address I said, referring to the hon. the Food Minister, that if he could persuade the hoarders to bring out their stocks in the open market by offering them suitable prices, his labours would be amply rewarded. This, Sir, is the first step towards the realisation of that objective and my first words should be words of appreciation and congratulations to the hon. the Food Minister for having

taken this much-needed step. The hon. the Food Minister has brought this Bill before the House within a few days after the debate on the President's Address and I am glad to find that the market price which was the only criterion for fixing the foodgrain prices or the terms of acquisition by Government is going to be substituted by an average price which is to be determined by statutory authorities. The market price, Sir, is an element which is vague, uncertain and indefinite. It is susceptible to contest and agitation in law courts and can open the flood gates of controversy in courts of law unsuited to the state of emergency through which the country is passing in the matter of food. In the circumstances there can be no two opinions about the necessity and urgency of this measure, as the hon. the Food Minister has stated in his opening remarks. Sir, I would only conclude by saying that if such a step had been taken a little earlier when food prices were not soaring, and the price of rice was ruling in Bengal at the rate of Rs 18 or Rs. 19, I think the question of hoarding could have been tackled and solved long long ago. At that time the Government went to America and to Burma for purchase of foodgrains at a higher rate than what was ruling in Bengal at the time. I would request the hon. Minister to clarify this position, as to why no such steps were taken at that time and the hoarders had a free hand in hoarding up their stocks requiring the Government to come out with a measure of this kind and that at this late stage. I understand, Sir, that the estimate that has been made in West Bengal is that 10 per cent of the foodgrains produced this year has gone into hiding. It is a serious problem which the West Bengal Government are trying their very best to tackle. I am sure that this measure now before the House, if passed into law, will strengthen the hands of the West Bengal Government.

Sir, my hon. friend, Mr. Bhupesh Gupta has talked of profiteering. He has been good enough to attribute it

to several Members on our side of the House. I have no knowledge. But is profiteering the monopoly of any such Members? There can be profiteering in foodgrains. There can be profiteering in the troubles and turmoils of the country for political purposes. That also is not quite unknown to my hon. friend, Mr. Bhupesh Gupta.

I am glad, Sir, that this measure has come up before this House. The hon. the Food Minister started with an apology to the Members of the House for any inconvenience that might have been caused to them on account of this debate. Sir, I had to cancel my reservation yesterday as well as today, and I do not know if I shall get any further reservation within two or three days . . .

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: That you will get.

SHRI SANTOSH KUMAR BASU: . . . but, in spite of that, I do not mind in the slightest degree any inconvenience so long as I am in a position to stand up in this House and to give my wholehearted and enthusiastic support to this measure.

SHRI H. N. KUNZRU: Mr. Chairman, my hon. friend the Food Minister apologised for bringing in this measure at so late an hour, but he has given us no adequate reason for not having placed it before Parliament much earlier. When did the Government become aware of the fact that food prices were rising? We have been aware of it for months. I think the Finance Minister too has expressed apprehensions more than once with regard to the rise in food prices, but the Food Minister himself has, I believe, consistently minimised the seriousness of the food situation. The price statistics have shown clearly for some time that prices were rising and that in spite of the opening of fair price shops and the other measures that Government took, there was no sign that the prices would be stabilised. In spite of all that the Government did, it was clear that prices were showing a tendency to

[Shri H. N. Kunzru.]

rise and yet, Sir, he comes to Parliament one day and says, "Please waive all formalities. I have to deal with an emergency. So please consider my Bill immediately."

There is one other fact that I should like to bring to the notice of the House in this connection. Government realising that the position was becoming very difficult has taken steps to secure foodgrains from other countries. So far as I know, it has entered into an agreement with Burma to get two million tons of rice from it during the Second Five Year Plan period. It has also taken steps to get, I think, about 3·5 million tons of foodgrains from America and perhaps from Australia too. The total quantity of foodgrains thus ordered is about 5½ million tons. Under the agreement that they have entered into they can even obtain, I think, about 80 or 90 thousand tons more, or even a little more, perhaps about a million tons more. They, therefore, knew that the present situation would soon become more difficult in the near future. That is why they took steps to enter into an agreement with other countries to obtain the food supplies badly needed by the country. And yet the Food Minister comes to us at the eleventh hour and wants the Bill to be discussed as an emergency measure. Is this, Sir, fair to the House? There may be hoarding and it may have to be dealt with, but I object very strongly to the procedure that Government has adopted. This is not the first time, Sir, that Government have acted in this manner. In spite of protests in Parliament they have been remiss in their duty on many occasions, and I am sure that this is not the last occasion when we shall be able to accuse them of being remiss in the performance of their duty.

Now, Sir, the Food Minister says that foodgrains are being hoarded. Is this a complete exposition of the rise in food prices? We all know that the food position in East Bengal is very unsatisfactory. It is also known from

newspaper reports that rice is being smuggled into East Pakistan. This is not a new phenomenon, something that has come to light during the last four or five or six days. This too has been known to Government for a pretty long time. It was also known to them that in spite of what they were doing smuggling was increasing.

And yet they slept over the whole affair and came before Parliament when it was going to adjourn. There may be some hoarding in the country, but I should like to ask the Food Minister to tell us whether this Bill would provide the remedy that is needed. This Bill cannot prevent anybody from smuggling rice into East Pakistan. It was said once that the rise in price of foodgrains was the result of hoarding. When prices are rising, people who hope to gain by the rise in prices may resort to more than one unsocial practice in order to secure some gain for themselves, but to think that these illegal practices are the only cause for the rise in prices is to make a serious mistake. Government should realise that their own policy is partly responsible for the rise in prices. They are indulging in deficit financing every year and then they come to us and talk about hoarders and people who indulge in unsocial practices and so on. The Government, from the Prime Minister downwards, have got into the habit of saying that the economic position of the country must be developed as rapidly as possible, that we must be prepared to make sacrifices at present for the benefit of future generations. Then we must recognise our own responsibility for what is happening at the present time but there was no sign of that in the speech of the Food Minister. The burden of his speech was that food prices were rising because of the existence of hoarders in the country. I hope, Sir, nobody will be taken in by this statement. The Parliament has been discussing the food situation for many years and there are many Members of this Parliament whose memories are not so short as the Food

Minister thinks. We know almost quite as much about the food situation as he himself does. Now, Sir, granting that something has to be done to check the rise in prices even temporarily—the Government, as I have shown, has known for a pretty long time the trend of the prices—what has it done in order to secure a fair quantity of foodgrains in this country in order to be able to distribute it when prices rose? That is a far better way of keeping prices steady or bringing them down than letting things take their course and then suddenly trying to adopt drastic measures. I think the proper course for them to follow would have been to try to purchase a fairly large quantity of foodgrains at harvest time. I do not say that they should have entered the market directly. That would have sent prices up but they could have entered into an agreement with a grain dealer as they did in the past on certain occasions and obtained the foodgrains needed by them at moderate prices but they have lost that opportunity. They again slept over the affair and woke up when it was too late. Now they cannot purchase foodgrains in partnership with any grain dealer, nor can they enter the market themselves, and in spite of the amendment that we are now considering I think that higher prices will have to be paid for any stocks that may be acquired in future than would have had to be paid, had the Government followed the course referred to by me. Now, Sir, these are matters which call for a full explanation from the Food Minister. I listened carefully to his speech but he was completely silent on these topics. He should have realised that Members of Parliament when considering his Bill would almost inevitably ask for the information for which I have asked and yet he did not refer even once to them. He thought that we would be in such a hurry to pass this Bill that he would be able to secure an easy passage for it.

Apart from this, I should like to get from him on this occasion an account of the policy of the Govern-

ment, at least in outline, on this subject. What is it that the Government propose to do in future to keep prices down? He knows, I am sure, as well as any other Member of this House, that this measure of his cannot provide the remedy that the situation needs. He may be able to get a few tons—a few hundred tons or even a few thousand tons—of food here and there but that will not solve the problem before us. It is therefore, incumbent on him, when he asks us to agree to his measure, to explain to us also the policy that the Government wants to adopt in regard to this matter in future.

SHRI BISWANATH DAS (Orissa):
Mr. Chairman, I always prefer to be a back-bencher but this is an occasion when I feel that I should say something. Sir, I for myself fail to understand why so intelligent a person as my hon. friend, the Food Minister, chose to come forward with a Bill merely to get frustrated by the time he gets the sanction and goes to the country to put into operation the provisions of this Bill. Sir, for myself I would have preferred to promulgate an Ordinance, take the available stock on hand at average prices as has been laid down in the provisions of the Bill and then come before the legislature for sanction and for amendment of the Act. I think that probably would have helped my friend better than the procedure he has chosen at this stage. Sir, the Food Minister himself and my hon. friend, Dr. Deshmukh, come from *mofussil* and they are in close touch with the people and conditions in the *mofussil*. I, therefore, fail to understand why this kind of approach to this all-absorbing question was felt necessary at this critical hour. We sympathise with him; we are prepared to co-operate with him in fighting against this evil.

Sir, my hon. friend the leader of the Communist Party gave figures and quotations. They are all unnecessary. Everybody knows that prices have been rising. The index has been rising both in general and in respect of food prices also. No citation or

[Shri Biswanath Das.]

quotation was, therefore, called for. All that is necessary is to help the Government to struggle and to fight against this dire evil in this critical hour. While I accord my fullest support to the principles underlying the Bill, which had been so clearly stated, I want to know certain things. Sir, the hon. Prime Minister, in the course of the debate in the Lok Sabha, has stated that the Bill aims only at dealing with the hoarders. I should like to know whether they have in mind the agriculturist or the businessman. If it is the agriculturist, I am afraid that the powers that have been given in this Bill will be a very serious one. And if it is for businessmen, I have no hesitation to say that my friend will find that in very many cases—I do not accuse of—the accounts are changed and the so-called average prices will be nothing short of the prices which prevail today. Therefore, the very purpose underlying the basic principles of the Bill will be frustrated and defeated.

Sir, then I come to another important issue, namely, that my friend has got ample powers under the Act of 1955 and has got a good machinery at his command and control to watch the food situation in the country. I say that this approach was necessary at the beginning of the year, just after the harvesting season, that is, harvesting of rice and harvesting of wheat. The fact that the price is rising and the index number is rising is known to everybody and I take it that it must have been known to the Government and especially to the Food Ministry. I should like to know why the Food Ministry did not keep my friend aware of the rise in the price situation, which has assumed such serious proportions. If they did not, I should say that the Food Ministry with such a huge machinery has not been very helpful to my hon. friend. Equally do I complain why we Members either of the parties or

of Parliament have not been taken into confidence to offer our humble advice and to place ourselves at his disposal soon after the harvesting season with all the available information he had on hand. I for one go for close co-operation and collaboration of the Members and the Ministers, of the State Governments and the Central Government, in this serious matter. The whole Five Year Plan will be a nullity if rise in prices go on in the way they are.

Then I come to the question of actual operation of the Bill. The prevailing average market rate for the past three months before notification is to be determined by an officer authorised by the Central Government. That is the power that has been asked for and we propose to concede it and grant it. As I have already stated, I repeat, if it means cases of businessmen, the number is bound to be small; but if it concerns also agriculturists the number is going to be very big and the locality and local price will assume very serious proportions. What is going to be the definition of a locality? Are you to leave it to the sweet will and mercy of a petty officer who is going to be the food officer for a local area or to some responsible person? From where are you to get so many responsible persons, if you mean the 5,50,000 villages constituting India? So, that is an important question on which I would like to have some guidance from my hon. friend.

Sir, then regarding the local prices, what are the local prices? How could you get them? Who is going to determine these prices and on what basis? And when I consider these difficulties I cannot visualise what amount of corruption and oppression it will lead to, if you, without confining yourselves within small limits, expand the limits of operation of this Bill.

Sir, you have to realise one thing, namely, that you are coming at a difficult time. This is the month of

May. Practically the production, whatever it was, most of it, has gone from the hands of the agriculturist to the hands of the businessman. However much papers might agitate, might say that the *ryot* has got the power of retention, I join issue with them. I feel that that power of retention is not there and foodstuffs have actually gone from the hands of the middle class and minor agriculturist to the hands of the businessman. Therefore, I would like to have information on this issue, as to the scope of operation of this Bill.

Then, Sir, if you are going to fight against this dire disease of rise in prices, what is the co-operation that Government is getting from the banks? No hoarder, no businessman will be able to stock paddy or rice long, or for a considerable period, or a considerable quantity of paddy or rice or any foodstuff, unless the banks agree to advance. Government have full control over the banks. The Reserve Bank has now absolute control over these banks. I should like to know what steps Government have been taking and from what period in this regard? I know certain steps were taken at a very late stage, but steps now and then do not help, unless general direction is given and both the Reserve Bank and the State Bank as also the other banks, that depend mainly on the Reserve Bank, assure the Government fullest co-operation in this regard.

With these words, I have no hesitation to appeal to the hon. Members of the House—both Opposition and the Government—to concede my friend all the powers that he wants with this limitation, namely, that he must do all his best to fight against this evil with the minimum of trouble and minimum of oppression and corruption.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Mr. Chairman, before I make my remarks on this Bill, I must congratulate my very esteemed friend Pandit Kunzru who has very candidly

and forcibly championed the cause of this House. Its privileges and its rights, and I lend my whole-hearted support to him for what he has said on this matter for preserving the procedure that we have adopted for transacting business in this House.

[MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN in the Chair.]

Sir, as an anti-hoarding measure I welcome this Bill, but I am sorry to say that this Bill is misconceived and its provisions will defeat the purpose it has in view. Sir, this Bill, I maintain, will be welcomed not so much by the starving millions of India but by the hoarders themselves, and to me it appears, Sir, that the provisions of this Bill have been drafted in consultation with the hoarders themselves. It may sound curious but I feel that the provisions of this Bill will benefit them more than those who need to be helped against the activities of the anti-social elements. Sir, if you look at the Bill, it says that the price that would be paid would be the average price for the last three months. Now, who are the people who have hoarded? People who have big resources, the big businessmen and the traders, and those who have got big farms and are big agriculturists. Now, these people will not come to purchase the foodgrains today in the market. They must have hatched their plans long ago before the harvest came in. Usually, Sir, the hoarders buy the foodgrains as soon as they come into the market, or else the big agriculturists keep the produce with them after the harvest is over and they do not sell it in the market when they see that there is a tendency for a rise in prices. Now, they have to gain in any way. Whatever price you will pay them, they will be the gainers. Now, there is a difficulty. They know that the people are conscious, that there are political parties who have been agitating against these anti-social elements, and now they have found a *via media* in the provisions of this Bill to hand over all their stocks to the Government themselves at the average price of the last three months, and the

[Shri Rajendra Pratap Sinha.]
average price has been the peak price that India has ever seen in regard to foodgrains.

Sir, it is strange to me that although the Government have been armed with ample powers by more than one legislation to protect the people from the anti-social elements, they never use them and they have never used them. Only the other day, Sir, my attention was drawn to a statement made by the hon. the Food Minister of West Bengal and he is reported to have said . . .

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: We call him Famine Minister.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: That is good. My hon. friend calls him Famine Minister. He has brought about famine, and I will presently show how he has done that. He is reported to have said in a Press Conference that to the best of his knowledge there were 4 lakh tons of rice hoarded in West Bengal itself by big agriculturists and traders. This is a very serious statement that he has made and a very important statement too. All that West Bengal requires is 4 lakh tons of rice to meet its deficit. Now, the Government of West Bengal or the Government of India has an eye on the stocks that are lying there, these 4 lakh tons. Why have those stocks not been requisitioned when the prices were low? They had that power to requisition those stocks. Why were these people whom they knew to be indulging in these anti-social activities not caught hold of under the Preventive Detention Act? I demand an answer to this question from my hon. friend sitting over there.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: They were engaged in the election campaign, the ruling party.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: People's sufferings are more important than any elections. They require

greater attention than even the elections.

SHRI JASPAT ROY KAPOOR (Uttar Pradesh): Do you want this Preventive Detention Act to be used a little more freely?

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Certainly, it is meant for being used against the anti-social elements.

SHRI JASPAT ROY KAPOOR: I hope you will not raise a hue and cry then, but give your support.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Certainly, we will give you full support, if you use it properly, but you always use it in a wrong way.

Sir, I was telling you that when the Government knew that there were stocks of 4 lakh tons of rice in West Bengal itself, why those stocks were not requisitioned. That is the only quantum of rice you want to meet your entire deficit, and that rice is in your own State, and that has not been taken. Why? And the people have been allowed to suffer and to die of famine.

Sir, there is a very important point, to which I referred at the very beginning, that these people have got their stocks with them from the harvest time when the prices were very low. The prices have risen in the last three months. Now, who is going to benefit by the provisions of this law? It is these hoarders who have stocked the grains from the time of the harvest, and when the curve of prices has gone up, they will get the average price. It may not be the highest price but it will be the average price which will be very much higher than the price prevailing at the time of the harvest.

Sir, only fifteen days ago the hon. the Deputy Minister for Food gave us in this House figures regarding agricultural production in this country. They were very heartening figures,

and a rosy picture was drawn of agricultural production in this country. Sir, the trouble is that my hon. friend has been caught in the meshes of his own statistics. It is claimed that food production was higher than last year and, as has been pointed out by my hon. friend sitting to my right, that rice production has reached its highest peak. And the irony of fate is that it was just at this time that we were having the peak prices. If the experience of 1952-53 or 1953-54 is any guide, the prices ought to have gone toppling down. In those years, we had a record food production and the prices went down. But now we find that, in spite of the higher production, prices are shooting up. Therefore, it appears to me that the statistics that the hon. Minister gives to the House are entirely misleading and if he is going to base his policy on those statistics, it is bound to be an erroneous policy. At this point, I am reminded of our late Mr. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai and we feel like giving our compliments to him now, Sir, the greatest merit of that departed soul was that he rejected his own statistics and went to the fields to find out the facts. He then initiated a policy which confounded his own statistics. He was big enough to prove himself wrong and I had expected that the hon. Food Minister, who was his life-long associate, would have got some spark from him and probably, that is why he was asked to get into the shoes of the late Mr. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai. But I find that that spark, if there was any, has been extinguished by the bureaucratic machinery and bureaucratic statistics that have been piled upon him from day to day. And I would ask him to bear in mind that an ounce of facts is worth a ton of theory and if he could base his policies on the facts as they are, then alone the food problem in the country would be solved. Otherwise, he would continue to remain in the mess of his own creation. If you look at the past history of our food problem, you will find that the question can only be tackled if we make an adequate supply to meet the requirements of the people. No amount

of jugglery will help the situation. And as has been rightly pointed out by my friend, Mr. Bhupesh Gupta and my revered friend, Pandit Kunzru, unless the Government gives up its attitude of complacency, there can be no solution to the food problem.

Sir, the Government considers that the food production has been going up and therefore, prices would be kept down. But the facts have belied this supposition. The Government must make immediate arrangements for supplying to the market adequate quantities of foodgrains. Now, the Planning Commission also, in a very much different context, said, that, even if our food production was very high and the prices were low, we required at least six million tons of food from abroad during the Second Five Year Plan and they had always urged that a major portion of this quantity of food must be imported during the first quarter or the first half of the Second Five Year Plan. Now, remember, Sir, that this figure of six million tons was drawn up when our production was high and the prices were low. And I am sure, if the Report were drafted today, the Planning Commission would have recommended a very much higher figure of imports.

What is needed today is to make a physical import of large quantities of foodgrains to meet the situation. That alone will bring down the prices. Now, an economic journal has drawn up an equation that, if we want to bring down the food prices by 15 per cent., we must import 2.5 million tons of foodgrains into this country. I can . . .

THE DEPUTY MINISTER FOR FOOD (SHRI M. V. KRISHNAPPA): You are condemning statistics by statistics.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: I am just giving you the figures; you are always fond of statistics. He cannot get convinced by facts; he can be convinced only by statistics. That is my difficulty, Sir.

[Shri Rajendra Pratap Sinha.]

If you take the Planning Commission's figures, 40 lakh tons ought to have been imported by the first quarter of the Second Five Year Plan out of which I find, you have imported 14 lakh tons of foodgrains in 1956. This is what your figures say. My revered friend, Pandit Kunzru, has referred to the various arrangements that the Government has made for importing foodgrains. But I have been crying hoarse on more than one occasion to find out from the Food Minister what the actual position of imports has been, either from America or from Burma, in the year 1957, what his plans are and how much he proposes to import by the end of this year. That is to say, I would like to know from him what his expectation of actual physical imports during the year 1957 is and out of that, how much he has imported and how much he proposes to import during the rest of the year. If you succeed in getting large quantities of foodgrains, that alone will suppress the market. If you make a statement that such and such is going to be our actual deliveries in the different months, that will have a sobering effect upon prices. Why can't you make that statement? Or are we to infer that your plans are not yet certain; you are not sure about your imports and you think that the quantity that you will import will not be enough? (*Time bell rings.*) I will just finish, Sir.

Therefore, I insist that, even if it comes to cutting down the Plan in other respects, it should be done because the people must be kept alive; they must be fed. Where is the Plan if people starve and die, while we can boast of our developing the economy in other respects? The first responsibility of the Government should be to feed the people. You cannot just say that we have got ample stocks. The question is that food must be within the reach of the people. That is to say, the food prices should be brought down in such a manner that the people can afford to purchase it and

eat it. It is no good offering to the market foodgrains at the prices which are beyond their reach. Sir, because of the failure of the food crop there is a steep rise in unemployment. The people have no employment on the rural side. And, therefore, they cannot afford to pay these high prices. After all, Sir, by your works on the rural side, how much employment do you create? The proportion is very small. It is better, Sir, to bring down the food prices by subsidising the food itself.

Now, Sir, there is only one more point and it is this that the Central Government must take upon itself the responsibility of helping the State Governments to grant large-scale remission in the rents. There has been a failure of crop over large areas in the different States, and there is a demand on the State Governments that there should be a remission of rent. Now we know the resources of our States. The entire resources of the States are more or less controlled from the Centre. The Centre should give an undertaking to the States that they will meet 75 per cent. of all the rent remissions that the States will make. Just as you are giving aid to the State Governments for providing gratuitous relief, in the same way you must give an undertaking to the State Governments that the Centre will meet 75 per cent. of the deficit created on account of the remission of rent. That is very important. You tax the rich; you raise your resources; you curtail your Plan. But the people must be fed in order that they may live. And that is the first responsibility of the Plan and of the Government. Thank you, Sir.

SHRI N. C. SEKHAR (Kerala): Sir, I must at the outset say that we are very much worried about the food situation in the country. Particularly when this subject was taken up for discussion the other day, we made references to the various States where the food situation was becoming very very grave. Now, Sir, I remember the words uttered by our Deputy Minis-

ter while he was in Hyderabad. He said that the situation in Kerala was quite o. k. and there was nothing to be worried about. Then, Sir, he said that the position was quite comfortable. That was the sort of statement being made by certain irresponsible people from the various corners of this country for which I am very sorry, Sir. Then, Sir, similar statements he had made the other day in connection with the question of Malayalees who were brought to Bhopal for colonisation purposes. When he was there, he said that the Malayalees were living as though they were in Kerala. Sir, such a statement should not be made by

SHRI M. V. KRISHNAPPA: Sir, I rise on a point of personal explanation. The hon. Member refers to my statement that I made from Hyderabad. It is true, Sir, that on the 8th of last month I went to Madras, Andhra, Mysore and came back to Hyderabad and made a statement about the overall picture of the food situation, especially in South India. And in that statement, Sir, I made a reference to Kerala also. I will repeat the very words that I uttered there. I said that in Kerala also the food situation was comfortable. These words I borrowed from their Food Minister, Mr. K. C. George. Sir, on the 6th or 7th April the Communists came to power in Kerala, and on the 14th of April, Sir, the State Food Minister made a statement from Trivandrum wherein he stated that the food situation in Kerala was comfortable. These very words, Sir, I repeated from Hyderabad after about 20 days that in Kerala the food situation was comfortable. These are the very words uttered by the Communist Food Minister, Mr. K. C. George. I am prepared to place that very statement on the Table of the House. May be, Sir, for our friends, one day the position is comfortable and on another day it is not comfortable. But for us it is a statement from the local Minister and I had to repeat the same words. That is what I have done.

31 RSD—2.

SHRI PERATH NARAYANAN NAIR (Kerala): I want to know, sir, whether the hon. Minister wants to base his policy on only one particular point in the statement of the Food Minister of the Kerala State.

SHRI N. C. SEKHAR: My point is that the Congress Minister at the Centre should not be so irresponsible as any other Minister, whether he is a Communist, or a P. S. P. Minister or a Congress Minister in any State. I am not here to defend any Minister, whether he belongs to the Communist Party, or to the Congress Party, if he makes any irresponsible statement before the public. Well, that is not the real situation. So, you cannot depend on only one word or one sentence uttered by a Minister. It must be the responsibility of the Central Minister to study the real situation obtaining in each and every State. You should have gone to Kerala and studied the position yourself instead of relaying on the statement made by

SHRI AKBAR ALI KHAN (Andhra Pradesh): Do you mean to say that a Communist Minister should not be depended upon?

SHRI N. C. SEKHAR: Well, Sir, I am speaking about the food situation. I am not speaking about any Communist Minister. That is it. It is not that I am not welcoming this Bill. I do welcome this Bill although it is belated. But my whole point is that the Central Food Ministry should have taken stock of the situation which started becoming very serious some three months back.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Sekhar, do you want the Central Ministers not to believe the statements of the State Ministers?

SHRI N. C. SEKHAR: Sir, here it is not a question of believing a particular Minister or not.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is the main question here.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Well, if he can quote the Kerala Food Minister who is a Communist, he can as well quote us.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You are not a Minister. You are not responsible for the administration.

SHRI PERATH NARAYANAN NAIR: What I object to is that he is basing his policy only on a single word out of context . . .

SHRI N. C. SEKHAR: Anyway, Sir, let him place that statement on the Table of the House. Otherwise I do not believe it.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is what he said.

SHRI M. V. KRISHNAPPA: Yes, Sir.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Sir, what is he going to place on the Table? Do I understand that he has got any written statement from the Kerala Food Minister to be placed on the Table, or do I understand that he is going to report the conversation as he likes?

SHRI M. V. KRISHNAPPA: Sir, the hon. Member referred to my statement in the press and he said that I stated that the food situation in Kerala was comfortable. I am going to place on the Table the actual words used in my statement in the press and the words used in the statement of the Kerala Food Minister, Shri K. C. George.

SHRI PERATH NARAYANAN NAIR: Anyway, Sir, it is a very novel thing for the Central Minister to single out one word here and there . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order, order.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: He was a Member of this House and then he became a Food Minister. Why not

quote us? We may become Ministers.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: When you become a Minister, he will quote you.

SHRI N. C. SEKHAR: The next point that I want to raise is this. I want clarification from the Minister. Here this measure is intended to check hoarding and if any hoarding is there, you will take it by giving the price which was prevailing three months before that date of taking over. I ask, whether the Ministry intend to take the grains only from merchants hoarding food or also from big farmers. For instance, there are cultivators or farmers in our part big ones, who cultivate about 3000 acres. That is capitalistic farming. They have immense quantity of grains to be put in the market. Such persons behaved in such a way during the last famine during the war as they hoarded the foodgrains and then released to the market in a clandestine way, that is by black-marketing at enormous prices which the people could not afford to pay. The same thing will take place, is going to take place and is taking place. Will Government take these hoardings from them at the market rate or controlled price, whatever it may be? You say in clause 2(iii) (c):

"where neither clause (a) nor clause (b) applies, the price calculated with reference to the average market rate prevailing in the locality during the period of three months immediately preceding the date of the notification."

Suppose you notify in Kerala, according to this clause the price you have to stipulate is the price prevalent three months before. That means giving an enormous price and our people cannot afford to pay. The price in March and April was equally high. Soon after you stopped bank advance to merchants and hoarders, with the opening up of fair price shops, there had been a slight tendency for the price to come down.

The Government step was meant to be short-term, and when you started paying advance to the merchants, the price of rice in the open market immediately shot up. That is the situation. So the price then prevailing and the one that is prevailing now is nothing different. So, are you going to take this clause as the basis to fix up the price, soon after you de-hoarded a big quantity of rice in a particular area? That is what I want to know.

Then in the new clause you say:

“(3A) If the Central Government is of opinion that it is necessary so to do for controlling the rise in prices, or preventing the hoarding, of any foodstuff in any locality, it may, by notification, in the official Gazette, direct that notwithstanding anything contained in sub-section (3), the price at which the foodstuff shall be sold in the locality in compliance with an order made with reference to clause (f) of sub-section (2) shall be regulated in accordance with the provisions of this sub-section.”

Will the Central Government take steps to study the whole situation in each State in consultation with the States? Or will it make statements as was made by the Deputy Minister? My fear is because such statements have done havoc to many . . .

SHRI A. P. JAIN: I can only place reliance on the State Ministers. I will not ignore them because they are my eyes and ears.

SHRI N. C. SEKHAR: That is why I ask whether the Central Government will take steps after consultation with the particular State Government? That must be done. Of course, if I say openly, I was about to take that particular Minister to task because he took the line of the Central Ministers who make baseless statements to create complacency in the people by saying that the food situation is good. It is after that, you could have seen, such statements

never appeared in the press. With these words I again ask the Minister to consult the particular State Government and then come to a decision and take the necessary steps on the basis of this Bill. We welcome it.

SHRI PYDAH VENKATA NARAYANA: Mr. Deputy Chairman, the prices of foodgrains are rising even after the advent of harvest crops. Though the sessions of the Lok Sabha and this House commenced on the 11th and 13th May respectively, the Government never thought of introducing this measure earlier to the last date there and a day later here. On the other hand some Members of the Treasury Benches made speeches that everything is all right regarding the supply of food. That shows the utter ignorance of the Government regarding the actual supply position of foodgrains in the country. I wish the Government had advised the President to promulgate an Ordinance even in the month of April containing these provisions. It is an admitted fact that there is rise in food production and therefore there must be a fall in the prices of foodgrains but it is rising. Why? Because the price and the movement of foodgrains are not controlled. There is a lot of hoarding. Though some restrictions are placed on banks, still several banks and others have been advancing a lot of money at higher rates of interest no doubt and that induces these big merchants to hoard the foodstuff in large quantities almost everywhere. There is no free flow of these foodgrains. There is not sufficient supply of these foodgrains reaching the actual consumer. There is the reason why there is an enormous rise everyday in recent months in the prices of foodstuffs. Government have now introduced this amending Bill. It is all right, but even under the existing Act, Government are armed with powers which have not been exercised. Though the main Act is there on the Statute Book, Government have not exercised their powers and hereafter they will do well to exercise those powers rightly and adequately.

[Shri Pydah Venkata Narayana.]

The present Bill is to amend the original Act so far as the calculation of the rates is concerned. The existing Act empowers the Government to requisition the stocks or to order sale of the hoarded stuff to a person or class of persons at the prevailing market rate. The only change now sought to be made by this amending Bill is to pay the seller the average rate for the last three months immediately preceding the notification. Prices were rising no doubt during the last three months in respect of rice and some other commodities. There used to be a fall in one week and a rise in another week, fall in one month and rise in another month. So, the power in the hands of the Government to order the stockists to sell the goods at the prevailing market rate is obviously something good, but Government are now seeking more effective powers which is in one respect worse than what it is today. If the average of the three months happens to be more than the prevailing market rate, the seller has to get a higher price than he ought to under the existing Act. The amendment now sought to be introduced is defective in that respect. I have given notice of an amendment in regard to the calculation of prices and I have said that either the average of the three months or the market price whichever is less may be paid. If we do not have such a provision, then the sellers will get much more than what they are entitled to under the present Act. When I am given a chance to speak on that amendment, I would refer to this in detail. I hope that the Government would accept that position and elaborate that point at that stage.

SHRI T. BODRA (Bihar): Mr. Deputy Chairman, there is nothing in this Bill for me to oppose but I shall try to prove that the present Food Ministry in the Central Government has been more on the side of complacency, and is incapable of handling

the food situation of so many millions of helpless Indians. I come from South Bihar. The House is aware, floods came in North Bihar in the months of July, August and September. At the same time, there was drought in South Bihar, i.e. in the districts of Shahabad, Gaya, Hazaribagh, Ranchi and Singbhum, and some parts of Orissa. Because of this, rice production was not adequate and the Government of India also made some statements on the floor of this House. Now, we are having this Bill today on the first day of June, but I expected some such Bill in the month of November or December 1956. If, however, Government had no time to come with a legislation like this in the month of November or December 1956, they could have utilised the power that the President has got, under the Constitution, to issue an Ordinance. Everyone in the country knows that in the rice-producing areas the months of March, April, May, June, July and August are the most crucial months for the cultivators and the farmers. In South Bihar rice was selling at about Rs. 17 a maund in the months of December and January; in the month of March it came to Rs. 20, in April it came to Rs. 22 and in May it was Rs. 25. The coarse rice that I purchased was Rs. 25 a maund, and in Rajgangpore, where the cement Factory is, they purchased rice on the 19th of last month paying Rs. 25 per maund, and they found the rice mixed up with stones and other things. There is every chance of the food prices going up to Rs. 28 to Rs. 30 per maund. Therefore, I am not in a position to say any sort of good words about the Food Ministry.

In Bihar we have got only three newspapers, The Indian Nation, Searchlight and The Aryavarth. Although there is much pressure brought upon the editors of these papers, still if you read them, you will find mention about so many tragedies, suicides, etc. A mother jumps into a well along with her three or four children merely because she has not got a morsel of food to offer to her

children. The father and mother commit suicide along with half a dozen children by lying on the railway lines for want of food. Whenever these papers come out with reports of starvation deaths, these reports are referred to the District Magistrates. They send back a report saying that there was no starvation death but that death was caused because of dysentery, diarrhoea or indigestion. What happens is this: I have actually seen it in the scheduled areas of Ranchi, Singbhum, etc. A family does not get anything to eat for four or five days. The people are hungry and they have not got a single grain in stock. Whenever they come across some jungle vegetables or leaves or rotten cereals, they take about two or three seers and boil them. Because the people have had nothing to eat for three or four days, they pounce upon this thing and you can easily imagine that when a man who has been hungry and starving for three or four days, consumes two or three seers of this, there will naturally be indigestion and he will naturally die. This is what actually happens and is narrated when reports are called for by Government. The reports are also partially correct when they say that a fellow died of dysentery or diarrhoea or indigestion. The number of these deaths are growing in each and every village. They have been there during the month of May and they will continue in the months of June, July and August. These deaths are not actually due to dysentery or diarrhoea but these are starvation deaths. In addition, if you read the papers, you will find a number of dacoities being committed, a number of murders taking place and the number of burglaries increasing. Whenever deaths happen like this, the District Magistrates suppress the facts and figures of starvation deaths, of suicides and of murders and dacoities. They will call them unnatural deaths, but the fact is that the number of murders, the number of dacoities and the number of burglaries are increasing in the State of Bihar and in some parts of Orissa. These are proofs to

convince the Food Ministry that the Food Ministry has not been able to handle the food situation satisfactorily. All these facts and figures supplied to us and published by the Publications Division do not sometimes convince me. I think they are bogus or merely propaganda figures. If these were not bogus and if these were not merely propaganda figures, the prices of foodgrains and other essential commodities would have been controlled earlier and they would not have been allowed to soar so high right from Rs. 17 to about Rs. 25 or Rs. 26 which is the price today. If the Food Minister is prepared to come with me to Ranchi, Jamshedpur, Singbhum, etc., I will be able to convince him.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA:
The Food Minister refuses to do that.

SHRI T. BODRA: He should not be associated with any Minister of the State, or any police officer.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND (Andhra Pradesh): He takes paper news only.

10 A.M.

SHRI T. BODRA: I do not think, Sir, that this legislation will do us any good. It will not stand us in good time. This legislation is too late. The prices have already gone up. If the average price for the last three months is taken, it will never be less than Rs. 21 or Rs. 22 at least in my part of the country, and do you think that it is within the purchasing capacity of the general public to purchase one maund of rice at the price of Rs. 22 per maund and to be safe for these three or four months? No. The purchasing capacity of the general public, of the people of Bihar is only to the extent of about Rs. 16 or Rs. 17, and unless the food price is fixed at Rs. 16 to Rs. 17 per maund, I do not think this legislation will be of any help to us.

Again this legislation will be useless specially because of the fact that the

[Shri T. Bodra.]

State Ministers, the District Magistrates and the S. D. O's., who are in charge of running the administration, who are the custodians of the lives and property of the people, are the best friends of the profiteers and hoarders, and this legislation will not be used against those profiteers and hoarders. Therefore, Sir, I would submit that in order to be able to tackle the food situation fair price shops should be opened at a distance of every five or ten miles. Relief works in the sense of construction of roads, excavation of tanks, building of mud schools, some sort of village hospitals, some sort of relief work should be opened, and let the people be given rice at concession rates, at Rs. 16 per maund, on the road side. Let them work on the road from 8 o'clock in the morning to about 6 o'clock in the evening. As I said, let them be given rice at the rate of Rs. 16 per maund. Gratuitous relief should be given to them. We have got the Natural Calamities Act. Under this Act the Government is empowered to allocate sufficient sums of money to give relief to the people under those circumstances, and especially there should be no taxation in the scheduled areas, and there should be remission of rent. If you go to Ranchi what do you find? At least one thousand Adivasis are daily entraining at Ranchi for the tea gardens, one thousand lean and emaciated, almost half-naked people with all their ribs coming out and their cheeks sunken, they are all migrating to the tea gardens in search of food. Perhaps the hon. Minister has never seen this picture or sight and therefore he is complacent. What I submit is this. If the Food Minister is incapable of handling the food situation he should follow the example of Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri and resign. He should not be complacent like this. A Minister in his position would have resigned if he were in Russia or if he were in America or even if he were in England, and our Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri has already set a precedent. When the particular Minister is in-

capable of handling the food situation, which involves the lives of so many millions of people, he should not try to be in the chair even for a day, and that is my submission. Unless this is done the food problem will not be improved.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, in so far as this Bill is an attempt at controlling the hoarders I welcome it provided some of the mistakes are rectified and some drafting errors are removed from it. But I have been trying to think why is it that this Bill has been brought so late in this session and why did the Government not take any steps for the last three months. After all the hon. the Food Minister and the Deputy Minister are patriotic people and if they have been considering this problem seriously what is the real reason behind it, why they have delayed this measure so long? I have been trying to think about it and I have come to the conclusion, Sir, that it has been deliberate because during the last two or three months, every time a question had been asked in this House either in connection with the discussion of a Resolution on the subject or a discussion on the Address of the President, the Food Minister and his deputies had strained all their efforts in trying to assert that there was no shortage of food in the country and that the prices were not rising. I will not weary the House by reading out the reply of the hon. the Deputy Minister with regard to the prices of foodgrains in our country. Time and again, even in spite of supplementary questions he has asserted that the food prices were not rising. But here now is a statement of fact and the hon. Minister in the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill admits "the present high level of prices". After all wisdom has dawned on him. I maintain, Sir, that the hon. the Food Minister knew of this for the last three months. He was trying to bluff and he thought that by the import of foodgrains and by various other circumstances the prices might come down and the bluff might be successful, and that if the bluff was success-

ful he would have artificially created confidence in the minds of the people by means of that bluff. But the bluff was not successful. Prices went on going up and now perforce, on the last day, he had to confess it. If he had taken proper measures three months back, this situation would not have arisen. I maintain, Sir, that in the matter of foodstuff this type of bluff, this type of complacency is a very injurious thing and he has done a great disservice to the country by trying to tide over the food crisis by means of a bluff. He has really played with the lives of millions of people in our country. I maintain, Sir, that the late Mr. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, when he was the Food Minister, took courage in both hands, and even when the food situation was not very rosy, he removed rationing. It was a great step. It was a very courageous step and, as they say, success justifies every means. He was successful. He somehow or other managed things and the evil effects of rationing were removed without any bad consequences. You know, Sir, at the time of his death, the much lamented death, the entire nation called him *annadata*, and we will remember him always as the man who solved the food situation of our country.

SHRI V. K. DHAGE (Bombay): Well, he is his protege.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: The hon. the Food Minister is also probably trying to follow in his footsteps, but some people do not become as great, or nature is not as favourable to them as in the other case. The result is that the hon. the Food Minister's bluff had not succeeded and now he has got to admit that what he said during the last three months was all a jugglery of facts, an absolute distortion of the truth. He has come down to this House with this Bill, and even now he is not adequately tackling the problem, much less solving the problem. I know, Sir—this is what will happen—that he will make a scapegoat of a few hoarders, just catch two or three hoarders and collect the foodgrains here and there, and he will think that

the problem was solved. I say it will not be solved, and again, after three months, he will make up and find that a measure of this nature is not complete although I admit that this is a step in the right direction and I do not deny it for a minute. Whatever faults it has, it is a step in the right direction—but this measure will not solve our problem. We have got to realise, Sir, that there are certain fundamental changes that have taken place in our rural economy, and unless we can tackle the fundamental problem, this scapegoat arrangement, this catching hold of a few hoarders here and there and probably bringing out of them some 50,000 or 60,000 tons of foodgrains—this 50,000 tons may be a very big figure if taken out of the hoarders—will not solve the problem. The hon. Member who preceded me pointed out that we are importing at least two million tons of rice and about four million tons of wheat from foreign countries. But you have got to see it in the context of our total production. The hon. Minister stated that the tentative figure of production for 1956-57 was 54 million tons of which half or more than half is rice. Rice is 27 million tons. As against a production of 27 million tons, we are importing two million tons. As against the other 27 million tons which consist of all the cereals—wheat and all other cereals—we are importing four million tons. So we are importing a total of six million tons which is nearly 11 per cent. The hon. Minister estimates that hoarding is to the extent of five per cent.; even five per cent. of 54 million tons is round about three million tons. An hon. Member from Bengal said that hoarding there was about four lakh tons; in some other place it may be another four to five lakh tons. Even if you add up all such figures, they will not exceed three million tons. If the food shortage was only to the extent of three million tons, since we are importing foodgrains to the tune of six million tons, the problem should have been solved. Why does the problem remain? Therefore my submission is that there is hoarding to a much larger extent. It is not just a

[Shri Kishen Chand.]

few hoarders among the urban population, in a few big cities. My hon. friend has said that the advances by the banks have gone up from Rs. 12 to 22 crores.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: No; from Rs. 12 to 24 crores.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: Yes; that means an increase of Rs. 12 crores. Now, how much foodgrains that will buy? That will buy about two lakh tons of foodgrains. Even supposing that you have got other black-market money with which you are hoarding foodgrains, all that will come to about four to five lakh tons of foodgrains. When we are dealing with 54 million tons of foodgrains, four to five lakh tons is less than half a million and that is an insignificant figure. Sir, that is not the real problem.

(Time bell rings.)

No, Sir, I submit that there should be no restriction of time. Unless I repeat . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please finish. Other members of your party have spoken.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: Sir, it is a fundamental right of every hon. Member that he can speak as long as he likes. Until and unless I repeat, I have got a right to speak.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You try to finish as early as possible.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: The only trouble is that one misses the line of argument.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: But by now you must have got accustomed.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: Well, Sir, I was saying that the scale of the problem is very much higher than what is estimated by the hon. Minister and I am sure that within three

months he will come round again with this problem. It is not only the few urban people who are the hoarders. We have got five lakhs of villages and in every village we have 10 to 20 families who have got 15 or more acres of land and who have surplus foodgrains. So they have become hoarders and they are stocking 30 or 40 maunds of foodgrains in each family in their own small little godowns. In this way we have nearly five lakh villages and about 20 families in each village are hoarding foodgrains in small quantities. That comes to about one crore families hoarding foodgrains. In the former days the peasant was very poor: he was heavily indebted and he used to sell his produce even before the harvest was ripe. He used to mortgage it to the moneylender in the village and that foodgrain used to go to the urban areas, but not he has become a hoarder.

So, the Government has got the problem of feeding the entire urban population, that is, nearly 80 million people in the country. Then it has also got the problem of feeding the entire landless agricultural labour in the rural areas. Their number is very large. I estimate that the landless rural population and the urban population together will be more than 50 per cent of the population of the country and the problem before the Government is the feeding of this 50 per cent of the population of the country. I would therefore beg of the hon. the Food Minister not to treat this problem lightly. By this Bill you may catch some 50 or 100 hoarders; you may hang them by the nearest tree that you find but you will not solve the food problem which is a much bigger and much deeper problem. You will have to go in for some sort of procurement, some sort of levy, some sort of fair price purchasing at the time of the harvest from persons who have got more than four to five acres of land. You cannot take anything from persons who have got only five acres of land because they

will need their produce for their own requirements. But if any person who has got more than four to five acres of land produces grains he is likely to be the hoarder. He is likely to hoard foodgrains in excess of his requirements. No law, not even this Bill, can touch him. This Bill will not touch him and therefore you cannot solve this problem. I submit that the hon. the Food Minister took a very wise step some time back. He has got the warehousing corporation and he has got infinite amount of money at his disposal. He must come up with certain concrete proposals on the basis that he has got to feed 50 per cent of the population. That means he has got to stock 25 million tons of foodgrains and he has got to find money for purchasing 25 million tons of foodgrains, stock them and distribute them throughout the year. That is the problem before him. I know that he probably thinks that I am giving very high figures. Sir, he is importing six million tons of foodgrains from outside the country and he has not been able to solve even the fringe of the problem. I am only asking that he should stock 25 million tons, that is, four times his estimate. Sir, mine is a correct estimate and he will have to come round to this figure. As I was saying, he has got the warehousing corporation; he has got the funds. At the time of harvest he will have to fix a fair price and he will have to purchase foodgrains from the peasants who may be hoarding some grain at a fixed procurement price and stock them in his warehouses. But the Congress will not do that because they have got to win elections. They have to remain in power. They are afraid to do this because their main strength lies in the rural areas. It is the vote of the rural people which has brought them to power and if they try to take anything from the peasant or to impose anything on him, they will lose his vote. Therefore they are very afraid of the rural people. That is why they bring a Bill for some palliative measures to catch the urban hoarders. Then they will say that

these urban hoarders are very clever people and that they are evading the whole thing and therefore the Government could not catch them.

Now, Sir, I come to the question of certain fundamental defects in the drafting of the Bill. Here he says:

"Any notification issued under this sub-section shall remain in force for such period not exceeding three months as may be specified in the notification."

Is it the intention of the hon. Minister that every three months he will go on renewing the notification or is it that this whole Bill will lapse after three months? It is not very clear as to whether the life of this Bill is only three months or whether it will continue. This is only an amending Bill; there is the main *Essential Commodities Act*.

SHRI AKBAR ALI KHAN: This is for three months only.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: Let the hon. Minister in his reply state categorically that the life of this amending Bill is only three months and that it will lapse at the end of three months. Or does it mean that he issues a notification and it is there for three months; after about a month or two he again issues another notification to continue it for another three months and so by repetition of the notification he can indefinitely continue to have this power. I would in fact prefer that the life of this amending Bill should not come to an end at the end of three months. I want that this power should remain with the Government.

SHRI H. N. KUNZRU: It does not lapse.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It is only the notification. The Government can go on repeating the notification if the situation remains as it is.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: That is what I want to be clarified. I would like to have a clarification, an assurance from the hon. the Food Minister that this measure will be permanently on the Statute Book and that only the notifications will require to be renewed.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It reads here: "Any notification issued under this sub-section shall remain in force for such period not exceeding three months as may be specified in the notification." The provision becomes a permanent feature of the Essential Commodities Act.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: I thank you very much for the explanation. I only wanted further clarification from the hon. Minister.

Then I come to the definition of 'stockist' and 'price'. In this Bill he has used the word 'person'. An hon. Member has sent in an amendment that he wants to change the word 'person' to 'stockist'. I have tried to explain that it is not only the hoarder in the urban area, but there is also the hoarder in the rural areas. Will it apply to the hoarder—whether he is a small hoarder or big hoarder—in the rural areas? Or, will it only apply to the big hoarder in the urban area? That is question number two. Because as I have pointed out, we have got lakhs and lakhs of small hoarders in the rural areas. It is not clear at all. This word 'person' in this context seems to refer only to big hoarder in the urban areas.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Unless the Bill itself makes such a distinction in the classification of hoarders, why do you presume that it will exclude anybody? Hoarder is a hoarder whether he is big or small.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: I submit that it is very curious. The hon. Minister keeps certain things unclear and the result will be that at the time of interpretation the petty officers who are going to interpret this law may

not interpret it in the same sense in which this House has passed it. Therefore, I am only asking, though it will not become part of the Bill, for a clear enunciation of the principles and their application by the hon. the Food Minister to clarify the position. And when it is going to be interpreted by thousands of petty officers all over the country, they will have before them the interpretation given by the hon. the Food Minister in this House and they will probably be guided by it.

Then, I come to the question of price. There are two sub-clauses (a) and (b) on page 2. If it is an agreed price or something to do with the controlled price, there is no objection. The only objection comes in with regard to sub-clause (c). It is the average of three months. Now, in a rising curve where the harvest price—that means three months back—is the bottom price, the average of a continuously increasing progression will be much higher than the initial price. It only means that by this Bill the hon. the Food Minister says to the hoarder: 'Look here, I will not give you full profit, but I will give you three-fourth of the profit. You should not be very much aggrieved by it.' The price at the time of the harvest was, say, Rs. 14 a maund and then during these three months it increases. Of course, I will come to the method of calculation. There are defects in the method of calculation also. It is Rs. 14 a maund and then in the first few days it remains at Rs. 14. But then suddenly it rises to Rs. 18 a maund, and then Rs. 20. If you take a three-month average, it will nearly be Rs. 19, because it was at Rs. 14 level for a short period, for a few days and it was at a higher price for a longer number of days. The result will be the average will be very near the top. This is a matter of arithmetic. And I can say with confidence that in a rising curve if it was at a lower level for a short period, the result will be that the hoarder will get, say, 80 per cent of the profit or at least 75 per cent of the profit. He may not get cent per cent profit. It

will be very small consolation that **after** all through this effort of the hon. the Food Minister, we are probably going to get a relief of about Re. 1 from the hoarder. He has got his **profit**.

Then, in most places there are no markets. You can only have a few markets, say, Hapur, and such places. And then does it refer to the wholesale price or the retail price? In calculating the average price, will he calculate it on the basis of wholesale price in the Hapur market, the Delhi market and well-known markets of India? Only the well-known markets of India issue a daily wholesale price sheet and in calculating the average, will he take the daily wholesale prices given by the wholesale markets or will it be the retail price? And if it is the retail price how is he going to determine it? Within the city of Delhi, the retail price varies from shop to shop and will it not lead to corruption when thousands of these petty officers have to calculate the average price over the retail price? They will probably get the retail price in their area which is fairly high and just make it an average and give that price. So, in all these things when we are making a law we should be very careful with the wording that we use. We should have really defined that it should be the wholesale price.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: You have not read all of it.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: I humbly submit that I have read it, but there is no mention here of the words. The hon. Minister uses the words 'prevailing market rate'.

SHRI V. K. DHAGE: It is the wholesale price.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: It should be the wholesale market price. Now, there may be difference of opinion. Could he not put it more rigorously? Could he not use the word wholesale rate of these particular all-India mar-

kets. He could have mentioned their names. After all there is a small number of wholesale markets which issue daily rates and on that basis he could have fixed it, but he must not keep it ambiguous. I submit the hon. the Food Minister may think that it is not ambiguous. To my small knowledge, all these words look very ambiguous and capable of being loosely interpreted by his petty officers. The hon. Minister will not interpret them wrongly, because he knows what is in his mind behind these words. But let him put what is in his mind into those words and not keep them vague. So, all told, while I do not object to this Bill—it is a very essential Bill—I once more repeat to the hon. the Food Minister that this Bill is not going to solve the problem. The problem is very acute, very urgent. He has a good knowledge of public feeling that he must get rid of his complacency. He knows it himself and he is going very sincerely to make the fullest efforts probably to solve the problem. Let him take the opposition people also into confidence. Let him try to clearly say that the food production is not rising, the food production, if at all, is going down and that in the near future—God forbid—if the rainfall is not as hopeful as it has been in the years 1951 to 1953 or 1954, if the rainfall is not properly planned by nature so that we have a bumper crop, there is a likelihood of danger. With all your sample surveys which are not really sample surveys—because they are biased surveys—it would not help. Sir, in statistics if you want to calculate the total production in a season, you cannot go to every farm, to every acre of land, find its yield, add it up. It is not possible. You only take up a few areas, some selected places here and there, a few acres of land here and there. See their production and multiply it by the total area. Now, in the selection of those few areas, if you select areas which have got a higher production and then you follow the rule of three and multiply it by a suitable factor to get the production of the whole country; because you have selected places with a higher yield,

[Shri Kishen Chand.]

the result will be that your estimates of food production will be very high. This has been the case in the past. Different parties and groups of officers of the Food Ministry have in their sample surveys selected various areas, and they have arrived at contradictory results. The food situation is serious.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You need not go into the question of collection of statistics now.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: Sir, it is all related to this question. You can curb the discussion in this House. But you cannot solve the food problem in this way, and the problem will become more acute, and you will have to give hours and hours for discussion.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We cannot discuss every problem connected with the food problem. Dr. Thomas.

DR. P. J. THOMAS (Kerala): Sir, it is clear from all accounts that there has been delay in bringing forward this measure. Steps should have been taken earlier. Steps should have been taken to purchase grain in the harvesting season, and now the main harvest is over in many areas.

In this connection I note that Government's statistics show that there has been large increase in production during the last few years. Those figures may be correct. I do not propose to question the accuracy of the statistics collected. But have the Government taken into consideration one or two important factors relevant in this connection? In the first place there has been a shift in consumption from coarse grains to rice and wheat in many areas, especially in Southern India. When I was a boy, I remember that in many parts of Tamil Nad, in all Southern India the great majority of people used to take coarse grains. But today most people want rice. Boys who have been at school aspire for higher living standards, and this means primarily rice-diet. There

has thus been a big shift, and this has to be taken into consideration when calculating the actual figures of rice requirements.

Secondly, the estimates made in the past of total foodgrain requirements must be revised every year, because you must remember that in former times many people were only eating half-stomach or quarter stomach. But now with more purchasing power in their hands and with the spread of education, they all want to eat full stomach. Even people who were formerly eating more vegetables must fill themselves with rice and wheat which are considered more respectable.

Therefore, in these and other ways there is possibility of miscalculation, and we have not taken into account all these factors in estimating the food requirements of the country. That is the reason why probably there has been this complacency, and I hope that in future at any rate these factors will be taken into account properly.

Now, just a word about Kerala State which is deficit in respect of foodgrains to the extent of over 50 per cent. Probably it is the only State in the Union which is faced with that amount of deficit, and this is an important fact. It is not that we cannot grow more foodgrains to narrow down this deficit and to improve our living. We have spent much money on community projects. I wish some projects had been carried out to increase the production of rice by utilising some of the forest areas where vast paddy fields are remaining uncultivated for hundreds of years. There are possibilities in this direction and a former Government of Travancore-Cochin State produced a plan for it. But nothing was done. My point is that first of all in Kerala steps must be taken to increase foodgrain production. It is possible. We must not continue to depend so much upon outside supplies. Another important point about Kerala is that nearly all

the people must have parboiled rice as in Bengal. Sufficient quantities of this, I understand, are difficult to get at present. Government is now trying to popularise wheat. I do not think this is possible immediately because our people must have their rice, parboiled rice. We have been getting this rice from Burma for long. Cannot this source be utilized more fully? In Travancore-Cochin, there are certain good rice-growing areas like Kotanad. We could increase production considerably. People have been working hard for long without much Government support. Now, in these places harvest is already over. Steps should have been taken earlier to snatch away part of this production. Something in this line has perhaps been done. More adequate steps could have been taken. Some of the larger producers may have big hoards, but it will be difficult to make them digorge them.

Now, an hon. Member from Bihar pointed out that there is starvation in or near Ranchi and I believe that this may be the case in some other areas also. There may soon be starvation in the South also, if proper steps are not taken. The Finance Minister has set apart Rs. 25 crores for food purposes. I wonder how it is going to be utilised. I do wish it is utilised at least in one way—there are several other possibilities—by opening eating houses in villages and in small towns for poor people so that they may be able to get a humble meal for two annas even. Some rough rice or wheat *chapatis* with one heavy curry would be enough.

Long term remedies have also to be sought. We should in this country try to increase the consumption of vegetables of all kinds. I do not think they are eating enough of green vegetables. I know by experience that we can reduce the consumption of rice considerably by increasing the production and consumption of certain kinds of vegetables. This will also improve the health of the people. I

do hope that the Government will utilise this opportunity and spend some part of Rs. 25 crores for increased production of green vegetables, and for supplying certain vegetable foodstuffs which would be popular and also cheap. Certain popular drinks also can be supplied at low cost. All South India formerly used as a drink, rice-water kept over-night. In Tamil Nad *kazhineer* is still used as it is better than beer, and contains a lot of yeast in it. We can have this made in large quantities and sold for half an anna or quarter of an anna per glass. It will become popular, and if you proceed on these lines, there will be no food scarcity. After all in most other countries the more advanced people become the less the consumption of cereals. Unfortunately here the exact opposite has been taking place. Therefore, apart from striving to increase production we should also strive to reduce the consumption of cereals. After all we cannot utilise too much land for food production because we must raise industrial raw materials and other money crops. Only by doing this may we be able to expand our living standards in the country.

Sir, I should point out that food policy has a very wide scope. The food problem has to be tackled in a more comprehensive way. We must prepare a comprehensive food plan for this country and thus make this country self-sufficient in the matter of foodgrains. We were hoping for that for so many years. Four or five years ago the expectation was that we were soon going to be self-sufficient. If we have a will, we could become self-sufficient even now in spite of great difficulties.

I am certainly for passing this Bill. I do hope that Government will give serious thought to this grave matter and carry out a proper food policy.

श्री पी० एन० राजभोज (मुम्बई) :
उपसभापति महोदय, इस बिल के बारे में

[श्री पी० एन० राजभोज]

मेरा कहना यह है कि हमारे खाद्य मंत्री ने जो मुझाव इसमें रखा है वह मेरे ख्याल में बहुत अच्छा है लेकिन सके बारे में दो चार बातें मैं भी बतलाना चाहता हूँ ।

हमारे देश में ज्यादा से ज्यादा चावल खाने वाले लोग हैं; तो अगर वे चावल के साथ-साथ थोड़ा गेहूँ भी खाने की कोशिश करेंगे तो बहुत अच्छा होगा क्योंकि ऐसा किये बिना जो अनाज के भाव बढ़ रहे हैं वह रूक नहीं सकते हैं । इसलिये मैं चाहता हूँ कि वे चावल के साथ-साथ ज्यादा से ज्यादा गेहूँ खायें ।

दूसरी बात यह है कि जो कालाबाजार करने वाले लोग हैं, उनको ज्यादा सजा देने के लिये गवर्नमेंट को व्यवस्था करनी चाहिये क्योंकि ये कालाबाजार करने वाले अनाज का होडिंग करके मुनाफा कमाते हैं, जिससे किसानों को लाभ नहीं पहुँचता और समाज को भी हानि होती है । इसलिये इसके बारे में सरकार की तरफ से कुछ न कुछ कोशिश होनी चाहिये ।

आप जानते हैं कि १९५३-५४ में अनाज की पैदावार में १ करोड़ टन की ज्यादा बढ़ती हुई थी । उस वक्त यह अकाल की स्थिति नहीं थी । अभी जो अनाज की सिचुएशन खराब है और कहीं-कहीं अकाल की स्थिति है, इसका कारण यह है कि अब की बार कई जगह बाढ़ आ जाने से फसल ज्यादा खराब हुई है । तो इस साल हमारी अनाज की स्थिति थोड़ी ठीक नहीं है । इस सम्बन्ध में मेरा मुझाव यह है कि इस समय जो जमीन बेकार परती पड़ी हुई है—गवर्नमेंट के पास, रेल लाइन के साथ या कई दूसरी जगहों पर—वह गरीब लोगों को देने के लिये सरकार की तरफ से कोशिश जरा ज्यादा होनी चाहिये ताकि उससे अनाज की पैदावार बढ़ सके । इस समय अनाज का ज्यादा उत्पादन होने की

बहुत आवश्यकता है । इसके लिये गवर्नमेंट की तरफ से ज्यादा कोशिश अच्छी तरह से होती नहीं है इसीलिये मेरा ख्याल है कि इस बारे में ज्यादा से ज्यादा कोशिश होनी चाहिये ।

मेरी एक बात है कि मुझे यह मालूम हुआ है कि करीब-करीब १५ लाख टन चावल व्यापारी लोगों ने चोरी-छिपे संग्रह कर रखा है । यह बात गवर्नमेंट को मालूम होनी चाहिये और उस पर ध्यान रखना चाहिये और कालाबाजार और सट्टा करने वाले ऐसे व्यापारियों पर कड़ी नजर रखनी चाहिये । इसलिये कुछ न कुछ ऐसी कोशिश होनी चाहिये कि वे लोग आगे ऐसा संग्रह न करे, जिससे गरीब लोगों की हालत खराब हो जाये । मेरी तो यह राय है कि कम से कम वे जो अनाज का सट्टा करने की प्रवृत्ति व्यापारियों में है इसका समाज से बहिष्कार होना चाहिये और हम लोगों को बहिष्कार करना चाहिये और गवर्नमेंट को भी कुछ न कुछ ऐसा प्रभावशाली रास्ता निकालना चाहिये कि सट्टा न कर सकें ।

तीसरा मेरा ख्याल यह है कि ज्यादा से ज्यादा गवर्नमेंट को इस बात की कोशिश करनी चाहिये कि सब प्रकार के अनाज का व्यापार किसी प्राइवेट व्यक्ति को नहीं मिलना चाहिये और न उसके हाथ में देना चाहिये । किसानों से सीधा गवर्नमेंट को अनाज खरीदना चाहिये और बाजार में बेचना चाहिये । उससे मेरा ख्याल है कि हमारे देश की अनाज की परिस्थिति अच्छी हो जायेगी और इसी वास्ते मैंने यह मुझाव रखा है । मेरा यह भी ख्याल है कि जहाँ भी अनाज कमती है और गरीब लोगों को नहीं मिल पाता है, वहाँ गवर्नमेंट को चाहिये कि ज्यादा से ज्यादा फेयर प्राइस शाप्स जगह जगह खोले । इस बात की बहुत आवश्यकता है क्योंकि कई परिस्थितियाँ होती हैं, जिनकी वजह से अनाज की कमी अनुभव होती है । गवर्नमेंट को जहाँ तक हो सके किसानों से ख़ुद ही अनाज खरीदना चाहिये, इसलिये

मेरा सुझाव यह है कि गवर्नमेंट को अनाज बढ़ाने के उपाय को सोचना ही चाहिये; साथ ही साथ यह भी उद्योग करना चाहिये कि गरीब लोगों को वह अनाज अच्छी तरह से, शांति से और कम भाव में मिल सके।

उपसभापति महोदय, यह तो मैं निवेदन कर ही चुका हूँ कि ज्यादा जमीन जो बंजर या परती पड़ी है वह गरीब लोगों को बांटी जानी चाहिये ताकि उत्पादन बढ़ाने में मदद मिले। उनको हल चताने के लिये भी सरकार से कर्ज मिलना चाहिये। उनकी आवश्यकताओं की पूर्ति करने के उद्देश्य से कोऑपरेटिव सोसाइटियाँ बनानी चाहियें और उनके सब प्रकार के कष्ट और असुविधाएँ दूर करने के लिये गवर्नमेंट को ज्यादा से ज्यादा प्रयत्न करना चाहिये। ऐसा प्रयत्न ठीक तरीके से नहीं होता है, यह मेरा खयाल है।

अभी केरल की खाद्य स्थिति के बारे में गई लोगों ने भाषण किया। हमारे डिप्टी मिनिस्टर, श्री कृष्णप्पा साहब ने ठीक ही बताया कि हमारे विपक्ष दल के भाई सिर्फ हल्ला मचाते हैं, गवर्नमेंट की कोई बात अच्छी नहीं मानते हैं। लेकिन मेरा खयाल है कि हमारे देश में सरकार खाद्य स्थिति सुधारने की काफी कोशिश कर रही है और २५ कोड़ रकम जमा करने के लिये रखी है जिस से कि अगर हालत खराब हो जाये तो भी अनाज लोगों को सहूलियत से मिल जाये।

चूँकि ज्यादा कहने के लिये समय नहीं है, इस वास्ते मैं इस बिल का समर्थन करते हुए मंत्री महोदय से निवेदन करूँगा कि मेरे सुझावों को दृष्टि में रखे और उनको अमल में लाने की कोशिश करें।

SHRI H. P. SAKSENA (Uttar Pradesh): Sir, I never intended to speak on a Bill which is being considered on an additional day that we have got, as compared with the scheduled programme that we had for

the session. Anyway, I welcome the suggestion made by my hon. friend, Mr. Bhupesh Gupta, that this question of food should be considered on no party lines. It is a matter which concerns us all and the only contribution that we should sincerely and genuinely make is that we should try to make things easy which, unfortunately, happen to be very difficult at the present time. I am reminded of the promises that I used to make in my hundreds of thousands of speeches during the pre-Independence days that, as soon as we got *swaraj*, there would be rivers of milk and honey flowing all over the country; there would be plenty of food to eat; there would be plenty of cloth to wear and things would have made such a tremendous advance that they would become almost unrecognisable. But to my very great surprise and dismay, I find that we have not even succeeded in retaining the prices of foodgrains that obtained during the worst years of the last war. So far as I remember, the price of wheat was Rs. 8 a maund during the worst days of the war, during the British regime. Although the position became easy during the regime of the late Shri Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, we hopefully thought that that condition would continue and things would remain easy. But, somehow or other, as soon as he breathed his last, things again began to take a different turn and today, we are in a very sorrowful state of affairs and it is very difficult to know what is in store for us in the future. So, my task is only this that I want to appeal to all the Members of this House, to whatever party they may belong, to extend their fullest co-operation and the greatest possible assistance to the hon. the Food Minister, so that this difficult problem which touches us all at a very vulnerable point may be efficiently solved. I hope and pray that this co-operation will be forthcoming to the fullest possible extent.

Now, Sir, my friend, Mr. Bhupesh Gupta—I always thought—is always capable of turning a new leaf by coming to the rescue of the Government

[Shri H. P. Saksena.]

which he has denounced day in and day out. There are occasions and there are times when it is everybody's patriotic duty to come to the assistance of the Government and to make a difficult situation easy. I am very glad that he has adopted that attitude and his frame of mind is entirely changed. Maybe that one single instance in the whole of the country—Kerala—has impelled him to change his line of thinking, and that is why I suggested, at the time when I spoke on that Kerala affair, that I shall not be sorry if these Communist friends get one or more . . .

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: For the benefit of the hon. Member, the line we have been following all these years has led us to Kerala.

SHRI H. P. SAKSENA: I doubt very much from my experience and I cannot subscribe to the view just now expressed by my friend, Mr. Bhupesh Gupta. Anyway, I take him on his word and I hope that this expression that he has made is his word of honour and he will stick to it for all time to come.

Now, Sir, coming to the Bill, the Essential Commodities Bill is, to my mind, an anti-hoarding measure, and so far as it goes, it is welcome. Now doubts and misgivings have been expressed by very many Members that it is not going to succeed. I am not a defeatist. I am neither a pessimist. I am an optimist of optimists, and I hope that this Bill is going to succeed. This anti-hoarding Bill, as I designated it, is going to solve, if not the whole of the problem, at least, to a very great extent, the problem that confronts us, that stares us in the face, the food problem, the food should be plenty. There are many cock and bull stories I am afraid that there have been deaths from starvation although they may be from indigestion, dysentery and other diseases. Now, Sir, it is so easy to put any interpretation that you like to the deaths that took place. But unfortu-

nately, whatever be the cause, the death taking place is in itself a very sad and sorrowful phenomenon. No such deaths that can be interpreted to be due to starvation did take place.

Now, Sir, so far as these hoarders are concerned, it is very easy to pass a measure in order to prevent hoarding, but our experience unfortunately shows that these people are very hard to be caught, and the Government will find it very difficult to catch hold of them.

Now, Sir, so far as the building up of our food stocks is concerned, many salutary measures are being taken. The purchase of rice from Burma is not a small job, is not an insignificant thing. The purchase of millions of tons of wheat from America and Australia is not an insignificant matter.

DIWAN CHAMAN LALL: It is a terrible burden.

SHRI H. P. SAKSENA: It is a terrible burden financially speaking no doubt, but then the food stocks have got to be built up so that there may be no scarcity of food, and in this respect we should all concentrate and we should all combine irrespective of any party consideration whatsoever. And therefore, Sir, although much can be said on this Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, yet the Bill is being brought at a very late hour and most of us are thinking of the All India Congress Committee meeting to which we are getting late. At any rate, Sir, this is more important than even the All India Congress Committee affair. And therefore, Sir, we are all sticking to our seats and co-operating with the Opposition to find out a solution for this difficult problem. I hope that the hon. the Food Minister who has stepped in the footsteps of a very illustrious predecessor would use all his ingenuity, all his experience and all his intellect to solve this difficult problem. So far as the country is concerned, it is all with him and ready to render to him any help that is possible.

Now, Sir, I make an appeal to the House to avoid wastage in our daily life also and to adopt a life of austerity. These big festivals and wedding ceremonies and all that should be stopped to a very great extent so that we may be able to save as much food stocks as possible.

Now coming to the question of consumption of rice and wheat, I belong to a wheat-eating area, but I am any day prepared to surrender the little amount of rice that I am taking so that it may be used for the benefit of our friends residing in the rice-eating area. We should all so adjust our daily programme of foodstuffs that the areas which need wheat may get wheat sufficient in quantity and those who eat rice may get rice in a sufficient quantity. This is how by give and take we can—and I am sure we shall—succeed in solving this difficult food problem. But there is one condition, and it is this that we should all give our unstinted, unhampered and unconditional co-operation for the solution of this problem. Thank you, Sir,

SHRI JASWANT SINGH (Rajasthan): Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, I have been in this House for a year now and ever since I came here, I have been trying to study the food policy of the Government. During the whole of this period the prices have been unsteady and higher than what they had been in the past, and the hon. the Food Minister has been asked here and in the other House as to what measures he has been taking to bring the food prices down. He has been telling us the various measures that he has been taking and he has been telling us that within a short time the prices are bound to come down. During the last year, particularly in the month of August, when the prices went very high, I remember the words of the hon. the Food Minister that with the steps that he was taking, the prices would come down crashing. And then, Sir, when

we met in the year 1957, what we found was that the hopes that he had been giving to the people of this country were being belied. It is difficult for us to understand whether the Government feels that by adopting complacent measures and by giving hopes to the people—whether they are false or true—or by bluffing the people, as my friend, Mr. Kishan Chand, has said, this problem will be solved. It is difficult to understand exactly what the policy of the Government is in regard to the food problem. The people as a whole are interested not in the measures

11 A.M. that the Government adopts,

but they would like to see in actual practice that the food is within their means so that they can purchase and lead tolerable lives. In the beginning of this year, when the Session started and in the month of March also—then of course it was not harvest time and generally at that time the prices go up but even then—the country had complained that the prices were too high. Then also some measures were supposed to have been taken by the Government. Even the scheduled banks were asked not to advance loans etc. At the commencement of the current Session the situation was, as a matter of fact, out of control and the hon. the Food Minister gave a big statement justifying the measures that he had taken and saying that the situation was under control but the facts are just the contrary. He has been giving us figures from the very beginning that the production is on the increase. We have also been seeing the statistics for a number of years according to which the acreage in the various States that have been brought under cultivation is increasing every year and if we calculate those figures given by the various States and by the Central Ministry, probably by now there will not be a single acre left in the country which remains uncultivated. But as they say, the proof of the pudding is in the eating thereof. We are not interested as to how much acreage has been brought under cultivation. If we take the figures into account, pro-

[Shri Jaswant Singh.]

bably no land will be left for more cultivation, but the fact remains that in the history of India, probably such high prices have never been seen. We have been told that in Samvat year 1956 there was a very big famine, particularly in Rajasthan and some parts of the country and it was supposed to be a record year when thousands died of starvation. Then the prices never came down to less than Rs. 10 a maund. What are we seeing here in this year of prosperity? As my friend Mr. Saksena said, what promises have been given by the ruling party to the people before Independence? Those of us, who come from the former Indian States where similar agitations, though of a different kind, were being conducted by the Congress, are too familiar with such assurances. Actually not only hopes but promises were given by responsible Congress leaders that 'Let Independence come, the country will be flowing with milk and honey'. But what are we seeing today? Various things were said by Mr. Saksena. It is a record price since India came into existence. For millions and millions of years I don't think the prices have gone as high as we see now and what have been the efforts of the Government? This is another measure of the several measures which the Government has brought, to be made into law, and this will also become another law without any result whatsoever because our experience of the past has been what we are seeing now. At this time when—this is the harvesting time—foodgrains should have come, from last month, into the market and normally without Government moving its little finger, the prices should have come down considerably, as against that, it seems that a very strange phenomenon is taking place. As compared to pre-harvesting time when generally the prices would be very high, the position is that the prices are higher now than in that period and we don't understand why the Government takes it so complacently. They feel that nothing is happening. Not only that. The other day in this

Session, the Home Minister in the other House stated that it is a sign of prosperity that people are buying food at such prices. I don't know whether it is a sign of prosperity or otherwise because except for the ruling party people who can afford to buy foodgrains at such a high cost, to the majority of the people it is becoming impossible to pay that price and make both ends meet. I know that in my part of the country, in Rajasthan, the farmers are parting with even the bullocks and camels which are so essential at this time, when monsoon will be coming before long when they will require them for sowing seeds, in order to get a morsel of foodgrains, in order that they can save their dying children. This is the situation when the highest quarters in our Government say that the situation is within the control, that it is a sign of prosperity, that people can purchase food at such high prices, but if they have to live, they have to part with or sell all and even the last thing in the house, before they die of starvation. So if some thing is not done soon, there will be a terrible situation before us and let God forbid it.

It is a matter of very great surprise to some of us that the Government takes such matters so complacently. The other day about two weeks ago, the hon. the Food Minister was good enough to call an informal meeting of Rajasthan Members of Parliament. I was also one of them and there he said that he was afraid that the prices of some of the foodgrains would come slashingly down, that the Government was afraid of how to arrest the fall of the prices and he wanted suggestions from us to arrest the fall as otherwise there would be a calamity in the economic condition of the country.

SHRI J. S. BISHT (Uttar Pradesh): When?

SHRI JASWANT SINGH: It was only two weeks ago, that the Food Minister called a conference of the Members of Parliament from Rajas-

than. He said that the prices of some coarse grains like gram would come slashingly down so much that he was worrying as to how to arrest the fall of the prices. It was only two weeks ago.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: He is completely misrepresenting the informal talks.

SHRI JASWANT SINGH: Even suggestions were asked from us as to how to arrest the fall and I was one of them who suggested . . .

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Whether it is informal or formal, may I know whether the Minister made that statement or not.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: But I say that is a complete mis-statement of the informal talks . . .

SHRI JASWANT SINGH: I am very sorry because suggestions were asked from me and I gave a number of suggestions. I said: 'For God's sake please don't arrest the fall till gram has not come down below Rs. 8 a maund' and if he feels that that type of information should not be brought out here, I don't know about it because we were not told not to talk about it. At least 30 Members of Parliament from Rajasthan were there and he asked suggestions from us as to what to do in regard to foodgrains like gram and other foodgrains which would come down in price so rapidly. In regard to wheat prices also, he said that the indications were that they were coming down. What do we see in two weeks? The prices not only have not come down but they are causing anxiety to certain people because it is beyond the means of many people to make both ends meet.

There was a reference made about the various statements by State Ministers. We have got very very bad experience of these statements. We look up to the Central Ministry of Food to have more control on the policies of States as far as food is concerned, because they are playing

with the lives of thousands and lakhs of people. Also in an important matter like this politics plays a very large part. I can say here, without fear of contradiction—it can be proved, and if the proceedings of the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly are looked into it will be seen—that where there is a bumper crop in certain areas, for political reasons they are declared a scarcity area, and where there is a genuine scarcity area and people are in need of help from the Government, it is not declared a scarcity area. An area where a Congress Member has not been returned will never be declared a scarcity area. It can be proved. Similarly, in an overwhelmingly Congress-returned area, even if there is a bumper crop it will be declared a scarcity area and that for the simple reason that the people will be able to get some remission of land revenue. It might have been justified about two years ago when there were the *jagirs*. Now the *jagirs* have been resumed. When there were the *jagirs*, well, these things could be justified on the ground that the *jagirdars* should not get any money out of the land revenue. But now, when there are no *jagirs*, even then for purely political reasons these tactics are adopted. Therefore, I would request the Central Ministry of Food to have more control on the States so that the people in the country as a whole should have the benefit of democracy. As far as the Centre is concerned there may be democracy, but in most of the States democracy is only in name.

Sir, there was also the question of the Preventive Detention Act being talked about. We see why the Preventive Detention Act was put on the statute book and how it is being used. It will have a very salutary effect if in matters of such anti-social behaviour it can be brought into play and if some cases are brought to book whereby these people are taught that if they, motivated by their self-interest, played with the lives of hundreds of people, their fate would be sealed. But it is very difficult to

[Shri Jaswant Singh.]

take action against such people because the Government in power has its own ways of using them, but I will submit that if they bring the Preventive Detention Act to apply in regard to such matters, it will have much better results than when applied to their political opponents. But what we see, generally speaking, is that the Preventive Detention Act is used against the political opponents. Well, in matters like this, if the Preventive Detention Act is brought into play, it will go a long way to solve a problem of this nature. Sir, I do hope that this measure of the Government will bear some fruit. But our experience of the past shows that it hardly cuts any ice whatsoever in the case of hoarders. The hoarders have got more brains; also they have got means and ingenuity, by which they will be able to go scot-free. Not only that. Government will be forced to bring in some other measure to curb the activities of these people, because to take action against certain sections of the people is not easy whatsoever good faith the Government may have. I wish the Food Minister success in this measure, but I have my own doubts that it will bear any fruit whatsoever.

Lastly, we are entitled to ask the Food Minister as to what is the reason, when the situation in the country was deteriorating and was going out of control, why has he come so late before the two Houses with a measure like this, if he thinks that the position is like this. However it is better and it is never too late to mend. But we have our own doubts that this measure will be of much help. The people, as I said a little while ago, are interested in the result. They want proof. The test of the pudding is in the eating thereof and not in the high hopes and promises and assurances that the Food Ministry raises and gives. The various statements of the Food Minister in regard to the various figures and statistics and assurances have all so far not been of much use, and we hope that in future some tangible results

will be shown but, as I have submitted, Sir, we are interested in the prices being brought down, not in the various measures that the Government has taken. In any case, as far as food is concerned, so far the Government policy has completely failed, and it remains to be seen in the future as to what success it will meet with.

Thank you.

SHRI H. V. TRIPATHI (Uttar Pradesh): Sir, much has been said on the subject and very learned discourses I have been hearing since I am here. Of course, there has been a lot of criticism that, looking to the immensity of the problem, it cannot be tinkered with by a measure of this nature. Of course, I need not dilate on the subject. The problem depends upon production. If there is not enough of production, the question of distribution does not arise, I mean, it will create more difficulties for us. For that, as I stated earlier also, during my budget speech, we have to go in for a large and broad-based policy in agriculture—a sort of a national policy of our agriculture being integrated with industrial development. But this is not the occasion to dilate on that subject; this is not the proper forum for discussing the necessary conditions for increased production, such as, land reforms, co-operation, better farming, and all the other things. This is also neither an occasion for me to lay stress on the gigantic effort for family planning. That is also one of the factors which have to be reckoned with. I am not here even to go into a thesis whether this rise in prices is due to expansionary causes or due to lack of production. That by itself requires sufficient space and time. But I wish to understand, Sir, from the Minister in-charge one or two things, purely for my understanding. He has used the word 'hoarder'. I wish to understand as to whether the word 'hoarder' includes the producer also, and I lay stress on this point. One of the reasons for increased hoarding can be that the producer must get an economic price, if not a production incentive price. So with that end in view, I say,

we have to understand whether as such the cultivator or the producer is getting the economic price. If he does not get the economic price at the time of harvesting, naturally he will have to keep his produce somewhere; he will have to retain it. You may use the word 'hoarding'. He will have to hoard it because he will have to have his average for the whole year. So, this is one point which I wish to raise, which I wish to understand for myself. I would like that this machinery may not be so used that the big man who is guilty of profiteering may get away with it and still get the benefit, while the main producer may be put to trouble.

The second question is regarding the price, as to what price is to be fixed. When it is stated that production has not fallen short we also find that in the markets grain is coming not in smaller quantities but in quite larger quantities. At least compared to last year we find the markets are not so poor. But still the market is rising. Naturally, if the production is in consonance with the production last year, then in that case the price to be given should not be on the basis of the price three months before it is fixed. I would suggest that the price should be on the basis of three months immediately after the harvest season in 1956. I think that may be one of the ways in which we can bring about some sort of fairness to the consumer but all this depends upon certain factors. If the inflationary factors are at work, if actually the producer is not getting a fair deal even today despite the high rise in prices, I do not know what the Ministry has got to suggest. It is quite likely that the suggestion of the Ministry might be correct. But all this has to be finalised in the spirit in which I have placed it before you, that the producer should get a fair price and that the middle man should not profit at the cost of the society.

Sir, I had many other points to make, but I think I must close now. Thank you.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Mr. Deputy Chairman, to put it briefly, the discussion this morning has been that the child is good but the mother is bad and ugly. It is the child that matters and if this Bill is acceptable to the House I do not want to say much in my own defence.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: But we have to deal with the mother who does not know how to nurse the child.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: The hon. Member has got infinite capacity of looking after things that do not matter and not looking after things that matter.

Now, Sir, I am glad that by and large there has been support for this measure. I have never claimed profound virtues for this measure; I have never said that this is going to solve all the food problems or even to arrest the prices fully. It is one of the measures calculated to arrest undue rise in prices. There are other measures the Government have been acting upon or the Government propose to act with them with greater care and with greater precaution.

Sir, the hon. Mr. Kunzru has accused me of presenting the House with a wrong analysis, of misrepresenting facts and of complacency. He said that I had in the course of my speech implied that hoarding is the only cause of the rise in prices. There was no such implication in my speech. There are many more causes. For instance, in our country there have been natural calamities confined to one or more areas. Then we have been living in an expanding economy during the past few years. It is the deliberate policy of Government to undertake schemes of development and to improve the standard of living of the people. In an expanding economy a certain amount of rise in prices is inevitable. An expanding economy develops more of income and it is not always that production is able to keep pace. The developmental history of

[Shri A. P. Jain.]

most of the countries in the world, in particular the developmental history of the communist countries, bears out that fact.

Agriculture is highly susceptible to the freaks of nature and no Minister can have control over nature, not even this honourable House. The House is aware that during the last two years the coarse grains have been badly affected by adverse natural conditions. Last year the coarse grains were short by about 3 million tons as compared with the previous year. This year also they have suffered badly and the production has gone down by about 3 million tons. Therefore, there has been a greater pressure on rice and there has been a greater pressure on wheat.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: I could not follow what the hon. Minister said.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: I said that the coarse grain production during the last two years has gone down by 3 million tons and, therefore, there has been a greater pressure on rice and wheat and even when the production of rice has reached the peak figure the prices have shown an upward tendency partly on account of the fact that the coarse grain production has gone down by three million tons. That is what I said.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Thank you.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Now, the hon. Mr. Kunzru himself mentioned deficit financing. Of course, we are having deficit financing. The Second Five Year Plan provided for deficit financing to the tune of Rs. 1,200 crores during the course of five years. Some doubts have been expressed about the magnitude of deficit financing and possibly that figure may be revised. But nonetheless it is a fact that when we have to fulfil the Plan which is an ambitious Plan, we should tax to the utmost our resources. We have to

have more of taxation and we have to resort to some deficit financing although we should not resort to excessive deficit financing. This developmental expenditure and deficit financing certainly have a tendency to push up prices. I am not justifying the rise in prices but these are natural tendencies. We have to make an effort to curb the upward rise in prices which is sometimes due to reasons other than the production of food.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Why did you not see it last year?

SHRI A. P. JAIN: I am coming to that: do not be in a hurry. The food policy was laid down in the Second Five Year Plan. Now, what was that? The Second Five Year Plan envisaged that on account of the developmental expenditure and deficit financing, there will be more demand for food and that the increase in food production may not be able to keep pace with the demand. Therefore, the shortage has to be met. How is it to be met? The Second Five Year Plan provided for an import of 6 million tons of foodgrains from abroad in order to meet temporary shortages and in order to meet the rise in prices as also to meet the increasing demand. That was the basic policy which has been accepted by the House because the House has accepted the Second Five Year Plan. And we have been acting upon it. The hon. Mr. Kunzru has himself referred to two agreements, an agreement with Burma and an agreement with U.S.A. under P.L. 480. The agreement with Burma which was made last year provides for an import of two million tons of rice and the agreement under P.L. 480 with the U.S.A. provides for an import of 3.5 million tons of wheat and about two lakh tons of rice. Now, these two together make up about 5.7 million tons. In addition to that we have to import our normal requirements outside P.L. 480. Our normal requirements have been assessed at about 5 or 5½ lakh tons per year. That is, during the course of the five years, in addition to this quantity under the

Burma agreement and the P.L. 480 agreement, we shall be importing about 2·5 million tons outside P.L. 480 agreement. Now, Sir, we are further carrying on negotiations with the United States of America for entering into another P.L. 480 agreement. So, not only we have made adequate arrangements for the import of foodgrains, as was envisaged in the Second Five Year Plan, but we are making arrangements for the import of more foodgrains. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that no country can subsist for any long time on imported foodgrains. We cannot afford to be beggars depending upon the mercy of other countries. We have to increase our own agricultural production. True, we have not been able to maintain the tempo of the agricultural production which was attained in the year 1953-54. But let me say with all respect to the hon. Members of this House that that was an exceptional year, more due to the favour of nature. In the year preceding 1953-54, the total production of all the cereals was of the order of 48 or 49 million tons. In 1953-54, it went up by about 10 million tons to 58 or 59 million tons. Now, that was a good thing. That was a fortunate thing. But it was something abnormal. In the subsequent year, that is, 1954-55, our production went down. In 1955-56, it further went down, but it went down primarily on account of the loss caused to coarse foodgrains. This year our production of rice is a peak production, about 28·1 million tons. Our wheat production is very near the maximum production which we have attained at any time.

DIWAN CHAMAN LALL: How much?

SHRI A. P. JAIN: 8·6—our peak production has been 8·8. But again, our coarse grain production has gone down by 3 million tons. Sir, the proper solution of the food problem is to produce more and to eat more. All our efforts are now concentrated towards producing more and we propose shortly to announce certain very fundamental and important measures as to how we propose to give incentive

to the producer to produce more and more.

Now, Sir, in the early stages of the Second Five Year Plan, our efforts were to meet the requirements of the people by making imports and distributing them through fair price shops. Our fair price shops have shown a reasonable amount of success; at one time the number of fair price shops reached 20,000. Some of the fair price shops have been closed and some hon. Members have been very critical of it. But they have been closed in the areas where the new harvest has come in. For instance, the price of wheat prevailing in the Punjab, in Western U.P. and in most parts of Rajasthan today is less than our issue price. The price of the common wheat, *Dara* wheat, in Amritsar, an important market, is something between Rs. 13 and Rs. 13-8. In Moga the price of the *Dara* wheat, according to the latest quotation given in the newspapers, is also according to our information, is Rs. 13-12. So, there was no point in issuing . . .

DIWAN CHAMAN LALL: Is that the wholesale rate or the retail rate?

SHRI A. P. JAIN: It is wholesale. There is no point in keeping fair price shops there.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Andhra.

DIWAN CHAMAN LALL: Fair price shops are meant for retail sale, I think, and not wholesale.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Yes. Our issue price is Rs. 14 for wholesale. So, there is no point in keeping shops there. In fact, in some other places where the necessity has arisen we have opened more fair price shops. In places where the necessity has diminished, we have closed the shops. In fact, we are living in a changing world and we have to adapt our policies according to changing conditions.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Was any earlier decision taken by the Government that from March generally the fair price shops would be closed?

SHRI A. P. JAIN: There was no such decision. We wanted to close fair price shops only in certain areas on the 1st of May; in places where conditions demanded it we wanted to continue them. Only in places where the necessity had diminished, we had closed. And, in fact, in some of the areas which have suffered from natural calamities, for instance, take the case of Bihar there were 1,700 fair price shops operating before and we have agreed to open 5,000 or 5,500 fair price shops, including those which existed previously. That number is being increased to three times. In Jodhpur, we have not only agreed to continue the existing shops, but we have also told the State Government that they should increase the number of fair price shops. Similarly, in the eastern U.P. we have placed large quantities of wheat at the disposal of the State Government and they are at liberty to open more fair price shops. In West Bengal they are opening more fair price shops. So, the number of price shops is being adjusted to the conditions prevailing at the time.

Now, as I said, broadly speaking, in the early stages, our policy was to import food from abroad, to sell this food at reasonable prices through fair price shops. These fair price shops were successful to a fairly good extent in arresting the rise in the prices. But a stage arrived when these fair price shops could not fully arrest the rise in the prices. We had, therefore, to take recourse to other measures. One other measure to which we took recourse was to put a limitation on the advances by the scheduled banks against foodgrains. A limitation was placed against advances against wheat. The margin was raised from 25 per cent. to 35 per cent., and the existing limit could not be increased. In the case of rice, we placed a limitation. Then, when the new crop came in and here were reports that the crop was very good and the prices sagged down, we removed the limitation. But later when the prices again began to show an upward trend in the month

of February, we reimposed limitations. And the limitation was that the margin was increased from 25 per cent. to 35 per cent. and that the aggregate advance should not exceed 75 per cent. of what it was in 1956. So, that was another measure which we undertook to arrest the rise in prices.

Again, we thought that through this scheme of fair price shops, as also curb on credit, we could control the prices. But those two measures proved insufficient. We have, therefore, now decided to have more of control on the distributive machinery. Now, I want to make it clear that it is none of my intentions to bring back either rationing or control in the old sense. And when I talk of regulating the distributive machinery, I have only the upper layer of the distributive machinery in mind. In my opening speech, I made it clear that I have no intention of acquiring the stocks of either the small trader or of the peasant under the new powers which I am acquiring from the House today. The operations under this new power will be confined only to stockists and substantial stockists. The House will agree with me that one of the schemes or one of the policies for regulating the prices or to arrest the upward trend, is to control the distributive machinery and that is the power which I am seeking now.

The hon. Shri Kunzru referred to smuggling to East Pakistan. It is a fact that there has been smuggling, perhaps a considerable amount of smuggling, to East Pakistan. We have not been unaware of that. And at a very early stage we delegated powers to the border States, under the *Essential Commodities Act*, to regulate the keeping of stocks and the stock movements there. These powers have been delegated to Tripura; they have been delegated to Assam and Bengal and Bengal has created a *cordon sanitaire*, where there are limitations on the keeping of stocks and movement of foodgrains, etc. Similarly, Tripura and Assam have taken action. But the

House would remember that there are hundreds of miles of border land, which is very difficult to manage. One half of a house may be on this side of the border and the other half on the other side. While it is possible to check any large-scale smuggling, it is not possible, over all that huge border land, to check all small kinds of smuggling. I have recently got some investigations made through officers of my Ministry, as also of the Intelligence department, and my information tallies with the report of the West Bengal Government that smuggling of late has considerably gone down. Nonetheless I am not prepared to say that there is no smuggling. Smugglers have neither nationality nor patriotism and if they can make profit they can dodge anybody. I am not unaware of this problem of smuggling and I want to stop this smuggling, but there are limitations prescribed by the physical conditions. The hon. Shri Kunzru was suggesting that we must make internal purchases.

SHRI H. N. KUNZRU: I did not say that you must make internal purchases. What I said was that at the time when new foodgrains were coming into the market, you could have acquired quite a good stock of foodgrains.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: That was what I was coming to, that we should have made purchases at the time of arrival of the new crop. That is probably what he meant.

SHRI H. N. KUNZRU: Through grain dealers.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Yes, through grain dealers. Now, Sir, we were very much alive to that situation and we made arrangements, we deputed our officers to buy foodgrains, we deputed our officers in West Bengal, in Orissa, in Andhra and in Madras also. But as soon as the news went about that the Government of India was going to enter the market to make purchases of rice, the price of rice went up by Rs. 1-8 to Rs. 2. I had to withdraw

those officers. The present position is that the day the market comes to know that the Government of India wants to enter the market, the prices will shoot up. I did not want the prices to go up unnecessarily. Therefore, we had to disband that machinery.

SHRI H. N. KUNZRU: Was the Government of India going to buy through its own officers?

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Our officers were to buy through the trade, not directly. We have no machinery for direct buying. We were prepared to utilise the machinery of the trade. Now, that is the position.

SHRI H. N. KUNZRU: That is not the point that I raised. What I suggested was that some arrangement should have been entered into with wholesale grain dealers for the purchase of foodgrains. If after the grain dealers have acquired stocks of foodgrains you send your men to buy foodgrains, naturally their prices will rise.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Either my officer, if it is possible, will ask the farmer to bring the foodgrains or he gets certain traders and tells them to buy the foodgrains and give us. The scheme was that our men asked the traders to give us the foodgrains. The very news that we were intending to buy foodgrains pushed up the prices, and therefore, we had to disband the scheme. All that I wanted to say was that we tried to buy as Pandit Kunzru wants us to buy but we failed to make any purchases.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Shadow boxing.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Now, Sir, we have been accused of not giving correct facts to the House, particularly about the rise in prices. I will refer to the statement which was made in this House. I said that in spite of the record rice crop and the improvement in the total production of cereals this year as compared to the last year . . .

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: What statement is that?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Statement that was made in this House.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: He made so many statements.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: May I have the date of this statement?

SHRI A. P. JAIN: On the 14th of May. The hon. Member should have a little patience. I never interrupted him when he was talking, and talking something which was not a fact. I said that in spite of the record rice crop and the improvement in the total production of cereals this year as compared to the last year, the prices continued to be generally higher this year than last year. It was natural for the consumers, therefore, to complain of these high prices. I had also suggested certain measures for regulating the prices—the appointment of a committee. Not that we were not aware of the position . . .

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Sir, in this connection I would like to draw your attention to a statement . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You have already mentioned it. (*Interruptions.*) Only one Member can stand at a time in the House.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: My suggestion is that you kindly request the hon. Minister just to hear what we have to say.

DIWAN CHAMAN LALL: On a point of order, Sir. The hon. Minister has made a statement. The hon. Member on that side contradicts that particular statement.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: He wants to refer to a previous statement.

DIWAN CHAMAN LALL: That is the point at issue, and I would request my hon. friend to give way in order that this matter may be cleared.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I have no objection if he gives way.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: I am not prepared to give way. I am mentioning a particular point. Now, Sir, I am not prepared to say that everything with the food situation is all right. There are difficulties. But we anticipated the difficulties; the Second Five Year Plan anticipated the difficulties . . .

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: When was that anticipated? Give us the date.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Well, all along I have been giving it to the House.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: I contradict the statement. I would request . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You cannot go on like this every time. You had your say.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: I want to contradict what he says.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I cannot allow that; let him go on.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: I have said and I repeat it again that the food situation is not alarming (*Interruptions.*) During the course of the last one month, we have placed no less than 40 or 45 thousand tons of foodgrains at the disposal of the Uttar Pradesh Government to meet the shortage in the eastern districts. During the period of last month, we have rushed no less than 35 to 40 thousand tons of wheat to Bihar and they are opening more and more fair price shops. We have given ten thousand tons of rice to West Bengal last month and we are going to give them more. There have been natural calamities; there have been shortages, but we are meeting those shortages by supplies from the central stocks and more and more fair price shops are being opened to meet the situation. There is no point in creating a passion. The most important thing about the food situation is the psychology of confidence. Hon. Mr. Bhupesh Gupta said that we must all join hands in solving the food situa-

tion. I welcome that offer. In fact, all along I have been saying that the food problem is a national problem. I have been seeking the fullest co-operation of all the Members of the House, irrespective of their political persuasion. I invited all the Members of Parliament belonging to West Bengal and discussed the situation of West Bengal with them. There were the Communist friends; there were others. I invited suggestions from them. Similarly, I invited the Members of Parliament from Bihar, Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. I discussed the position with them. I placed all the facts and figures before them.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: All Members, or only the Congress Members? I have not received any invitation.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: I invited everyone. You might not have been here or your man might not have delivered it to you. But I can say . . .

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: The papers ought to have been delivered to me. I was here throughout the Session.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: I am sorry if the hon. Member has not received the invitation; I issued it. (*Interruptions.*) I issued the invitation to everybody.

At any rate, I am prepared to have any suggestions. I invite the co-operation of all the sections of this House in solving the food problem. It is a difficult problem and it is a problem which concerns everyone of us. Therefore, we must make our utmost efforts to find a common solution. But, Sir, I was very much aggrieved to hear certain statements made by Shri Jaswant Singh. He said that, at the informal meeting of the Members of Parliament from Rajasthan, I talked of buying the stocks of wheat in order to support the price . . .

SHRI JASWANT SINGH: I have not said that. I am sorry. I spoke of gram.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: . . . in order to give support to the price. That is a total misrepresentation of facts. Quite a number of farmers from Rajasthan and Punjab have been coming to me and representing that the price of gram has gone down to Rs. 10-4 or Rs. 10-8. They say that the price of all the commodities which they consume either for production or for their domestic purposes has gone up and any further sagging of the price of gram which is ranging between Rs. 10 and Rs. 11 will retard production. And I invited these gentlemen to express their opinion whether the Government should buy it and if so, at what price. This is something very different from the price support. Hon. Members should not forget that we have also to look after the interests of the grower. It is after all the grower who grows the foodgrains and he must get a remunerative price. He wants that the Government must assure him a remunerative price. And if I enquired from hon. Members what they considered to be the remunerative price, have I committed any sin and have I misled them into believing that the prices are going down?

I did not want—and in fact, I had no intention—to go into the fullest history of the talk that took place. But I will only mention one thing that the hon. Member, Mr. Jaswant Singh, himself said that there was no such thing as a scarcity in Rajasthan. He said, "In Rajasthan, for ages, we have been growing one crop in three years and we conserve the crop grown in one year for three years in order to meet the requirements of the other two years."

SHRI JASWANT SINGH: It is not a correct statement. I should say . . . (*Interruptions.*) What I said was . . .

SHRI V. K. DHAGE: I do not think, Sir, that, if the hon. Member . . .

(*Interruptions.*)

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: What is the statement?

SHRI A. P. JAIN: I will give way.

SHRI JASWANT SINGH: The statement I made was this. I said that I could not speak on behalf of Rajasthan and I could speak only on behalf of Bikaner and in Bikaner also, out of 23,000 sq miles, I could speak of only one thousand sq. miles of the Ganga Canal Colony. There is a bumper crop there this year. That does not mean that this will solve the problem of the whole of Rajasthan.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any-way, let us not go into this matter.

SHRI JASWANT SINGH: There was a bumper crop in one thousand sq. miles and in spite of this bumper crop (Interruption). The hon. Minister has said that I have gone a step further. There was a bumper crop in that area

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: In a particular area, you mean?

SHRI JASWANT SINGH: In that particular area. My point is why, in spite of such a good crop, the price should be so high. So, I wanted his answer to solve a particular problem and now he wants me to speak for all Rajasthan. I deny that I wanted to speak on behalf of Rajasthan.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: To that extent, I stand corrected. He does not know about other areas; he does not represent the whole of Rajasthan; he represents only a small community; he represents only a small area. Nonetheless, I repeat the statement that there is no such thing as scarcity in Rajasthan, because there is only one crop there in three years and that one crop is conserved by the farmers to feed the people during the other two needy years. (Interruptions). He further said that this was a bumper crop. But it was a mistake to make the statement that scarcity was everywhere. Stating this about Rajasthan is something very strange. But I leave this at that.

Another trouble has been raised. My colleague, the Deputy Minister, made

a statement in Hyderabad. Now, that statement was based on the statement made by Mr. George, the Food Minister of Kerala.

SHRI N. C. SEKHAR: That was in March.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: That was on the 14th of April, not in March. What has Mr. George said? The report is that Mr. George, the Food Minister of Kerala, told pressmen that the situation in Kerala was most satisfactory, the words 'most satisfactory' being within inverted commas. 'Comfortable' is less than 'most satisfactory'. If anything, my Deputy Minister was rather toning down what Mr. George said. Sir, primarily food is the responsibility of the State Government. We also come into the picture. But does it mean that the statement made by the State Minister has no meaning? The State Minister is the ears and eyes of the Central Government. We have to accept his statement unless it is proved to be otherwise. If it is proved to be otherwise, then we can talk with him and come to a conclusion. He is certainly in a better position to know what the actual condition is and the statement made by my colleague, the Deputy Minister, at Hyderabad, is fully justified, fully supported, by what Mr. George has said. These things create a rather difficult situation. Nonetheless, I stand by my promise that I propose to treat the food problem as a national problem and I am prepared to seek the advice and co-operation of all the sections of the House. It will be most welcome. But, I would very respectfully submit that, in a difficult situation, particularly when certain elements in the trade and others are trying to take undue advantage of it, creation of a psychology of scarcity where it does not exist will not help anybody.

12 NOON

Then, Sir, my hon. friend, Mr. Bhupesh Gupta, referred to the strike in Calcutta against taxation and high food prices.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Strike and hartal.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: That strike will not feed people and that strike will not help anybody either. At the moment what we require is a constructive approach to the problem, how our food production should increase and how its distribution can be improved. Surely that cannot be done by organising a *hartal* or . . .

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: It will compel the Government to change its policies.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Well, if you persist in *hartals*, there can be no agreement between you and us.

Then, Sir, Mr. Kishen Chand has given some astronomical figures of our requirements. He says that we must import 25 million tons. The rest of the world cannot give us 25 million tons. And that is not a realistic figure also. I do not know whether it was deliberate or it was a miscalculation. But to talk in terms of astronomical figures means nothing but creating a wrong and an unnecessarily misleading psychology.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: I did not say 'import'. I said 'stock'.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: We have got the experience of working under the free economy since 1954 and of the controlled economy. (*Addressing the Official Gallery*) What are the figures?

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Sir, I would like to know whether this cross talk between the Minister and the Official Gallery is allowed. I think it is only proper that he should go there and talk to him, but not talk to him from here.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: In that case, Sir, we shall also have our people here sitting by our side, because we also want similar facilities.

(*Interruptions.*)

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: The hon. Minister can walk across and consult the Official Gallery people.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: I am sorry to submit, Sir, that this is not the right way of doing things. Here the hon. Minister was addressing the House and at the same time he is putting a question from here to the Official Gallery.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I think he can get some information. There is nothing wrong in it.

SHRI H. N. KUNZRU: But the method chosen by him, I think, was completely out of order. He cannot while standing in this House, talk to somebody in the Official Gallery.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Sir, we do not object to his getting the information, but there should be some method of getting it.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Sir, the intention was that I may give the accurate figure to the House.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Sir, I rise on a point of order. The hon. Minister is justified in making enquiries. But he could have asked his Deputy or the Whip to collect those facts. Anyway, he cannot talk like that from the House to any person in the Official Gallery or any other gallery.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Sir, I am sorry for this slight impropriety.

SHRI SONUSING DHANSING PATIL (Bombay): Sir, is the Opposition entitled to make this noise?

SOME OPPOSITION MEMBERS: Yes.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Sir, I have already said that I am sorry for this slight impropriety. In fact, I was anxious to give to the House correct figures . . .

SHRI KAILASH BIHARI LALL (Bihar): May I know, Sir, whether the officials are made to sit here in order to help the Ministers? In that case what is the harm in consulting them?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: There is a method in everything.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: I was anxious to give a correct figure so that there may be no question of giving any inaccurate figure. And if there has been this slight impropriety, I am sorry for it.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: That is all right.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Now, Sir, during the days of ration the total quantity which we were issuing was 6 to 7 million tons. Last year we issued about 2 million tons of wheat and rice and that was helpful to us in maintaining fairly reasonable prices. I do not know how the hon. Member gives the figure of 25 million tons. At any rate, I do not want to deal with that question any more.

Then, Sir, so far as this Bill is concerned, I have made it clear more than once that it is not a measure in regard to which any one can claim that it will solve all our food problems. It will no doubt help us in solving the food problem. It will discourage hoarding. It is not meant to be applied against the small trader, nor is it meant to be applied against the farmer. Its operation will be confined only to the big stockists, and to that extent, I find that there is ample support from the House that the anti-social activities should be curbed. On the whole, Sir, whatever criticisms may have been offered, there is an ample support for this measure, and I therefore commend this measure for acceptance by the House.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Sir, I sought some explanation with regard to his statement which, I think, aggravated the food situation. The hon. Minister has not answered it. Sir, I was not misrepresenting him. This is what he said:

"I will very earnestly beseech the hon. Members to have a little

patience, not to be upset, not to be agitated, and to wait for another 15 days, and I will show you that the prices will go down further and there may be a crash."

This is what he said on the floor of this House and we have waited for . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Gupta, you have already referred to it.

The question is:

"That the Bill further to amend the **Essential Commodities Act, 1955**, as passed by the Lok Sabha, be taken into consideration."

The motion was adopted.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Now, we shall take up the clause by clause consideration of the Bill.

Clause 2—Amedment of section 3

SHRI SONUSING DHANSING PATIL: Sir, I do not propose to move my amendments.

SHRI PYDAH VENKATA NARAYANA: Sir, I move:

4. "That at page 2, at the end of line 14, after the word 'notification' the following be inserted, namely:—

'or the price calculated at the market rate prevailing in the locality on the date of the notification, whichever is less.'"

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: Sir, I move:

5. "That at page 2, lines 12-14, for the words 'average market rate prevailing in the locality during the period of three months immediately preceding the date of the notification' the following be substituted, namely:—

'average wholesale rate calculated on the basis of minimum

weekly price (Monday to Sunday) prevailing in recognised wholesale market nearest the locality concerned for the period of 13 weeks immediately preceding the date of the notification."

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The clause and the amendments are now before the House.

SHRI PYDAH VENKATA NARAYANA: Sir, the object of my amendment is this. Under sub-section (3) of section 3, Mr. Deputy Chairman, any person selling any commodity in compliance with the order of the Government shall be paid as provided under clauses (a), (b) and (c). Clauses (a) and (b) deal with only controlled prices but there is no control on prices now. So in effect what is sought to be amended is clause (c) of sub-section (3). The present wording is that the seller shall be paid the price calculated at the market rate prevailing in the locality on the date of sale. In view of the present high prices, Government consider it necessary to discourage hoarding and prevent undue profiteering by altering this provision. It is therefore proposed under sub-sections (iii) (a) and (c) to pay to the seller the average market rate prevalent in the locality in the period of three months immediately preceding the date of notification. In effect the Government are anxious to have more effective powers to prevent hoarding to see that there is free flow of foodgrains throughout the country which is really very good.

By this amending Bill, will this objective be achieved? I say no. The price of foodgrains are rising. That does not mean that the prices of foodgrains are rising day by day and hour by hour. The prices are very fluctuating and are highly unsteady. Generally speaking, the prices are the highest during these two or three months. In respect of some commodities the prices touched the highest last month and some in April.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: So you want the highest price to be paid?

SHRI PYDAH VENKATA NARAYANA: Whichever is less.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: It is very clear.

SHRI PYDAH VENKATA NARAYANA: If this Bill is passed, we shall be paying the highest price in respect of some. To obviate that I have proposed this amendment but there is some fall in the prices of some commodities during these few weeks though the prices are still in the highest range. If this Bill is passed into law, the seller of these commodities is entitled to get more money than what we should pay under the existing Act. Therefore, instead of discouraging hoarding, this Bill encourages hoarding of large stocks and the suffering of the people will be more. After this is enacted, there is bound to be some, though not appreciable, fall in the prices of foodgrains. In that case also the three months' average rate will work out more than the prevailing market rate at the time of future notifications. To obviate these difficulties I have proposed a small and simple amendment which I hope the Government will accept otherwise I feel there will be a lot of confusion.

The hon. Minister may feel that there is no use of further delaying the legislation by accepting my amendment as the other House had adjourned *sine die*. We don't want it to be delayed even for a day nor are we anxious to enact a bad legislation. I request the Minister to accept my amendment and the Government should advise the President to prorogue both the Houses and promulgate an Ordinance immediately on the lines of the amended Bill that may be passed by this House.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Kishen Chand, it is a substitution you want and not addition? Otherwise . . .

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: It is a substitution that I want. Mr. Deputy Chairman, may I point out that the present wording is 'average market rate prevailing in the locality'? Now that word 'wholesale' is only a matter of clarification—average wholesale rate prevailing in the locality. Supposing it is a very small town, it is very difficult to get the average wholesale rate in that locality. So it will be better if we link it up with the recognized wholesale market nearest to the locality. That addition will be very helpful. If we add on 'in recognised wholesale market nearest the locality', then the question comes in as to whether it will be the average of the daily rates—that is the average of 90 days and you add up for 90 days. Instead of that, I want to suggest minimum weekly market rate. I have specifically used the words 'minimum' and 'weekly'. You know that in some places the week begins on Thursday and ends on Wednesday. It has a great influence on calculations. Therefore, my week will begin on Monday and end on Sunday. In that period of one week whatever was the lowest rate that will be taken as the rate of that week and then you have 13 weeks for three months, preceding the date of notification. You take an average of those 13 weeks. Your definition is specific as to how to calculate the average. I will suggest that we are very keen that this Bill should be passed and if the hon. Minister thinks that by accepting this amendment it will be delaying the Bill, I am prepared to withdraw it provided he gives us some hope that he will keep this in mind when he makes the rules that he is going to make about calculation of average.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir . . .

SHRI R. P. N. SINHA (Bihar): Don't forget that our food problem has to be solved.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: The hon. Minister complained that we liked the child but disliked the

mother. Sir, he is mistaken. We like the mother but we lament this ill-begotten child.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Teach the mother to nurse.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: My hon. friend Shri Narayana has suggested a method by which a *Suddhi* can be performed of this child.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Let us not go into all that. Come to the amendments. You are going to the mother and all that. Leave them alone.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: He has started that.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It is beyond the scope of the amendments. Which of the two amendments are you supporting? Both are from your Party.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: I am talking of the amendment of Shri Narayana. My friend has very correctly pointed out that the greatest lacuna in this Bill is that a hoarder is likely to profit more than what he would have otherwise done if this Bill was not there.

SHRI J. S. BISHT: But the whole of section 3 is not being repealed.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Therefore, if we accepted this amendment, then in the calculation if the price is less than the average market price he should be paid at that. What is the harm if we accept this amendment? This is another instance that the hon. Minister has got this Bill drafted in a great hubbub and it clearly shows that the drafting Ministry has not been given very clear instructions as to how they should meet with the situation. As a result of those confused instructions, we have this product. If the Minister accepts this amendment this injustice that is being done to the hungry millions of this country will be righted.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: I wanted to speak on the clauses. I did not intentionally give any amendments. We did not give any from our Party. The reason is that we know that there is not much point in giving amendments because firstly the Government may not accept any and secondly, even if they accepted, this would not become the law. The whole thing may get delayed because the other House is to be called and they are not going to do it. The suggestion that has been made that an ordinance should be promulgated after proroguing the House to improve this matter, should be considered and I would only make the suggestion because I think the Government would find it necessary to improve the present legislation possibly by an Ordinance even before the next Session of the Parliament meets.

There are two aspects of this clause. One compels the hoarders or profiteers to sell. This is one aspect and the other is empowering the Government to operate with that end in view. As far as that particular side of this measure goes, we are in full agreement and I hope that the Government would go after the big ones first.

My hon. friend Shri Kishen Chand said that there will be very many people, hoarders and stockists spread over but today we must concentrate our fire against those who have got bulk of the stock. That not only will bring you some foodgrains but what is more important, that sets in good process in the market and that makes it difficult for others to hoard and that brings into play the factors that are favourable for combating the food situation. Therefore, it is not merely in quantitative terms that this whole question should be judged. It has greater economic implications. I think that should be undertaken and therefore I support.

Now, another aspect of the matter. As far as the price is concerned Government is offering—an overall

scheme is there—a certain price. I think this is a high price that you are offering because the averages will put the price at a much higher level than would be justified when the problem is one of bringing down the prices. We have been told in regard to that matter how the Government policies influence one way or another. He was giving the example that when he decided to buy from the market prices went up. Of course, I do not accept that thesis which is established by him, when the situation could have been easily managed. It was a temporary phenomenon; it could have been tackled by proper Government purchases. I am not going into that, but if you propose to offer such high prices, the tendency will be for the prices to rule high. This is my quarrel with this provision, because three months' average, whatever it is, is much higher than what should be a fair price, and that is why I say that this clause really needs change, and the Government itself, if the Government were to buy, would find the necessity of changing it. If it does not buy or keeps this clause in cold storage, the question will not arise. But a crisis will develop; the food situation will become worse. This matter will not be so alive and pressing to them. Therefore, I say that it is essential that you must compel the hoarders and profiteers and the speculators to disgorge their stocks and at a price which is suitable for us the consumers, and the State for that matter, not at a price which benefits them. If you give high prices like that every year at harvest time, they will corner the foodgrains, build up stocks and then they will perhaps negotiate with the Government so that a Bill of this kind is brought in to offer them high prices. There will be all kinds of pressure brought to bear upon the Government with a view to getting higher prices than they are entitled to. This is a situation which we should really avoid. I would, therefore ask the hon. Minister not to stand on prestige with regard to this matter. I would ask him to consider

[Shri Bhupesh Gupta.]

as to whether it is possible, even now, after this House is prorogued, to issue an Ordinance or to do something. I think he has the power not to pay the price to the big hoarders outright. Let there be deferred payment. The price question we can discuss later. For instance, if there is a big firm or a big man in Calcutta, you get hold of his stocks. We need not pay the price. We are not under any obligation to immediately pay the price. Stocks could be had. They could be distributed. They could be sold, and we can discuss the question later on. But some such thing should be done. I am not prepared to give some more encouragement to the profiteers and the hoarders when we are, according to this law, supposed to launch a campaign against them, to disgorge their stocks so that these foodgrain stocks can be sold and made available to the people. I would ask the hon. Minister to consider this point.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you accepting any of these amendments?

SHRI A. P. JAIN: None; neither of the two, Sir. So far as Mr. Kishen Chand's amendment is concerned, I am sorry I cannot accept it. We will take into account all the published figures and they would give us a better average, a more realistic one.

Now so far as the other amendment is concerned, the House should remember that already there is the proposed sub-section (3A) (iii) (c) in clause 2 where it is provided: "where neither clause (a) nor clause (b) applies, the price calculated with reference to the average market rate prevailing in the locality." on the date of the sale. Now, this new provision is meant to meet certain emergency situations, when hoarding is on, when the prices are going up. If as a result of the issue of a notification the price goes down there is no purpose in acquiring the stock.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The question is:

4. "That at page 2, at the end of line 14, after the word 'notification' the following be inserted, namely:—

'or the price calculated at the market rate prevailing in the locality on the date of the notification, whichever is less.'"

The motion was negatived.

*Amendment No. 5 of Shri Kishen Chand was, by leave, withdrawn.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The question is:

"That clause 2 stand part of the Bill."

The motion was adopted.

Clause 2 was added to the Bill.

Clause 1, the Title and the Enacting Formula were added to the Bill.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: I move:

"That the Bill be passed."

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Motion moved:

"That the Bill be passed."

SHRI PERATH NARAYANAN NAIR: Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, let me at the very outset make it clear that on one point I am in complete agreement with the hon. the Food Minister and that is that the Central Government must take the State Ministers very seriously. After all the State Ministers are the ears and eyes of the Central Government. But in all humility may I also point out that when the Central Government take the statements of State Ministers seriously they would take some little care to get the whole text of the statements, that they get the whole authorised statements and not rely on a stray sentence culled from a press interview? I am referring to

this thing not with a view to scoring any debating point. I agree with him that food is a national problem, that it is a national responsibility and we have to be unanimous in our efforts to solve it. But when we are discussing these things we must also have a correct picture of the situation obtaining in the various States. I am not at all defending any particular statement which the State Minister might have made, but I have taken some pains to understand, to know for myself the context in which that particular statement was made by that hon. Minister. The hon. the Food Minister must know that at the time Shri K. C. George made his statement, over a thousand fair price shops were in existence in Kerala, even before the Communist Ministry came into power. The Central Government knew that on an average per week they had to distribute about 7 to 8 thousand tons of rice there, and they were obliged to supply at least to some extent that measure of rice there. Now the position arose, some time in the second week of May, there was some difficulty felt in regard to the supply of foodgrains to the various fair price shops and also the supply in the market. There was so much of panic and we people were really apprehensive about the food situation. A question was put to the Minister. I have not got the full text of his statement before me but, if my memory is correct, the Food Minister said that the stock position at that moment was satisfactory or most satisfactory if you like because, after all, the hon. Minister has himself said that it will serve no useful purpose in creating a psychology of scarcity, but at that time, when actually there was the difficulty for these fair price shops to get supply, actually at that moment the hon. Minister, Shri K. C. George, he himself made it clear that at the moment there were about 25 to 30 thousand tons of stock available there. Now he said that the position was satisfactory at the moment in regard to the stock position. I do not know from which paper he is reading that. I had occasion to go through the

interview published in the Malayalam papers and I myself had occasion to know the position when I was in Trivandrum early in the month of May. Then in that very statement the hon. Mr. George has also made it clear that with Central help and through efficient tackling the food position would be managed. These were the words used. Why I say this is that I do not want either the House or the hon. Minister to go about with the impression that the food situation is all that it ought to be in Kerala. They have given a wrong impression. I do not say that the position is alarming or anything like that; nor is it correct to say that the position is comfortable. It is a serious situation which needs constant watch and efficient tackling and the united efforts of the State Government and the Central Government are called for.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Government also admit that position.

SHRI PERATH NARAYANAN NAIR: But just to say that the hon. Minister here and the hon. Minister there agree that the position in Kerala in regard to food is comfortable would create a very wrong impression. It is not a fact. As a matter of fact throughout the coastal areas the Government in Kerala, I understand, are seriously considering about organising relief measures and opening gruel centres. The position is so bad that according to reports in newspapers the Kerala Government have submitted concrete proposals as to how best the Central Government can help the State Government and together they can solve the problem. So the point I want to emphasise is this. These are the worst scarcity months in Kerala, the 14 to 15 weeks yet to come, up to the middle or end of September, *mithunam* and *karkatakam*, we call it. In a deficit province, especially in the middle of the scarcity months, to create an impression that the position is comfortable is not representing the actual state of affairs. I am not saying this because the Communist Ministry is

[Shri Perath Narayanan Nair.]

there. As my leader, Mr. Bhupesh Gupta, has made it clear we are looking at it as a national problem. It is a national responsibility. The only thing is that in the handling of the situation we feel that the Government of India have been rather slow about taking proper steps; we feel that they have been complacent about the whole thing and even some of the steps they are taking now are not quite effective. Not that we grudge the powers that they need to tackle the situation. We are all for giving them the powers. The only thing is in the handling of the situation on certain matters we hold different views. We feel that more effective steps could have been taken and we have suggested concrete measures. Let us not treat this as a party question. I am not saying this just because there is a Communist Ministry there in power. But when you take out stray sentences, cull them out of their context, it is not fair. After all, the Central Government has also full responsibility. I am told that the hon. Minister is expected here tomorrow for the National Development Council. Sir, it is not only in regard to Kerala that we find these different versions of Ministers' statements. For example, take Andhra. In reply to a question here we were told by the hon. the Food Minister, and we also know, that Andhra is a surplus area but we have got this phenomenon of the Andhra Food Minister making representation to the Centre for 30,000 tons of rice.

SHRI B. B. SHARMA (Uttar Pradesh): Sir, are we not repeating the same thing over and over again?

SHRI PERATH NARAYANAN NAIR: Sir, the Central Government and this House should know that the position in Kerala deserves their fullest support and close watching. That is all I have to say.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA. Mr. Deputy Chairman, I am rather disappointed at the speech made by the hon. Minister in reply to

the debate on the first reading. I had expected from him an approach of 'do or die'. I had expected that he would have assured through this House the country that he would arrest the deteriorating situation and solve the food problem once for all . . .

SHRI R. P. N. SINHA: . . . here and now.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Yes, here and now. But what do we find? He has got himself mixed up with all kinds of statistics supplied to him. Sir, you know better than myself because you have been now presiding over this House for a number of years and you can judge a member or a Minister from the manner in which he conducts himself in this House.

SHRI H. P. SAKSENA: From his clothes or from his appearance?

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: From his exterior appearance and conduct. What the hon. Minister, in spite of the bold appearance that he puts on, betrays is that he is nervous about the situation. In spite of the statement that he is making I feel that he feels in his heart of hearts that the situation is getting out of his control and, therefore, he is not in a position to assure the House or the country. Sir, I would beg of him to shake off this nervousness, take . . .

SHRI H. P. SAKSENA: He has none of it.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: . . . the country into confidence and tell us what the exact position is. He has not told us in spite of my repeated questions today and on other days what the position is. The Government has not disclosed to us the quantity of foodgrains they hope to import into this country before the end of this year. That is the real crux of the problem. It is no good telling us that so many thousand tons of rice have been given to East Bengal, West Bengal, Bihar, Eastern U.P. and all that. That will not help the

situation. They must tell us to what extent they are going to augment the food resources of this country by imports during this six months' time. They must also say what has been the import during the last six months.

DR. RADHA KUMUD MOOKERJI (Nominated): Why did you mention East Bengal in this connection?

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: They have been giving rice to East Bengal also.

SHRI H. P. SAKSENA: By smuggling?

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Not by smuggling; they are handing over . . .

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: . . . as gifts.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: That is the only way to assure the country; that is the only way to assure the hungry mouths in this country. We must know whether their plans to import are going to fructify or not. They have been giving us news about the agreements that they have been entering into. We all know that; we read papers. The people in the country know that they have entered into so many agreements. He merely repeated what my hon. friend Dr. Kunzru said. That would not satisfy us. We want to know the actual imports that have taken place and the imports that are likely to take place month by month. That alone will bring down the prices; no amount of passing legislation will bring down the prices.

Sir, in a war we have got to take the enemy by surprise by springing a new weapon. Now, what did his great predecessor do? He took the hoarders by surprise by withdrawing controls and what happened? The food prices came toppling down. We must do something like that and the only way to do this is to flood the market by imports of foodgrains.

As I said earlier, the hon. Minister referred to the Second Five Year Plan.

SHRI B. B. SHARMA: May I know how it reacts on the producers?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Let him go on, Mr. Sharma.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Let us first feed everybody in the country. Then we will take care of the producers. Sir, I was telling you that the hon. Minister referred to our Second Five Year Plan. I have also read that report. The whole basis of the Second Five Year Plan is the food production and the hon. Minister for Food is also the Minister for Agriculture. Unless the agricultural production goes up, the whole Second Five Year Plan will collapse like a house of cards. What is happening with regard to the increase in the agricultural products? You see the report . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You will be starting again a general debate.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Another one minute at least you will give me, Sir, and I shall finish.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We are in the third reading stage.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: The point is he has referred to it . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Confine yourself to the Bill.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: Well, Sir, I may refer him to the policy followed in regard to the community development projects and the national extension service. Our whole hope is based upon the agricultural production that we shall achieve in these areas, in these project areas. What is the report there? I wish I could have time. I have got these things here to quote to you and their report is this that the agricultural production is not going up in those project areas. And unless the Minister for Food and Agriculture gives increased production and

[Shri Rajendra Pratap Sinha.]

maintains the price level of food, the Second Five Year Plan will not be fulfilled.

Sir, he was talking about deficit financing and all that.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Sinha, I have to remind you.

SHRI RAJENDRA PRATAP SINHA: I will take two minutes more. He was talking about deficit financing. Well, I have also read the report. The rise in prices which is envisaged at the end of the Second Five Year Plan, after Rs. 1,200 crores deficit financing has been pushed through—that rise has reached in the beginning of the Plan period. Do you think that you can implement the Second Five Year Plan with this rise in prices? Unless you hold down the price level of food, the whole of the Second Five Year Plan will collapse. Therefore, the most important thing to do is to hold down this price level and you can only do so by large imports. And if it comes to that, cut down other portions of the Plan, so that you can employ your foreign exchange or the foreign aid and the foreign grants to import food. If you succeed in importing food, in improving our agricultural production, the Plan will go through; otherwise, it will fail. And that is my submission.

SHRI T. BODRA: Sir, I will speak for two minutes. During the last general elections 98 per cent of the M.L.As' and M.Ps' seats have been won by the Jharkhand Party and the Janata party, that is, by the opposition parties in the districts of Palamau, Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Singhbhum and Santhal Parganas . . .

SHRI H. P. SAKSENA: This has got nothing to do with the Bill we are now discussing.

SHRI T. BODRA: Now, my apprehension is that whatever information that may be given by the district magistrates of all these districts and whatever information which the State

Government of Bihar might be giving to the Central Government, may not be all correct. Therefore, I appeal to you to act on this food problem which is most alarming in my part of the country, to act on your own information, on the information of your own machinery and not to rely much on the distorted versions of the State Government of Bihar and the district magistrates of these districts, of this political region.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: I would like to say a few concluding words on this subject. I have made it very clear in the beginning that we have made this matter as a matter of national importance and our approach should be as broad as possible, as national as possible. It should be our common endeavour to do so. That is why, despite certain defects in the measure, we did not have any hesitation in supporting it and, as you know, we did not give any amendments even. We should like to see, as I said, how it works and leave it to the Minister to make such changes as would be called for. Since they have armed themselves with this measure, I would only ask them to do certain things, so that the purposes of this measure are not defeated. Sir, many things have been said about the food production and all that. What the yield is on the food front, I do not know. But I do know there has been a bumper yield of bluffs on the side of the Treasury Benches and I wish there were some famine, some flood or drought to wash it away, to destroy it. This is the first thing. The bluff should go. I read out the statement of the hon. Minister and I should like to ask him to read it, the exchanges that he had with me on the 30th August. Who proves right, he or I? I shall not speak here on this matter.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, come on with your suggestions.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: I am coming to the Bill. I am talking about complacency and here is the

statement, an essay on complacency, by the hon. Minister. You read, every paragraph is filled with complacent utterances which bear no relation whatever to the realities. I read out one portion. He did not give any explanation about the crash. Now, Sir, this, therefore, is a thing on which some exercises will be necessary on the part of the Minister, to get rid of complacency. I can help him in this matter, provided he consults us from time to time.

Then, Sir, with regard to production, that is very important, because if you go in for this kind of thing, you may think that you will turn the corner. I think production is of very great importance. I do not attach very much importance to the official statistics for reasons I have already stated. Now, Sir, some hon. Members have suggested that they put emphasis on import, and much has been said about it. I make it clear that we are not against import whenever that is absolutely necessary, but I think that the hon. Shri Chaman Lall was saying that there was a heavy burden on our exchequer. That has also to be kept in view because we should not go in for solving the food crisis merely by importing foodgrains. Import when you must, when there is no other way out, but production has got to be stepped up and increased. Essentially, Sir, I do not believe that we can really be out of the woods or turn the corner or find a lasting and permanent solution unless we go into the question of the land reforms and give land to the tillers of the soil, which has not been done. I would ask the Government to consider this matter. Self-sufficiency and stability in the matter of foodgrains have yet to be achieved. I would ask hon. Members to remember the statement Prime Minister Nehru made at the end of June 1949 over the All India Radio when he said that within two years, by 1951, India would be self-sufficient in regard to food. At the end of the First Five Year Plan we have imported according to schedule 6 million tons of foodgrains. So there is no question of self-sufficiency

or stability. Therefore, in order to ensure stability and self-sufficiency in the matter of food production and yield it is important that due attention should be given to this matter, and the crux of the problem, I repeat, is reform, real agrarian reform, by which the peasant and the tiller of the soil must get land.

Then, Sir, hoarders and profiteers. It is good, and I agree with him that the target of our attack should be the big ones. Who are these big ones? Those people in the countryside who have concentrated land in their hands by different subterfuges, the big landlords, *zemindars* and others. It is they who control stocks because of the fact that they are in possession of land. Arrangements have been changed, but they are in fact in possession of the land. I think you can never fight these categories of hoarders and profiteers unless you divest them of the land which they still possess and make this land available to the tillers of the soil. That is also important. Strike at the very source of this profiteering and hoarding, and everything will be exactly what we want it to be.

Then, Sir, the bureaucracy.

(Time bell rings.)

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: All this is foreign to the debate. We are in the third reading stage.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Yes, I know.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Speech is made only to support or oppose the Bill. There is another Member who wants to speak and then the hon. Minister has to reply.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: We will sit for a little more time if necessary. Regarding bureaucracy . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You will have to be relevant. I cannot allow these things. Are you opposing the Bill?

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: I am supporting the Bill and I am saying how it should be implemented. Why are you supposing that I am not relevant?

(Interruptions.)

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order, order. We are now in the third reading stage.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: I am suggesting how it should be implemented.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Not at this stage.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: I have to say that. Why should I not say that? I should be allowed to give my suggestion. You may say that I should be short. But please do not say that I am irrelevant. I am perfectly within my right in suggesting as to how it should be implemented.

I would therefore say, Sir, that the officials should be properly instructed to implement it because difficulties arise even in respect of a good measure. We have sometimes found that certain good provisions are not properly implemented.

I would also suggest that in order to implement it—I do not think I am saying anything new—popular committees should be encouraged where members of all parties and members of popular organisations should combine together to help the fight on the food front, to help the solution of the food problem. This is very very essential. We have had experience of famine in Bengal. It is very very essential that Government should take the initiative in this matter and enlist the co-operation of all political parties and popular organisations, and crystallise this co-operation in the form of some sort of Food Committee. I am not bothered about the name you give it. I personally want to sit with the Congressmen in a committee in a locality to discuss matters to find a solution, to explore the possibilities

of how to meet the emergency. I have no means of doing it.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That will do.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: This is the suggestion that I wished to make.

Then somebody said that he was a great optimist. Well, I would only ask him not to feed his optimism or false statistics. That is what I will ask of him because the statistics are sometimes very misleading.

SHRI H. P. SAKSENA: He does not depend upon statistics. It is a feeling of the mind which he has developed.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: I do not like to be fed on false statistics.

Sir, I say that these suggestions should be taken into account, and I am extremely sorry that when I was making a suggestion you suddenly thought that some kind of ruling should be given or something should be said. This way I find it difficult to proceed, and I would like you to exercise similar restraint on the Ministers dealing with various subjects.

DIWAN CHAMAN LALL: Sir, I rise on a point of order. I am quite sure you did not mean to restrict the debate on the third reading merely to those who oppose the measure, because if you look at page 59 of the Manual, rule 96 says "discussion on a motion that the Bill be passed shall be confined to the submission of arguments either in support of the Bill or for the rejection of the Bill. In making his speech a Member shall not refer . . ."

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: They were neither. He made suggestions for implementation.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: I think, Sir, our rights are being curtailed. What is the irrelevancy if I suggested that a Food Committee should be started? Was I irrelevant?

Mr. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The rule says that in support of the Bill or in opposition to the Bill you can make some remarks, but the remarks that you made were neither. You made some suggestions regarding its implementation.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: What remarks are irrelevant I do not know. I would like to be told what are those remarks which should not be made. I was suggesting as to how the Bill should be implemented.

Mr. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Kishen Chand.

SHRI KISHEN CHAND: Sir, we welcome the passing of this Bill, and I have only to add that whatever we have said was only with the sole intention of removing the complacency of the hon. Minister and making him realise the gravity of the situation. I do hope that he will take up this problem very seriously.

One word more. When he pointed out that last time when rationing was in operation it was only in the big urban cities, I would point out to him that 50 per cent of the rural population, who are landless labourers, were also in very great difficulty and they had to purchase food at very high prices. Therefore, if you go to the rural areas and supply foodgrains, naturally you will have to take much larger stocks. I do hope that when he has really considered the problem, he will come to the conclusion that he may have to deal with 25 million tons of foodgrains

Thank you.

SHRI A. P. JAIN: Sir, I have nothing much to add in my reply except that I want to clear one misunderstanding which has been created by the speech of the hon. Member who spoke first on the opposition side. He said that the difficulty in Kerala arose because of want of stocks and because of want of proper supplies. Curiously enough in the statement made by Mr. George he said that there was adequate stock of foodgrains in the State, and I know it as a fact that there was more than two months' supply in stock there. In any case I do not want to raise any unsavoury controversy which may reflect upon the State Minister or any Minister of the Centre. We want to give the fullest co-operation to the Ministers of any State, no matter whatever may be their political complexion or persuasion. The Minister for Food in Kerala is to me just the same as any other Minister of Food in any other State. I do not think that it will improve the state of affairs either in Kerala or elsewhere or at the Centre if these rather unsavoury controversies are raised, and I hope that there will be an end of them.

Mr. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The question is:

"That the Bill be passed."

The motion was adopted.

Mr. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The House stands adjourned *sine die*.

The House then adjourned *sine die* at fifty seven minutes past twelve of the clock.

Editor of Debates,
Rajya Sabha Secretariat.