

**Proceedings of the Thirteenth Session of the First Legislative Assembly,
assembled under the Provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935.**

The ASSEMBLY met in the Assembly Chamber, Shillong, at 11 A.M. on Tuesday,
the 23rd November, 1943.

PRESENT

The Hon'ble Mr. Basanta Kumar Das, Speaker, in the Chair, the ten Hon'ble
Ministers and fifty-four Members.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

STARRED QUESTIONS

(to which oral answers were given)

Re: Sibsagar Local Board

Srijut SURENDRA NATH BURAGOHAIN asked :

*22. Will Government be pleased to state—

- (a) Whether it is a fact that they have since passed orders annulling a resolution of the Sibsagar Local Board adopted by it in November, 1939, regarding the retirement of the employees of the Board on completion of thirty years' service or on attaining the age of fifty-five years, whichever was earlier ?
- (b) If so, what was the date of the Government order ?
- (c) Whether the employees, who were made to retire by the Board acting on the strength of the aforesaid resolution before their attaining the usual age of superannuation, will thus stand reinstated with effect from the dates of their respective retirements ?
- (d) If so, whether Government propose to direct the Sibsagar Local Board to reinstate those persons ?

The Hon'ble Srijut HIRENDRA CHANDRA CHAKRAVARTY replied :

22. (a)—Yes.

(b)—3rd March 1943.

(c)—Yes.

(d)—Government have no information that the persons have not been reinstated.

Rice concession to Members of the Legislature

Mr. BINODE KUMAR J. SARWAN asked :

*23. Will Government be pleased to state whether they propose to grant rice concession to the Members of the Legislature as is done in the case of Government servants drawing salary of Rs. 100 per month ?

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA replied :

23.—No, as Members of the Legislative Assembly are not Government servants.

Introduction of Queue system for distribution of sugar in Shillong

Mr. BAIDYANATH MOOKERJEE asked :

*24. Will Government be pleased to state—

- (a) Since when the queue system was introduced in Shillong for the distribution of sugar from the Government Store ?
- (b) For how many hours the sugar was distributed there daily ?
- (c) When and why this system was subsequently discontinued ?
- (d) Whether it is a fact that the quantity of sugar so distributed varied from three bags to sixteen bags a day ?

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA replied :

24. (a)—Since 2nd January 1943.

(b)—The sales time was at first three hours a day, and subsequently it was raised to six hours a day.

(c)—The system was discontinued since 1st September 1943 because of the tremendous crowd waiting for a seer of sugar for hours on end and because some people have made a trade of buying sugar from Government shop and selling it to others at high prices.

(d)—Yes. When there was plenty of sugar in the market, very few people came to the Government shop and there was no queue at all. Later when sugar was scarce in the market, people flocked by hundreds at the shop. The quantity sold, therefore, varied accordingly.

Nomination of Ahoms to the Municipal Boards

Srijut SURENDRA NATH BURAGOHAJ asked :

*25. (a) Will Government be pleased to state whether they are considering the question of nominating Ahoms to the Municipal Boards of Sibsagar and Golaghat ?

(b) Is it a fact that nominations for these Boards have not yet been announced ?

The Hon'ble Srijut HIRENDRA CHANDRA CHAKRAVARTY replied :

25. (a)—In nominating members the claims of communities that are not adequately represented by election are taken into consideration hence Ahoms' cases will be accordingly considered.

(b)—Yes.

UNSTARRED QUESTIONS

(to which answers were laid on the table)

Theft and dacoity cases in Goalpara

Maulana ABDUL HAMID KHAN asked :

45. (a) Will Government be pleased to state the total number of Ejahars lodged in different Thanas of Goalpara District during the last one year, of theft and dacoity ?

(b) Is it a fact that most of these cases are due to economic reasons ?

(c) What steps have been taken by Government to put a stop to this increase in theft and dacoity ?

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA replied :

45. (a)—A statement showing the figures thana by thana in the Goalpara district for the period from 1st July 1942 to 30th June 1943 is placed below :—

Names of Police station	Dacoity	Theft
Dhubri		
Golakganj	2	50
Gossaigaon	8	16
South Salmara	3	21
Mankachar	4	14
Kokrajhar	...	24
Bijni	8	15
Bilashipara	4	32
Sidli	3	25
Goalpara	6	14
North Salmara	2	20
Dudnai	8	29
Lakhipur	10	10
	9	17
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	67	287

(b)—The figures of theft have not in fact much increased. The increase in dacoity cases is no doubt due to war-time economic disturbances of many kinds.

(c)—Government have strengthened both the ordinary police and the C.I.D. to deal with crime as well as taking measures for the improvement of the economic situation too numerous to recount here.

Adjournment Motion *Re*: failure of Government to give relief to the starving families and dependants of some security prisoners

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: I have got notice of an Adjournment Motion from Srijut Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri.

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHAUDHURI: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg leave of the House to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to consider a question of urgent public importance of recent occurrence, namely, failure of Government to give relief to the starving families and dependants of some Security Prisoners.

Sir, it will be admitted that some persons have been detained as Security Prisoners because it is supposed that they being at large may interfere with war measures. Government have nothing specific against them because if there could have been any proof of their complicity of any crime, Government would have brought them to justice in open trial. So the fact that some persons have been detained as Security Prisoners can be justified only as a part of war measure. For this world-wide war, not only the Government of India but also the Government of Assam have spent a huge and colossal amount the magnitude of which we could not have dreamt at any time in the past. Now since we are not hesitating to spend large sums of money in other directions, Government should not have been at all meagrely in respect of granting allowances to Security Prisoners.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Who are starving?

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHAUDHURI: The families of the Security Prisoners are starving. I understand, the policy of the Government is to give some allowance to the Security Prisoners particularly those who are the earning members of the family and the Hon'ble Prime Minister declared in this House, I think, last year or in the March Session of this year that whenever he got an application from any Security Prisoner, he gave due attention to that application but I have received telegrams both yesterday and day before yesterday. I have also got letters in support of some of these telegrams—one telegram is from Bani Devi Chaudhury which is as follows: "Husband Rajani Chaudhury of Pathsala sole earning member detained as Security Prisoner since September last year now in Sylhet Jail no allowance granted despite repeated prayers, family consists of seven members including four minor children starving pray provision."

Then I think a copy of this telegram has also been sent to the Hon'ble Prime Minister because here I find it is written "Two addressees".

Then there is another telegram from Bharati Das, the wife of Upendra Nath Das.

"My husband Upendranath Das, Pleader, Security Prisoner Tezpur Jail. No allowance granted extreme suffering for children Pray secure prompt order."

I have also received another letter from the brother of Srijut Mahi Kanta Das in which it is stated that wife and children of Srijut Mahi Kanta Das are starving in spite of the fact that application has been made for the grant of allowance to his family.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: I think, this will do.

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHAUDHURI: So I say, Sir, this is a matter of urgent public importance as well as of recent occurrence.

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have implemented the promise that I made on the floor of the House in the Budget Session of March last. We have laid down the policy that all those Security

Prisoners who were earning members and whose families have got no other source of income, will be maintained at public cost. But we required each Security Prisoner to apply through the Deputy Commissioners to minimise time because as soon as a petition is received by me, I send it down to the Deputy Commissioner concerned for a report. Up till now, speaking from memory, some 70 people have been given allowance and the cases of some 30 are under investigation. The two cases cited by my hon. Friend.....

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHAUDHURI : Three cases, Sir.

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA : But I have received only two telegrams. I have not received the letter. The two cases about which my hon. Friend has just now mentioned, they are one from Bharati Das and the other from the wife of Rajani Choudhury.....

Srijut GHANASHYAM DAS : On a point of information, Sir. Whether the family of Srijut Madhusudan Das, B.L. has applied for any allowance ? He is also a Security Prisoner. His family is starving at Barpeta and I think, application has been sent to the Hon'ble Premier but his case has not yet been considered.

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA : There is no point of order in this interruption, Sir. As a matter of fact, my Friend is giving some information.

Srijut GHANASHYAM DAS : Not a point of order, Sir, but on a point of information.

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA : As I said, Sir, every case which has come to my notice has been enquired into and in about 50 per cent. of the cases, I have granted not only family allowance but also personal allowance to the Security Prisoners. Unfortunately, as regards the personal allowance to the Security Prisoners is concerned, although in certain cases we had given Rs.10 per month, under uniform policy which has emanated from the Central Government, it has now been reduced to Rs.5.

This Adjournment Motion, I think, Sir, is not in accordance with the provisions of our Rules. My Friend was here from the first day of the Session and if he wanted to bring this Adjournment Motion, he should have brought it on the first day.

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHAUDHURI : Sir, I got the telegram yesterday.

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA : Sir, the telegram from Mrs. Bani Devi Choudhury was received by me two days ago. As I also noticed that there were two addressees I thought one was addressed to my Colleague, the Hon'ble Minister in charge of Jail but now I find that it went to Mr. Chaudhuri. He had the whole of yesterday to put in the case before the House.

The policy which I adumbrated in this behalf, Sir, has been strictly followed and with utmost leniency. Every petition that was received, has been sent to the Deputy Commissioners for report and sometime even though an adverse report was given by the Deputy Commissioner, if I found any reason whatever to disagree with the Deputy Commissioner, I have given allowance in spite of the recommendation of the local officer to the contrary. In certain cases I had to accept the recommendation as I found that the family had other source of income. As it is, Sir, 70 persons have already been given allowance and of the remainder, half the cases are still pending and I may say that every application that is received will be thoroughly scrutinised and wherever necessary an allowance will be granted.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER : What is the opinion of the Hon. Mover. Is he satisfied ?

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHAUDHURI : Sir, I feel hardly convinced by what the Hon'ble Prime Minister has said. Either the Government is not serious about their policy with regard to the allowance given to the Security Prisoners or Government servants do not take seriously the policy laid down by the Hon'ble Prime Minister and in either view, Sir, the result deserves condemnation.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: The matter relates only to three cases. The general question does not arise.

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHAUDHURI: I must speak something with regard to other cases. These people have been detained as Security Prisoners for a long time. All people will not complain for the grant of allowance. The respectable families, although they are in difficulty, will not come for beggings only because their husbands or relations have been in jail for a few months. Sir, what was the treatment given to the German prisoners of war, what was the treatment given to the Italian prisoners of war and what treatment is accorded to the Indian nationalist prisoners?

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: The Hon'ble Premier has said that he has laid down a policy and is following that.

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA: I have already taken steps, Sir.

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHAUDHURI: The telegram refers to September. It is now two months and nothing has been done. Has not, Sir, that machinery to be condemned?

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA: The Adjournment Motion is not for the machinery to be condemned, Sir.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: What is the intention of the hon. Mover?

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHAUDHURI: As I have said, Sir, I am not satisfied with what the Hon'ble Prime Minister has said. He has rather taken up an unkind attitude this morning and I don't know why. But when I do not get a more kindly assurance, I must stick to the Motion.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Having heard the hon. Mover and the Hon'ble Prime Minister, I am disposed to think that the Motion is in order. The Motion is to this effect:

"That this Assembly do now adjourn to consider a question of urgent public importance and of recent occurrence, namely failure of Government to give relief to the starving families and dependants of some Security Prisoners.

Has any hon. Member objection to this Motion being discussed?

(After a pause,)

Hon. Members who are in favour of leave being granted to this Motion will please rise in their seats.

(Only 19 Members stood up and so no leave was granted to the Motion being discussed.)

Attachment of salaries of Members

Babu KARUNA SINDHU ROY: Before we proceed with the business, I want to inform the hon. Members of this House about an important matter which concerns all the hon. Members of this House. In the last November session my travelling allowance bill was attached. But though my case was amicably settled, on a reference to Government, I received a reply from the Secretary, Legislative Department, informing me that the salaries and travelling allowances of Members of the Legislature are not attachable.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: I think, the hon. Member has mentioned this or the information of the other Members of the House.

Babu KARUNA SINDHU ROY: Yes, Sir.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: The hon. Member could have done it in some other way.

Smoking inside the House

Maulavi MUHAMMAD MAQBUL HUSSAIN CHAUDHURY: Sir, on a point of information, may I know whether smoking inside the House is permissible?

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: No. There is a distinct rule that no smoking is allowed inside the House.

Maulavi MUHAMMAD MAQBUL HUSSAIN CHAUDHURY: But I find, Sir, that some visitor in the Official Gallery is smoking.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: If any visitor is smoking then he must leave the Gallery.

Discussion Regarding the Food Situation in the Province

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: The House may now proceed to discuss the food situation in the Province. Three Motions* have been tabled on this subject. One stands in the name of Maulavi Muhammad Maqbul Hussain Chaudhury, another in the names of Maulavi Abdul Bari Chaudhury, Maulavi Naziruddin Ahmed and Maulavi Abdur Rahman. These two Motions are practically the same although the second Motion is a bit argumentative. Then the third Motion stands in the name of Maulavi Abdur Rahman. There have also been some amendments tabled to the first and the third Motions. There are three amendments † to the first Motion and two amendments ** to the Motion of Maulavi Abdur Rahman, that is, to the third Motion. I have scrutinised

*1. Maulavi Muhammad MAQBUL HUSSAIN CHAUDHURY to move:—
 "That this Assembly do proceed to consider the food situation in the Province".

*2. Maulavi ABDUL BARI CHAUDHURY
 Maulavi NAZIRUDDIN AHMED to move:—
 Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN

"That this Assembly is of opinion that the extremely grave situation arising out of the acute shortage of food-stuffs and the abnormal prices thereof in the Province be taken into consideration".

*3. Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN to move:—

"That this Assembly is of opinion that the Government of Assam do constitute a special Committee of seven members consisting of officials and non-officials, with non-official majority to be nominated by the Government to draw up a definite programme to deal with the economic and food problems in the Province and to regulate the supply policy".

Amendments to Maulavi MUHAMMAD MAQBUL HUSSAIN CHAUDHURY'S Motion on the food situation in the Province to be discussed on 23rd November 1943.

†1. Mr. BAIDYANATH MOOKERJEE to move:—

"Taking the food situation into consideration this Assembly is of opinion that in order to effectively tackle the present food situation and to improve the economic condition in the Province the Government do take the following measures amongst others at once:—

(1) To open registers in villages immediately throughout the province with a view to record (a) the name of each cultivator, (b) the area of his land under paddy cultivation, (c) total quantity of crops when harvested, (d) number of members of dependents in the family of each cultivator below and above 12 years of age separately.

(2) To prevent export from the province before knowing the actual surplus, if any, and to allow inter district export of foodgrains within the province.

(3) To pursue profiteering by all possible severest means.

(4) To prevent profiteering by all possible severest means.

(5) The Grow-More-Food Campaign be properly handled by an expert and qualified officer.

(6) To set up Regional Food Advisory Boards throughout the province to regulate the production, supply and price.

(7) To introduce ration cards throughout the province.

(8) To make adequate arrangements for supplies of all kinds of essential food-stuffs and other necessities of life".

†2. Srijut SURENDRANATH BURAGOHAJIN to move:—

"That after the word 'Province' at the end of the original Motion the following be added:—
 'and that this Assembly is of opinion that the Government do take the following amongst other measures without delay:

(a) Introduction of rationing all over the Province including the rural areas; and
 (b) Fixation of price of all essential food-stuffs including milk, meat, eggs and fish".

†3. Babu NIRENDRA NATH DEB to move:—

"That after the word 'Province' at the end of the original Motion the following be added—
 'and that this Assembly is of opinion that the Government of Assam do refrain from making any purchases of rice or paddy on their own account'".

* Amendments to Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN'S Motion regarding constitution of a Committee to draw up a programme to deal with the economic and food problem in the Province, to be discussed on 23rd November 1943.

**1. Srijut SURENDRANATH BURAGOHAJIN to move:—

"That for the original Motion the following be substituted:—
 'That this Assembly is of opinion that the Government of Assam do set up a Standing Committee of seven members of the Assam Legislature, five to be elected from this House, one to be nominated by the Government from among the members of the Legislative Council and the Minister-in-charge of Supply to act as its Chairman, to advise the Government from time to time on problems and policy connected with civil supply of the Province'".

**2. Babu KARUNA SINDHU ROY to move:—

"After the word 'Government' in the fourth line the following shall be added:—
 'and to be taken from all parties of the Province,'".

these Motions and Amendments and I find that all these Motions and Amendments can be discussed. Now, for the House to discuss the food situation in the Province, I think it would have been better if the debate was initiated by Government. But when private Members have tabled the Motions I would allow the debate to be initiated either by Maulavi Muhammad Maqbul Hussain Chaudhury or any one of the three Members in whose names the second Motion stands, and after that Motion is moved I would call upon the Hon'ble Premier to state the Government position with regard to the food situation in the Province, and the measures that have been adopted by Government and the nature and extent of success that have been achieved up till now. That would help the House to proceed with the debate in a regular way. Then I shall ask the hon. Members in whose names the Amendments and the other Motions stand, to move their Motions and Amendments and then a debate will proceed and finally, the Hon'ble Premier will reply after which the debate would conclude and the Motions will be put to the vote. There is an amendment tabled by Srijut Surendra Nath Buragohain. If this amendment is adopted then the Motion standing in the name of Maulavi Abdur Rahman, and the amendment of Babu Karuna Sindhu Roy, would be barred. But with regard to other Amendments, I am of opinion that all can be accepted by the House without any inconsistency resulting therefrom. So I would allow all the Motions and the Amendments there to be moved and discussed in the House. I shall however consider how the vote of the House is to be taken on the Motions and the Amendments.

* Mr. BAIDYANATH MOOKERJEE: Sir, before the matter is discussed, it will be better if some arrangements are made so that the public outside can hear the debate on this important matter.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Yes, this has already been done. It would be better if I get the names of the hon. Members who want to take part in this debate. I may then fix a time limit for each speech, if necessary.

* Mr. JOBANG D. MARAK: Sir, there is a food scarcity throughout the Province. So everybody wants to speak.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: If every hon. Member speaks then the debate would not be finished to-day.

Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN: With regard to my Motion, No.3, will it have to be moved separately?

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: I have said that I would allow all the Motions to be moved so that the debate may be focussed on the various aspects of the subject which have prompted the Motions and the Amendments.

May I know who would like to take part in the debate.

* Mr. A. WHITTAKER: Sir, two of the Members of my Group like to make speeches on this matter.

Maulavi MUHAMMAD MAQBUL HUSSAIN CHAUDHURY: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do proceed to consider the food situation in the Province. Since the time I gave notice of this Motion, the food situation in the Province has changed. The price of rice was so high that it was almost prohibitive. Either owing to the handling by Government or for any other reason this has come down now. But this, according to us, is still temporary, because we find in some places where rice was selling at Rs. 36 per maund came down in the course of one and a half month to Rs.12 per maund. But after that it had gone upto Rs.22 again. So we cannot say that the present rate will be a permanent rate for the next rice season. Government have established some checking stations and export has been stopped. Government have perhaps, the Bengal traders would not come to this Province for free trade on rice and hence the rate had gone down. There is another factor also. The stockists did not sell their rice at Rs.22 per maund in the months of August and September because they were hoping to get Rs. 30—35 per maund from agents coming from Bengal. But when Government established checking stations or offices in different centres in order to stop export from this Province to Bengal, the stockists of the Province released their rice and paddy and the price had come down. Now and then we hear that all

* Speeches not corrected by the hon. Members concerned.

on a sudden the price goes beyond Rs.20. We then come to know on enquiry that some stockists are purchasing rice with a hope for future, or some Bengal agents are purchasing through local agents in a competitive way for which the price goes very high. I am glad that after the decision arrived at at the Food Conference that was held in this Building in August last Government took every effort to check the export and the Checkers and the Inspectors of Rice Control were all active and at the same time Government seized paddy from the stockists at the rate of Rs.10 per 'maund. Some cultivators gave their paddy without any objection. Sometimes paddy was seized in such huge quantity that hundreds of cases were reported to us and we reported the matter to the Government but unfortunately Government did not take any action in this direction. We find from the reports of the Government agents that while the agents were purchasing at the rate of Rs.18 or 19 per maund in Cachar and Assam Valley districts, all the officers of Government in the district of Sylhet were purchasing paddy at Rs.10 per maund which was much less than the rate fixed by Government. It would have been fair for Government to pay at least at the controlled rate to the cultivators of the districts of Sylhet. We brought this matter to the notice of Government but we are sorry that Government did not take any action in this direction. We heard of many cases of highhandedness on the part of the officers appointed in connection with the Rice Control by Government. There are some cases instituted in courts but I don't know whether Government have taken any action departmentally or what action they propose to take. One very sad occurrence took place in Markuli. Some of the officers tortured a Bengal trader in such a manner that the man died on the spot. I understand that an enquiry was made but we did not know whether the culprits were really found out and hauled up. For this, people became annoyed and did not welcome these officers. They regularly ransacked villages to exact money from the cultivators. Some seized paddy and sold the same to their relatives and friends and to the Bengal traders but though reported to the Government no action was taken at the time. In Surma Valley when there was no control over export, Messrs. Ishpahani and Company of Calcutta and Messrs. Kilburn and Co. freely purchased rice from markets and without having respect to any rate they competed among themselves and kept the market excited and this was to some extent responsible for the high price of rice in the months of June, July and August in the Surma Valley. Rice control staff fought against them but they could not do any thing because Government could not check their operation at least in the Surma Valley. I was told the other day by a gentleman of Maulvibazar that Messrs. Jshpahani & Co. are still allowed to purchase rice indiscriminately in South Sylhet Subdivision and I am told by my hon. Friends Maulavi Abdul Bari Chaudhury and Maulavi Abdur Rahman that they are still purchasing in Karimganj too. If these things are allowed, I am afraid, the price of rice will again rise.

One very surprising revelation to the House will be perhaps that the Rice Control staff though appointed in last year were not paid till October. The checkers told us that they got appointment letters and uniform to do this work and that work but they were paid not a single *couri*. Unless they are paid regularly what work can we expect from them? I am told that they seized this boat and that boat to exact money and many such cases were reported to Government and some checkers and some Assistant Sub-Inspectors were dismissed but what is about their pay? They were appointed by Government but I don't know why Government did not make any provision for their pay.

Mr. BAYDIANATH MOOKERJEE: They were perhaps on commission basis.

Maulavi MUHAMMAD MAQBUL HUSSAIN CHAUDHURI: If Government admits it I shall have no grudge because I know there are many companies and commission agents. Sir, though Government checked all exports from this Province still in some localities there was want of foodgrains. We heard the other day how the people of Baniyachang suffered. We discussed the matter threadbare and we blamed the hoarders and some action was taken by Government to find out the hoarded paddy that was under the possession of hoarders. But if I say that the Government is also a very big hoarder, I think, I shall not be very wrong. Government

seized paddy and collected it and kept in godowns but when people died of starvation they did not release that paddy. If the private hoarder is to be blamed the Government is not free from complaint of that nature. Through some pressure Government appointed some agents for supply of rice to Government officers and some agents supplied rice to the people of Shillong. One of these agents is Rai Bahadur Jiban Ram Goenka. I am told by some of the residents of Shillong that this agent supplies rice to the people of Shillong which is not worth consumption. The other day Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan said that it was not even fit for গরু, ষোড়া (cows and horses). The quality of rice is not at all good. I have been supplied with samples and I hope, the Hon'ble Premier will have a look on these. This is a first quality rice and this is a second quality rice. The Hon'ble Finance Minister in reply to a question of mine the other day said that he purchased rice from these controlled shops. I do not think that this second quality rice was purchased by him or by any of his Colleagues. These samples were taken from some controlled shops. Evidently black marketing was going on. On 17th October I arrived in Shillong. I went to a controlled shop for rice and I was shown this rice by the shop-keeper. I could not purchase it. I asked a friend of mine who gave me some rice for the night which was purchased at the rate of Rs. 40 per maund. For sake of myself I took the help of my friend and he procured it through black-market. Then I went down to Gauhati where I found that same thing was going on there. Perhaps the Hon'ble Premier will bear me out if I say that a bag of sugar was sold in Shillong at Rs. 125. In this way, due to the defect of matters of control, black marketing was going on. In the mufussil, the charge of supply was placed in many towns in the hands of clerks, and it was alleged that to procure a bag of sugar from the Government godown cost not less than Rs. 25. Now what was the shop-keeper to do? He paid the price and in addition he paid Rs. 25 as bribe. Then how could the shop-keeper recover this amount? He had to take recourse to black marketing and in this way he profited. Sir, if this state of affairs is allowed to continue, I am afraid, Government cannot check black marketing. If the officers who are in charge of supply in the districts encourage black marketing in this way, then the poor cultivators will be helpless. In towns where the officers look after the things themselves people get some advantage, but in villages no commodity such as *atta*, *maida*, sugar, etc., is regularly available. They are brought according to necessity. Shop-keepers come to the town and if they can pay to the issuing officer they get *atta*, *maida* and sugar, if they cannot, they go back empty handed. So the people of that locality are deprived of these commodities. We sometime bring complaints to the local officers but for want of instructions from Government they cannot do anything. It was decided at the Food Conference on the 24th August that in all subdivisinal towns Government would set up a food committee who would look after the distribution of foodstuffs throughout the whole subdivision. But I am sorry, at least in my town no such committee was established by the Government. Now, though the price of rice has come down, still profiteering is going on. People sell rice at Rs. 12 to 16 per maund but when they purchase other commodities they do not get proportionate reduction in prices and therefore some illegal arrangement is made with the sellers and thus black marketing goes on as it was going on formerly. While the anti-hoarding drive was started in Bengal, Government of Bengal issued instructions not only to the officers but to the members of the public also. These instructions contained how the officers should approach the public and how the members of the public should meet them, and therefore, the officers could not do anything illegal and the public, under the instructions of Government, cordially received the officers and the operation of the scheme was going on smoothly. But there is absence of any such instructions by our Government, cordially according to their sweet will are working in different centres and therefore officers conformity in the operation in the subdivisions. Now what is the remedy? I would request the Government to start an anti-hoarding drive for the benefit of the cultivators by issuing instructions both in English and Vernacular and the officers should be instructed in such manner as to how to do their duty and that they do not

harass the members of the public. The public should also be instructed how the officers have been directed to do this and that and how the public should approach them. If these instructions are widely circulated throughout the whole Province, I think, such things will not occur in future, as they are occurring now. I would further request Government to make a complete survey of the cultivable lands under paddy to prevent all exports from this Province to other Provinces.

The checking stations should not be allowed to go unchecked as they are going now. The officers appointed under the scheme of Rice Control should be paid regularly; they should not be kept unpaid, and thus indirectly allowed to take recourse to illegal gratification. For the sake of Grow-More-Food campaign, Government should open all available land. I was told that some of the District Magistrates passed orders that lands should be settled with cultivators on *chukti-bhagi* system. I do not approve of it. The lands should be settled direct according to the *rai-yatari* system, and above all I would request Government to constitute a Provincial Food Board to look after the distribution of foodstuffs throughout the whole Province. This matter was pressed by many hon. Members in the last Budget Session, but Government have not yet done anything in this direction. According to me this is of urgent necessity; for want of a Board all the grievances of the localities cannot come to the notice of Government and they cannot consider the conditions of different localities, with the result that the officers are acting according to their discretion without any uniformity. In important centres in the rural areas Government should appoint committees to look after the distribution of foodstuffs in the villages. This can be taken circle by circle, or a thana may be divided into several centres according to convenience; otherwise it may be very difficult for Government to manage the distribution of foodstuffs. I come from the village, and I know how the village people are suffering at this time; people living in the towns cannot imagine how things are going on in the villages.

One point more and I have done. Government, under the pressure of public opinion, have fixed the price of rice, *atta*, *dal*, sugar, *maida*, etc., but they could not control the price of other commodities which are essential for life. I would request Government to look to that side also; otherwise the cultivators would be losers by selling their rice at lower prices and purchasing other necessaries of life at a higher price. This seriously affects the economic condition of the cultivators. I would therefore lay stress on this point.

Sir, there are some amendments to my Motion, and there are some other independent Motions too. So, I do not like to take much time of this House. I hope, Sir, Mr. Mookerjee, who is moving the first amendment to my Motion, would do more justice to the subject than I have done, and you would allow him sufficient time.

With these few words, I beg to resume my seat.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Motion moved:
"That this Assembly do proceed to consider the food situation in the Province".

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA: Mr. speaker, Sir, I do hope that each hon. Member, who will take part in this discussion, will be good enough to give their suggestions as the hon. Mover of this Motion has done.

The question of food situation in the Province can be taken into two parts, *viz.*, the results of the past policy and, we should concentrate on this now, what should be our future policy. In the opinion of Government, the policy which they have followed so long has been fruitful of good results, although we have not had the same results as was expected, partly on account of circumstances over which the Provincial Government had no control, partly due to illiteracy and ignorance of our cultivators and partly due to the greed of a section of our own people. Times without number, we had heard the controversy that we are a deficit Province, that our statistics were not reliable and that there would be an acute shortage in the Province if the policy of Government of feeding the Military and allowing export to the famine stricken Province of Bengal was carried on unchecked. But in spite of the fact that

from 15th May right up to 15th August free trade, unfettered and unchecked by any ban, had full play in part of the Province, in spite of the fact that the Province sold quite a considerable quantity of rice to the Defence Forces. Everyone must admit that the acute shortage—I should say general shortage—that was apprehended did not fortunately materialise.

I must be frank and admit that our statistics are not what they should be. It is not merely a provincial question. This question was tackled by the Gregory Committee, who after taking evidence of all-India came to the conclusion that the statistical position of foodgrains throughout India was not what it should be, that there should be some reliable data on which to base our calculations.

But in spite of this limitation, I make bold to say that what I had told the House has come to pass, that is, there was not any universal shortage throughout the Province, in spite of a big drain. This will be only a guess work, because there is no statistics whatsoever of the amount of paddy and rice that was exported from the Surma Valley during the period of free trade. Taking everything into consideration, we will not be far wide of the mark if we say that full 30 lakhs maunds of rice and paddy were sent to Bengal and supplied to the Defence force, and yet, barring local shortages for special circumstances in different localities, the Province in general did not suffer. Special localities like Baniyachong has been mentioned. Therefore, I will confine myself to Baniyachong. It had special reasons namely the murderous malaria epidemic raging in that locality which is responsible for shortage of rice, but even then, as I mentioned the other day, that eye-witnesses have come to me to say that there is a good and bountiful crop ready for harvesting and that we should organise labour even if it be necessary to import from Bengal to reap that bumper crop. There are places in the Assam Valley notably the Subdivision of Dibrugarh which cannot subsist unless a large quantity of rice is supplied to them from lower down the Valley. The quantity necessary there, is as much as 10 lakhs of maunds per year. We, therefore, had to arrange the purchase of the surplus rice and paddy that came to the market, not only for supply to the Military but also to the civilian population of different areas or for the purposes of fair and equitable distribution amongst our own people. The fact that there was not large shortage in those areas clearly shows that the policy adopted by the Government justified this course. Mention has been made of the very high price to which rice soared during the months mentioned by my Friend, *viz.*, June, July and August. The high price according to the Mover was partially due to the competitive buying between Messrs. Ishpahani, agents of the Government of Bengal and the Steamer Company represented by Messrs. Kilburn & Co. who bought for providing food for their own establishment. I have mentioned before the House, on many an occasion that Government of India advised to start free trade in the Eastern regions of Bihar, Orissa, Bengal and also a part of Assam, namely, Surma Valley. It was a foregone conclusion that if an area is brought under free trade the level of prices in the entire area will come to the same standard as the highest. We have heard, my hon. Friend may have personal knowledge, that in the neighbouring province of Bengal, the normal price of rice in those months was as much as Rs.40 immediately after the operation of free trade in that area with Bengal. In this matter the local Government, I mean the Provincial Government of Assam, was neither consulted nor the Central Government gave any head to the dignified, nevertheless very vigorous protest that was lodged immediately after the promulgation of free trade. Conferences were held and the bad results of these experiments were realised even by those who thrust free trade upon those areas and ultimately were an experiment of two months free trade was withdrawn. Government took every step before the free trade and in the areas where there was no free trade, to serve for the population of the province, every grain of rice and paddy and put every kind of ban on exports to outside the Province, but human psychology being what it is, the lure of 4 to 5 hundred per cent. of gain compelled many traders both of the Province as well as outside to try and smuggle our food-grains to Bengal. We started

checking stations on the border area, both in the Assam Valley as well as in the Surma Valley. My Friend, the Mover, has frankly admitted that this was a great check upon smuggling of our food-grains to outside, but he had at the same time said that these checking stations ought to be checked by supervising staff. What work these checking stations did can be realised when I placed the following figures before the hon. Members of this House. In the checking station in the Assam Valley, as much as, a lakh and twenty-one thousand maunds of paddy and about two thousand maunds of rice were prevented from being smuggled out of the Province. In the Surma Valley, the quantity though less was nevertheless not insignificant. Speaking from memory, the quantity of rice seized by these checkers is about 1,300 maunds of rice and about 45,000 maunds of paddy. Government did all that they could but if the whole country side wants to commit suicide there is no power on earth to keep them in check. If our cultivators or if our traders, in order to make money, want to export rice from Surma Valley especially during the rainy season when the borders of Bengal and Assam become one vast sheet of water where innumerable dug-outs and small country boats daily operate as the only means of transport, it is humanly impossible for the few Government checking stations to prevent a certain quantity being smuggled out. If our people had looked to their own interest a little further than the immediate prospect of fabulous gain, then neither the Bengal traders nor the Assam merchants could take away rice and paddy from our cultivators. In this matter Government did whatever they could. Government themselves secured a considerable quantity of rice and paddy from the cultivators with a view that they might not sell it to the Bengal merchants and distribute it within the valley. The rice and paddy that were secured by the District authorities were meant to feed the localities themselves when there would be shortage after a huge drain to outside the Province. My Friend Maulavi Maqbul Hussain Chaudhury has criticised that the prices that were paid in many instances to the cultivators by the Government Officials were far less than what was the prevailing market rate at that time in the Districts of Cachar and Assam Valley. I think, he is correct in this matter. I had made inquiries on the complaints many a times and it was reported to me by the Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet that in most cases the cultivators themselves sold away their paddy at this rate for two reasons—firstly in the rainy season they had no place to stock and secondly the paddy was of that type which is locally known as the *Boro* paddy. This is harvested at the time of the highest humidity and so, they do not keep for a long time. Moreover, Government paid the price at the granary and the cost of bagging and transport to a centre where godowns were available had to be borne by Government. Therefore even if there was a little less price paid than the market price, it can be said that the people were given sufficiently reasonable price and not unduly small and forcible price as has been alleged. Government took other measures also for coming to the aid of the people. Last year when the normal trade channels were choked owing to the defection of the trading community going to their homes in Central India leaving the trade in Assam in a chaotic condition, Government undertook to bring the other necessities of life to the doors of the cultivators so that they could maintain them with a reasonable dietary requirement. I have mentioned before, that even in the midst of these circumstances, the rice position in Assam is not so bad as that of some other provinces in India. Our position as regards other necessities of life namely, *dal*, sugar, salt, *atta*, and flour was not very happy. Wheat does not grow here and we have got no salt lake or spring from which to manufacture salt. We have also got no sugar factory in the Province and the quantity of *dal* that is produced here is hardly sufficient to feed one-tenth of the population and the result was that Government had to import from outside a vast quantity of cereals and other necessities of life. The quantity that was imported last year, *i. e.* 1942-43 can be imagined from the following figures:—7 lakhs 63 thousand and odd maunds of salt at a cost of over 45 lakhs of rupees was imported, 2 lakhs 28 thousand and odd maunds of sugar at a cost of over 33 lakhs of rupees, 43 thousand maunds of *atta* at a cost of 5 lakhs of rupees, 19 thousand and odd maunds of gram at a cost of very nearly 1½ lakh of rupees, 2 thousand 6 hundred and odd maunds of mustard oil at a high cost and 97, 965 maunds of *dal* at a cost of

over 11 lakhs of rupees. If Government had not undertaken this colossal task of bringing from outside the Province, these commodities which play an important part in the dietary requisites of our people and if the Province had not borrowed money in order to carry on these transactions, the people of Assam would have been in very great difficulties. We have continued the same policy in the year 1943-44 also and the quantities that are imported are in advance of that of last year. Any one who has travelled during these days knows the difficulty of transport and it was with the greatest difficulty that this huge quantity of commodities was transported from outside the Province at a time when the main artery of communication namely, the Bengal and Assam Railway was breached by flood and was unavailable for a long time.

It may be said and it has been rightly said from many quarters that the good intentions of Government have been frustrated by what is alleged, lack of control. I would say, Sir, that there was no lack of control on the part of Government. Government after importing these goods left the distribution to the distributing companies. The District authorities were asked to select reliable and honest merchants who will be licensed as wholesaler. Similarly to reach the interior and also different quarters small retail traders were licensed to receive Government goods and sell them to the public at controlled price. It has been reported to me and I believe it is correct that in many instances, only a small portion of the stock that was issued to the licensed traders were received by the public at the controlled price and a part found its way to the black market. It is rather a very painful topic to dwell on. The pain lies in the question "who are these people who are breaking the good intentions of Government." It is our own kith and kin. It is all the more painful that at a time when everybody has been hard hit, the controlled price fixed by Government which gave a decent margin of profit to the traders, was set at naught and people tried to make a 100% and 200% profit. If public opinion was strong in Assam, if the local public had refused to buy at any price but the controlled price rather than buying articles from the black market even though that might necessitate their going without commodities like sugar, these black-guards of society then would have been brought to their senses.

Mr. BAIDYANATH MOOKERJEE: You showed the way, Sir, by purchasing from black market in Bengal.

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA: My Friend is reminding me of my attempt to feed the sweet mouths in the Province of Assam. There are occasions when some sugar is absolutely necessary, if for nobody else, at least for the *Rasagulla*-fond Brahmins. For Mr. Baidyanath Mookerjee to caviil at my attempt to provide him with a dish of sweets is I should say the height of ingratitude. I did ask the Government agent to buy 10,000 mds. of sugar from Calcutta black market at a time when our own quota of sugar was not available. Again it is painful to relate the reason for the shortage. Sugar as everyone knows has been controlled by the Government of India and each province had been allotted a special quota and special factories were asked to sell to different province. The factory in Bihar from which Assam was to obtain its quota was burnt down by saboteurs and we could not get for about a month any sugar at all. That was the time when I had to take recourse to black market in Bengal.....

Mr. BAIDYANATH MOOKERJEE: We also do that, Sir, when we are compelled.

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA: I am glad to find, Sir, that at least, the Mover and I hope, some of his Friends are at one with us in the policy which he asked us to follow, *viz.*, to stop all export to the outside. It is for this reason that Government had re-established, after the free trade was withdrawn, checking stations in the Surma Valley. Again I regret to say, Sir, that in spite of tall talk we hear in this Hall, in spite of best attempts of the Government to stop all export during the 3 months from 15th August, up till now we have had to stop about 25,000 mds. of paddy from being taken out of the Province, namely, the tendency of the people of Assam or at least the traders of sending foodstuffs outside the Province, has not stopped. Unless the representatives of the people who are present in this House explain to their own constituencies or in their neighbourhood that this is a suicidal policy, unless our own people accept that advice, I am afraid, we will not be able to

check even 50% of the quantity that is smuggled out. I seek the co-operation of every section of the House in this matter. I have already referred to the suggestion that these checking stations should be checked and I will see how much we can do in this line.

Mr. Maqbul Hussain Chaudhury has raised a very pertinent point when he said that the best interests of the people would not be served if Government keeps price control over rice and paddy only. Foodstuffs that come to sustain the life of our cultivators must also be controlled, I mean the price thereof. So far as articles that are controlled by the Government of India are concerned they fix the price themselves, *i. e.*, the price of *atta*, and sugar. We issue in the Gazette the price at which Government wants that these ought to be sold. I believe, Sir, that this is a policy which has found acceptance in the higher quarter and Government of India is doing their best to reduce the price of such other commodities like the implements used by our cultivators, like the necessaries of life, as cloth. So far as cotton cloth is concerned, most hon. Members must have noticed in the Gazette that the Government of India has issued the Cotton Cloth and Yarn Control Order by means of which the price of cotton cloth has been greatly reduced. There is reason to hope that there will be a further reduction. Germane to the subject is the question of standard cloth. To-day, I can put a very cheerful note on it than before. This year we have been allotted 29 million yards of standard cloth. So far, we have received 3 million and 5 million more yards are on the way and if the rate of the despatch of last month is kept up, we hope to get our entire allotment by February.....

Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN: How much has been received altogether?

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA: We have received upto now 3 million yards, 5 million yards are on transit and 7 million yards are on the point of being loaded in trains. Sir, if this rate is kept up, I think, there will be a definite decline on the price of cloth. If again our people as well as our officers play the game and this quantity is sold to the poor, as is envisaged both by the Government of India as well as the Provincial Government and as well as the mill owners who produce the goods, then there need not be any feeling of scarcity of cloth. We have already ordered our local officers to issue standard cloth. As a matter of fact, I ordered that the cloth should be sold to the public before the Puja and the Id so that the poor may get some new pieces of cloth. I am told that at least in Sylhet there has been a good quantity already received and the stuff sold in the interior.

Now the policy that has been recommended by my Friend Maulavi Haqbul Hussain Chaudhury in this Motion or at least in his speech had already been given effect to. He has mentioned that we should endeavour to have every possible bit of culturable land settled with the people. We have issued our Resolution on the subject which has received mixed reception. Certain quarters complained that we have not gone far enough. There are other bodies who think that we should not have taken that policy at all. The question which my Friend Maulavi Maqbul Hussain Chaudhury mentioned about the Chuktibhagi tenantry is not meant for settlement of land under the Resolution. It is in connection with the utilising of road side land which can be settled with people for growing crop, only paddy crop, that this Chuktibhagi system is going to be experimented upon.

My Friend had very forcibly insisted that there should be a committee or a food board in the Province. In this matter I will entirely be guided by the vote of the House. (*Voices, hear, hear*). But I will place certain matters before the hon. Members so that they can arrive at a reasoned judgment on the subject. The question that we should remember is not merely one of paper scheme, but that a scheme laid down by a body, call it a food committee, call it, a food board, must be capable of being translated into action. There are three different branches of this subject. First the procurement, distribution and price control. As regards procurement, we had been benefited by the experiment of having a Government agency in the last year and we propose to follow the same system with a separate agency for Surma Valley. Many run with the idea that procurement is only possible in one case, namely, buying up all the surplus

available coming to the market for export outside the Province. It is not so. Procurement is necessary for equitable distribution and also for price control. Next comes distribution. For distribution of the procured rice and paddy one must have the co-operation of the railways and the steamship companies. Unless they agree to transport our foodstuffs from one place to another where it is necessary, no amount of paper scheme would see the benefit to the people which such a board will want to do. Lastly comes price control. Price control can be effective only if the authority controlling the price has sufficient stock to release to the markets at a time when the markets show a tendency to rise. Now, in order to function effectively and efficiently we must have the co-operation of all the three bodies, the Government agents procuring, the railways, and steamship companies that are carriers of these goods, for effective control of the rice position. In these days the carriers have been utilised most by the defence services. The problem of representatives of the army on such a board is a vital necessity. It is with these ideas in our minds that the Economic Advisory Board was constituted. There we get representatives of the railways as well as the steamship company. We also get the co-operation of Military representatives. We get reports from our buying agents. That body has got representatives from this House and speaking off-hand, I think there are as many as eight Members of this House sitting in the Economic Advisory Board. I think my Friend either Mr. Whittaker, or Mr. Mookerjee or Mr. Maqbul Hussain Chaudhury will correct me if I fail to enumerate any member in that Economic Board. As representatives of this House or as head of the Supply Department, I am there. My Friend, the Finance Minister is there. My Friend Mr. Maqbul Hussain Chaudhury, representative of *buvo* crop is also there. Mr. Whittaker, representative of the great Tea Association, Khan Bahadur Maulavi Mufizur Rahman, Mr. Kedarmal Brahmin—they are all there. Khan Bahadur Maulavi Keramat Ali from Assam Valley is also there from this House. The Council is also represented by Mr. Satyendra Lahiri. In this way we have got a body which is already doing the work which a food committee will do and in my opinion they are doing it far more effectively because we are getting the co-operation of all other interests whom I have already mentioned but if on the face of that Board this House thinks that there should be another body then I will surely constitute another Board.

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHAUDHURI: May I interrupt for a moment, Sir? Is there any Member from the Assamese Hindu Community in the Economic Advisory Board?

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA: If by Assamese only Assam Valley indigenous Hindus are meant there are none. There is Mr. Kedarmal Brahmin who represents the Indian Mercantile Community from Assam Valley.

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHAUDHURI: If there is any seat, Sir, I think Mr. Buragohain can be taken in.

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA: My Friend is making these interruptions deliberately so that I may lose my trend. If the House wants to constitute another food committee, I shall be only too glad to form one but I must say that the personnel of this Advisory Food Board must be other than those who already sit in the Economic Advisory Board. That is one thing and another thing which I must insist is that under orders of the Government of India, I have constituted a Provincial Advisory Board for standard cloth. Now, very recently about a fortnight back, we have received another communication from the Government of India that we may constitute a Provincial Advisory Board for carrying their latest Ordinance—anti-hoarding and anti-profiteering Ordinance—into effect. We will have another—constitute a new board on the vote of the House. All these three functions should be amalgamated and given to one board. I have some suggestions of having a board of seven of which there will be one Government representative and six non-official, five from this House and one from the Upper House. Whether it will be possible to have a representative body—representative of all sections of this House with this bare number, I leave for the House to judge. So, Sir, in this matter I will be guided by the views of

this House. As I have already constituted the Standard Cloth Board in which the following are already there—Mr. Whittaker, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan, Babu Kamini Kumar Sen, Maulavi Muzarraf Ali Laskar, Srijut Joges Chandra Gohain and Srijut Bhairab Chandra Das. We have already had six Members of the Legislative Assembly in the Standard Cloth Advisory Committee. If hon. Members want that we should have another board I will request them to consider whether these Members should not remain in that body.

Then, again Sir, mention has been made by my Friend the Mover that the informal food committee that discussed the food situation sometime in August recommended that there should be a similar board in each Subdivisional headquarters and District headquarters to give the benefit of their local knowledge and to give the advantage of their informations to the District and Subdivisional authorities. I at once took that matter up and I have formed such food committees in every Subdivisional headquarters wherein every Member of the Legislative Assembly or Member of the Legislative Council living within their jurisdiction will be a member. The Chairman of the Local Board and Chairman of the Municipal Board will also be members and there will be a representative of the trade and any other enthusiastic worker about the food solution to be nominated by the District Magistrate. Unfortunately although my Secretary has sent up the names to be published in the Gazette but as some Subdivisions have not been able to send up their names up till now, I prevented him from publishing the names piecemeal. We have asked the defaulting Subdivisions to send up the names at once so that the whole list can be published in one issue and that soon I have every confidence that before this month is out, those food committees will be constituted and they will have a large say in the matter of distribution and price control in their own areas. If hon. Members who will represent their constituencies in those Boards find that they can do sufficient good to the people by giving their services to those committees, they may think that we need not have a Provincial committee at this stage.

Sir, one more matter and I will finish. These are the first two recommendations of my hon. Friend Mr. Maqbul Hussain Chaudhury, and I find that Mr. Baidyanath Mookerjee also had made similar recommendations. These are the two recommendations or suggestions, *i.e.*, (1) to start an anti-hoard drive with proper instructions to the public and (2) to have a complete survey of the cultivable lands under paddy. These are ideal recommendations which look very good in theory, but as realists, we must take every point into consideration. Now roughly we have got 5 million acres of land under paddy—this is according to our agricultural report. Converted into bighas which is the normal measure of land in the Province, it is a crore and a half bighas. It is up to the hon. Members of the House to judge what amount of money, time and labour will be required to have a complete survey of this vast quantity of land. Then again we have been asked to start an anti-hoard drive. Ninetyfive per cent. of our population are cultivators and if any drive is to be undertaken, most of this 95 per cent. of the people for whom this anti-hoarding drive is recommended will be involved in it. There are quite a number of big cultivators who have got a considerable quantity of paddy and rice in their granaries. We go to a cultivator, ask him what is his requirement for feeding his own family during the year and then we go with our weights and measures and start measuring the extra quantity of paddy. Is it conceivable that this drive can be done—very effectively done—in the short space of time that we have? Moreover, no crop of the different seasonal variety of paddy that we grow in Assam is in itself a surplus crop. Our winter crop which is the biggest, gives us only 75 per cent. of our requirements. If we start an anti-hoard drive, say at this time, the cultivator would at once say 'I have not got with me the requirement for feeding my family for the year'. His extra supply, if there is a supply at all, is made up by other crops. In the Surma Valley they grow *aus* and *buro* crops and in the Assam Valley we have got different crops, such as, *aus*, *bau*—which are broadcast and also another variety which is *khorma* or *katisali*. So at no point will these crops make a surplus in the granaries of the

cultivators. If we take the total of these different harvests which a cultivator gets at different times of the year the cumulative effect of that can alone show whether there is a surplus and there is hoarding. Now the Government of India have very recently enacted the Hoarding and Profiteering Prohibition Ordinance V of 1943 which was issued from New Delhi on the 3rd November. I think that will give the Local Governments sufficient power to find out the hoardings.

Maulavi ABDUL BARI CHAUDHURY: How the hoarding is defined ?

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA: The hoarding is not defined, but the 'Hoarding and Profiteering Prohibition Ordinance' gives power to the civil authorities to take necessary remedial measures for the success of a scheme which may be designed to supplement and reinforce Provincial efforts in the campaign against hoarding and profiteering.

Babu KAMINI KUMAR SEN: On a point of information. Does not the Ordinance relate to articles other than paddy ?

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA: My Friend is correct but we have already got an Ordinance or Order passed under the Defence of India Rules.

Ordinance is giving particular powers to the Provincial Government to deal with the difficulties experienced against all hoarders. We can follow the same policy for rice and paddy also. To find out whether a trader is hoarding or not, we must find that he has surplus in his godown or granary, but to prevent such a stock being found the rule or process that is now being generally followed by the traders is that the poor cultivators are being given advance which is popularly known as *dadon* and the paddy or rice is kept with the cultivators as against that advance, and the ownership of the property is though with the trader the possession of the articles is with the cultivator. In order to get round this we have recently issued another order wherein we have asked both the cultivator and the Mahajan to disclose the amount of *dadon* that has been given so that we may know what quantity of food-grains—rice or paddy—is with the cultivator on behalf of the trader. If we get this material from both the sources, we will be able to follow any stock where it is and if we know where the stock is, we can either requisition it or secure it for distribution to the public. Hence there is no need for a drive to find out stocks.

I think, I have placed sufficient materials before the House of the policy which Government had adopted in the past and the policy which Government is intending to follow in the future, and in the light of the remarks and the figures that I have given, I think, my hon. Friends will give us the credit that we have forestalled them and most of their recommendations have been given effect to.

The Assembly then adjourned for lunch till 2 P.M.

After lunch.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: I would now ask the hon. Members to move their Motions and Amendments without any speeches. After all the Motions and Amendments are placed before the House I shall call upon the Members one after another to deliver their speeches; of course, the Movers will be given preference.

Then I may tell the hon. Members that this is the really most important business of the Session. This very vital question affects the Province deeply, and each hon. Member is anxious to take part in the debate. I am therefore disposed to give ample latitude to every hon. Member who wants to speak. Hon. Members know we have got two more days for Private Members' Business; if the debate is not finished to-day it can be carried over to the 26th; if it be not finished on the 26th it may stand over again for the 27th. As I see, the House is very keen about the matter and would like to have a full-dress debate.

I would now ask Mr. Mookerjee to move his Motion.

Mr. BAIDYANANH MOOKERJEE: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that for the original Motion *the following be substituted:—

"Taking the food situation into consideration this Assembly is of opinion that in order to effectively tackle the present food situation and to improve the economic

*Maulavi Maqbul Hussain Chaudhury to move:—

"That this Assembly do proceed to consider the food situation in the Province."

condition of the Province the Government do take the following measures amongst others at once:—

(1) To open registers in villages immediately throughout the Province with a view to record (a) the name of each cultivator, (b) the area of his land under paddy cultivation, (c) total quantity of crop when harvested, (d) number of members of dependents in the family of each cultivator below and above 12 years of age separately.

(2) To prevent export from the Province before knowing the actual surplus, if any, and to allow inter-district export of foodgrains within the Province.

(3) to pursue vigorous anti-hoarding drive.

(4) To prevent profiteering by all possible severest means.

(5) The Grow-More-Food Campaign be properly handled by an expert and qualified officer.

(6) To set up Regional Food Advisory Boards throughout the Province to regulate the production, supply and price.

(7) To introduce ration cards throughout the Province.

(8) To make adequate arrangements for supplies of all kinds of essential food-stuffs and other necessities of life”.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Motion moved:

“Taking the food situation into consideration this Assembly is of opinion that in order to effectively tackle the present food situation and to improve the economic condition of the Province the Government do take the following measures amongst others at once:—

(1) To open registers in villages immediately throughout the province with a view to record (a) the name of each cultivator, (b) the area of his land under paddy cultivation, (c) total quantity of crop when harvested, (d) number of members of dependents in the family of each cultivator below and above 12 years of age separately.

(2) To prevent export from the Province before knowing the actual surplus, if any, and to allow inter-district export of food grains within the Province.

(3) To pursue vigorous anti-hoarding drive.

(4) To prevent profiteering by all possible severest means.

(5) The Grow-More-Food Campaign be properly handled by an expert and qualified officer.

(6) To set up Regional Food Advisory Boards throughout the Province to regulate the production, supply and price.

(7) To introduce ration cards throughout the province.

(8) To make adequate arrangements for supplies of all kinds of essential food-stuffs and other necessities of life.”

*Srijut SURENDRA NATH BURAGOHAIN: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that after the word ‘Province’ at the end of the original Motion of Maulavi Muhammad Maqbul Hussain Choudhury the following be added:—

‘and that this Assembly is of opinion that the Government do take the following amongst other measures without delay:

(a) Introduction of rationing all over the Province including the rural areas; and
(b) Fixation of price of all essential food-stuffs including milk, meat, eggs and fish’.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Motion moved:

“That after the word ‘Province’ at the end of the original Motion of Maulavi Muhammad Maqbul Hussain Choudhury the following be added:—

‘and that this Assembly is of opinion that the Government do take the following amongst other measures without delay:

(a) Introduction of rationing all over the Province including the rural areas; and

(b) Fixation of price of all essential food-stuffs including milk, meat, eggs and fish’.”

*Babu NIRENDRA NATH DEV: I beg, Sir, to move that after the word 'Province' at the end of the original Motion of Maulavi Muhammad Maqbul Hussain Choudhury the following be added:—

'and that this Assembly is of opinion that the Government of Assam do refrain from making any purchases of rice or paddy on their own account'.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Motion moved:

"That after the word 'Province' at the end of the original Motion of Maulavi Muhammad Maqbul Hussain Chaudhury the following be added—

'and that this Assembly is of opinion that the Government of Assam do refrain from making any purchases of rice or paddy on their own account.'"

Maulavi ABDUL BARI CHAUDHURY: I beg to move, Sir, that this Assembly is of opinion that the extremely grave situation arising out of the acute shortage of food-stuffs and the abnormal prices thereof in the Province be taken into consideration.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Motion moved:

"That this Assembly is of opinion that the extremely grave situation arising out of the acute shortage of food-stuffs and the abnormal prices thereof in the Province be taken into consideration."

*Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN: I beg to move, Sir, that this Assembly is of opinion that the Government of Assam do constitute a special Committee of seven members consisting of officials and non-officials, with non-official majority to be nominated by the Government to draw up definite programme to deal with the economic and food problems of the Province and to regulate the supply policy.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Motion moved:

"This Assembly is of opinion that the Government of Assam do constitute a special Committee of seven members consisting of officials and non-officials, with non-official majority to be nominated by the Government to draw up definite programme to deal with the economic and food problems of the Province and to regulate the supply policy."

*Srijut SURENDRA NATH BURAGOHAIN: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that for the original Motion of Maulavi Abdur Rahman the following be substituted:—

"That this Assembly is of opinion that the Government of Assam do set up a Standing Committee of seven Members of the Assam Legislature, five to be elected from this House, one to be nominated by the Government from amongst the Members of the Legislative Council and the Minister-in-charge of Supply to act as its Chairman, to advise the Government from time to time on problems and policy connected with civil supply of the Province.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Motion moved:

"That for the original Motion of Maulavi Abdur Rahman the following be substituted:—

"That this Assembly is of opinion that the Government of Assam do set up a Standing Committee of seven Members of the Assam Legislature, five to be elected from this House, one to be nominated by the Government from among the Members of the Legislative Council and the Minister-in-charge of Supply to act as its Chairman, to advise the Government from time to time on problems and policy connected with civil supply of the Province'."

*Babu KARUNA SINDHU ROY: Sir, I beg to move that after the word "Government" in the fourth line of the Motion moved the following shall be added:—

"and to be taken from all parties of the Province."

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Motion moved:

"After the word 'Government' in the fourth line the following shall be added:—

'and to be taken from all parties of the Province'."

Maulavi ABDUL BARI CHAUDHURY: Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is surely a momentous occasion. We are going to discuss a matter on which will depend the lives of thousands of persons whom we profess to represent. The gravity of the situation demands united efforts of all sections of the people. The food situation as it

prevails in the Province at present is very critical and fraught with grave dangers. Only a month ago, Sir, rice was selling from Rs.30 to Rs.35 per maund even at the big rice-producing centres. People were reported to be starving in the villages. Apart from the appalling situation prevailing at Baniyachong, stray reports of disease and death were pouring in.

The price at that time was far beyond the reach of the majority of the middle classes, and these people had not the means of having even one square meal per day. At the present moment there has been a sudden fall in the rice market ; from Rs.30 to Rs.35, the price has come down to Rs. 10 to 16 now. This dramatic fall in the course of one month before the *Aman* and *Sali* crop could be properly harvested cannot be viewed without suspicion. We have grave apprehension that this is another clever move on the part of the stockists and hoarders.

I am sorry to note that the policy that has been adopted by the Government of Assam does not give us any satisfaction. They have allowed things to pass on. They did not try to collect necessary statistics and data. The officers seem not to have realised the gravity of the situation and soon it is going out of grip. The denial policy with which we started is leading us to the vertex of danger. The policy so long pursued has been characterised by a sense of uncertainty and lack of confidence in ourselves. It is no wonder at this hour of distress that people will find it difficult to place real reliance on the Government.

I do not want to dilate on the first chapter of our food policy when a ban was imposed on export of all food grains and how it was worked out. Nor have I any intention to discuss the incidents relating to the withdrawal of it at the behest of the Central Government. Needless to say that the Government of India exposed in its nakedness the mockery of the much vaunted Provincial Autonomy. The supporters of the Government would have welcomed a firmer action, even if it entailed a crisis.

We have already entered the third chapter. A fresh ban has been imposed and it is as a result of parleys held in New Delhi. But what is the price we had to pay in exchange ? The reports published from Delhi and Calcutta were alarming. The Hon'ble Food Minister to the Government of Bengal declared on the floor of the Bengal Legislative Assembly that they would receive 63,000 tons of paddy from Assam under the new arrangement. Then again the condition put down by the Government of India at the Food Conference at New Delhi was that the procurement plan must be put in operation and stocks must be on the move to Bengal and Government of India would judge whether sufficient steps have been taken to secure supplies. Free trade would continue to operate until that time.

The first question that one would be tempted to ask whether Assam which here means only the Surma Valley is in a position to meet these exorbitant demand of 17,00,000 maunds ? The next question is whether this huge price at the cost of starvation of her own people is worth while for the reimposition of the ban. These are matters which must be examined in detail.

These questions inevitably lead to another question. Is Assam a surplus Province ? All information at our disposal points to an emphatic 'No.' From a report submitted by the Department of Agriculture, Assam, to the Government of India, we find that in the year 1940 which was perhaps a normal year the total export including the export by country boat amounted to 12,42,650 maunds of paddy and 2,06,925 maunds of rice. The import for the same period amounted to 29,361 maunds of paddy and 11,80,807 maunds of rice ; if paddy is converted in terms of rice it will reveal a net deficit of 2,67,000 maunds of rice. The Senior Marketing Officer admitted in course of the same report that with regard to her demands for rice during normal years Assam is very nearly a self-supporting Province. I presume that there has not been any appreciable change in our balance sheet as the small additional acreage that has been brought under plough would be more than counterbalanced by the normal increase of our population.

What is the position at the end of the year 1943 ? Situated in the active War zone, we have an extra burden of at least 10 lakhs including the soldiers stationed for the defence of our frontiers. These people are to be provided for and provided perhaps with abundance.

The import, 65 per cent. of which came from Burma has totally stopped. Due to abnormal condition prevailing in Bengal export in that direction has far exceeded the figures of normal years. Apart from the purchases made by duly authorised agency, a vast quantity of paddy was smuggled outside the Province. Then again, huge quantities were purchased by the Indian Tea Association far beyond their normal requirements. Above all, we have the Messrs. Steel Brothers. Is it probable that after so much drain Assam would be able to shoulder another burden of 17 lakhs of maunds without starving her own population? The whole proposition is absurd and ridiculous.

I am constrained to say that in more than one respect Assam has suffered by default. Feeling against Assam is hardening at New Delhi. A false notion there is gaining ground that while Assam is swimming in affluence, it is denying a portion of its hoarded surplus to its stricken neighbours. It is a pity that the Prime Minister of Assam could not attend the momentous session of the Food Conference held in July. Is it not time to explore the myth of Assam's imaginary surplus?

We have, many of us, personally witnessed the sufferings in Bengal. It is colossal and heart rendering. In its stark grimness it will perhaps surpass the great famine of 1776, but her people and her Government are alive to the danger. The Government of India have recognised her needs. Supplies have been organised from far and near; but what about Assam? Is there any prospect of relief in the days of our scarcity? The situation is already desparate. If the Government wants to tide over, all possible steps should be taken immediately and without delay, against export. Any undertaking to the contrary should be repudiated forthwith.

Though free trade was introduced in the Surma Valley, the Brahmaputra Valley remained a protected zone but the suffering there was none the less. The food-shortage and rocketing prices there was a direct outcome of the unholy competition between the Indian Tea Association and Messrs. the Steel Brothers, the sole agents of the Government. Why did not the Government of Assam put a timely brake when this Company was purchasing at any price to earn a good commission under the terms of the contract? Would the Government enquire how much rice and paddy was procured by the Indian Tea Association and the individual tea concerns? Is it not time to settle our accounts with Messrs. Steel Brothers?

So long the Government of India had not countenanced any fixation of maximum price for essential food grains. But the attitude had to be changed. Now the initiative for fixing such prices rests with the Provincial Government. After the Food Conference held in Shillong in August last a maximum price was fixed. But perhaps, the time has come when not only the ceiling price but also the floor price could be determined by Government.

Sir, there was a bumper *boro* crop this year, so also the *aus* but we could not retain our stock. The prospect of *amon* and *sali* is also very satisfactory. But are we going to allow this crop also to flow in the same channel through which the *boro* and *aus* were drained away?

I would suggest also that attempt should be made immediately to import larger quantities of wheat, gram and millet to relieve pressure on the consumption of paddy and rice. The Government of Assam should awake to the reality of the situation. In the villages, scarcity is already prevailing. The big agriculturists are holding their stocks in expectation of getting still higher prices. Hundreds of persons have starved in the past and many more are expected to starve in future, if we do not change our policy. An anti-hoarding drive should be undertaken to bring out the surplus stocks in the open market. Sir, I do not agree with the Hon'ble Prime Minister that it is not a workable proposition, and that an anti-hoarding drive will affect 95 per cent. of the cultivators. It will affect only the stockists and perhaps at the maximum 5 per cent. of the cultivators who are very big agriculturists. So it is essential that the word "hoarder" should be defined.

The "Grow-More-Food" Campaign should be seriously undertaken by throwing open the huge cultivable waste land under the plough, by supplying adequate quantities of food-seeds, by affording irrigation facilities and by making liberal

advances to the cultivators for purchase of cattle. Sir, it is a pity that out of the promised sum of 14 lakhs of rupees, Assam will get only 3 lakhs of rupees or something like that while Bengal is getting 36 lakhs of rupees for the "Grow-More-Food" Campaign from the Government of India. Here again I should say, Assam's case has gone by default. Even after the Government Resolution regarding the policy of settlement of land, not an inch of cultivable waste land has been up-till now settled with the people who are crying for land.

Sir, I am tempted to ask who is representing Assam in the Long Term Planning Committee which will decide our future policy and planning in co-ordination with the Government of India. Finally I submit that all these things should be taken into consideration before we evolve an agreed solution of our food problem. With these words, Sir, I resume my seat.

Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN: Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a little earlier, we had been reminded by the Hon'ble Chair that the Motion which now we are going to discuss, namely, the food problem of the Province is a very serious one; and so every one of us here should give our best and thoughtful consideration towards the matter so that the Hon'ble House may come to a considered and definite decision over the question. Sir, when we take the question of the food problem of the Province, we should first decide for how long we are going to pass through this abnormal period. I am putting a short sentence from Colonel Knox who in course of his statement said that the present war may continue up to the end of 1949 and it is not known when the normal period will come after the war. It may not come back very soon, it may take a year or two for the normal time to come. In all these circumstances, it is only desirable that this Hon'ble House should take into serious consideration this problem, namely, the food problem, so that it can save millions and millions of the people of the Province. Sir, the situation in Bengal is well-known to each and every hon. Member of this House. When we go through the pages of Newspapers, we find that within the city of Calcutta alone, hundreds and hundreds of people are dying for want of food. If you look to other places, you will find that dreadful reports are coming from each and every part of Bengal. We also get report that human corpses are being devoured by vultures, etc. because it is not possible on the part of the human beings to take care of the dead bodies. It is really a very dreadful and heart-rending news, and we must get our own lesson from the occurrences which are daily taking place in Bengal. It is no doubt a blessing to us that up to now we have not met with such exigencies. Of course, there may be one or two cases of this nature. My point is that before we go to take into consideration the future policy and programme of the food problem, let us see what is the present policy of the Government which is being promulgated in the Province with a view to solve the food problem. In the early part of the day, we have heard an exhaustive statement of our Hon'ble Prime Minister with regard to the food policy which has hitherto been followed by the Government, but Sir, I am constrained to say here that I have found nothing in his lengthy speech which would show what he intends to do with regard to the food problem in future. In fact, I have found nothing as to what his future programme would be. He has said that if the Hon'ble House wants that a Board should be constituted for the purpose of regulating the food policy of the Province, he can agree to that but at the same time, he has also administered an warning to us that all the Members who are now serving in the Economic Board must be taken in. Sir, I do not find any justification whatsoever for this part of his statement. I, therefore, ask what are the special reasons for which this Hon'ble House should commit themselves that the persons who are now working in the Economic Advisory Board which has not the sanction of the people of this Province, should be taken in that Board.

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA: I must correct the hon'ble Member. Sir, I never said that the Members who are already working in the Economic Advisory Board should be taken in that Board. In fact I said exactly the opposite. What I said is that the Members who are already working on the Economic Advisory Board should not be nominated for this Board.

Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN: I distinctly heard that the Hon'ble Prime Minister said that those Members should be nominated for this Board also.

The Hon'ble Maulavi Saiyid Sir MUHAMMAD SAADULLA: I said that those Members must not be nominated for this Board.

Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN: I am sorry for this mistake, Sir, and I beg your pardon (*laughter*).

Sir, the Economic Advisory Board which now regulates the food policy and upon which the fate of our Province depends was constituted, I am told, during the "93 Administration". During the last Budget Session there was ample demonstration on the floor of the House and the feelings of the hon. Members was that the Board should be reconstituted. Since then, Sir, we found there were only one or two additions in the persons of Maulavi Maqbul Hussain Chaudhury, who, I am told is supposed to be taken from the *boro*-growing area of Sylhet and Babu Satyendra Mohan Lahiri from the other Valley. With these two exceptions I do not find any justification for the continuance of the other Members on the Committee. While making this remark, I must make it clear that I do not bear any grudge against my hon. friend Mr. Mookerjee or Mr. Whittaker, but I have no faith in them. My point is that the House should get a chance to send their own representatives. Seeing that they were nominated during the "93 Administration", I do not think they have any popular sanction behind them to serve there.

Then again I come to another point. It will be a news to the Hon'ble House that the Secretary of that Committee is our hon. Mr. Whittaker. Now, let us proceed to consider the interest which Mr. Whittaker can naturally have for the people of the Province of Assam. I should say, that this Mr. Whittaker is a person who has come to this Legislature with a vested interest.....

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Instead of saying 'this Mr. Whittaker' the hon. Member should say, "hon. Mr. Whittaker".

Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN: I am sorry, Sir, the hon. Mr. Whittaker has come to this House with a vested interest to serve. He is the representative of Tea Industry and he represents the planting interests. So it will be unwise to think that he can have any idea as to the condition of the people of my own Province. For Indian Planting Constituency we have got our own Members who are the sons of this Province. For European Planting Constituencies the representatives who have come here are persons who do not belong to India or who are not sons of Indian soil. Sir, up till now as I have seen from the activities of hon. Mr. Whittaker and his Colleagues, I have been fed up by reason of the fact that they never take any interest for the poor people of my Province; and this is why I would like to describe him as a Member with a vested interest. His interest cannot have any other motive but to look to the welfare of his own constituency. Moreover, Mr. Whittaker is a person who not only represents Planting Constituency but he is also very very largely paid by that Constituency. He originally belonged to the Indian Civil Service but he resigned his original job.....

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Why should the hon. Member introduce all these matters?

Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN: With this hon. Mr. Whittaker we have sealed our fate. One more curious thing has been brought to light that regarding the food problem of the people of India the Central Government has formed a Long Term Planning Committee which will deal with Indian food policy and the various provinces have sent their own representatives there. Where Ministries are functioning one of the Hon'ble Ministers has been nominated to serve on that Committee but unfortunately for the Province of Assam it is hon. Mr. Whittaker who has been sent there to present the fate of the people of the Province. I put a question to the Hon'ble Prime Minister whether it is at all desirable that this foreign gentleman, a European, should be sent there to represent the fate of the millions of the people of my Province. Can he convince me with any argument that he is the suitable person to represent the fate of the thousands and thousands of the poor people of my Province? Mr. Whittaker knows very little about the condition of the Province. I am sorry that this is the manner and this is the idea of our Government. Now time has come, and it is high time, that there should not be any more toleration. Let us unite together and let us see

that Government do save the lot of the people of my Province. If we indulge in finding fault with one another, certainly we shall be held responsible to the millions of people of the Province whom we intend to and do represent here. If things are allowed to continue in this way a time may come when our own children may die for want of food on the road side. This time we turned out Bengal people like cats and dogs. Many people came to our Province but what did we do to them? We did not attend to them rather we turned them out. They were not allowed even an entrance to our Province. At Shaistaganj and Lumding stations they were held up. These people were treated mercilessly and even beaten by police of railway staff. There were deaths at Shaistaganj. I then ran to the Hon'ble Prime Minister for making some sort of arrangements for doles to these people. The Hon'ble Prime Minister said that he had already issued orders for giving doles to these people. Sir, the Bengal people tried to come to our Province, but if such a thing happens to our Province what can we do? There is natural barriers to all sides. We cannot go to Burma, cannot go to China and it is only Bengal where we can run to and there our fate may be the same. I appeal to my hon. Colleagues to give their best consideration in this matter.

Again, Sir, let me take up certain matters which are now agitating the people at large in the rural areas. Sir, our Government is now maintaining a huge staff in the name of Supply Department at a very very huge cost with a Secretary and other officers. The Secretary is an Indian Civil Service man who earned a very good name in the administrative capacity as the head of a district. We are told by the Hon'ble Prime Minister that he would prove to be the best man as Secretary of Supply Department.

I find innumerable officers have been appointed in the Supply Department. In spite of this how this Department is now functioning let me describe this. We are told, that there are certain foodstuffs which are meant for the consumption of the general mass people at a low price, *i.e.*, at the controlled price. It has been said by the Mover and some other hon. Members as to how things are going on with regard to the price of controlled goods. I will cite an instance for which I have got the right to speak and it is from my personal knowledge and it is an occurrence of my own Sub-division. Sir, to this Subdivision, Habiganj, I am told, about 6,000 maunds of sugar are allotted for the consumption of the people for every month. But how this sugar is distributed? Only the town area people could get the scent of the controlled sugar under the rationing system of course, but even then all this is not adequate at all, and those who are fortunate got one seer or a little more. But there is no arrangement made to distribute the sugar in the rural areas. Even if any zamindar comes from a village he does not get any quantity of controlled sugar. Is it that the sugar, atta and flour are not meant for the people living in villages, and are they only meant for the people of town areas?

Mr. BAIDYANATH MOOKERJEE: It is for smelling and the hon. Speaker did not get any taste of them, perhaps.

Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN: I do not care whether I get a taste or not. May I ask whether the people living in villages are not at all considered fit to consume sugar? Is it wise to think that the people living in villages are not like those who live in towns? I do not think the towns people are a better type of people than those living in villages. Sir, it will be a matter of surprise for the hon. Members to know that one day a gentleman had to come to Habiganj town from his place some about 14-16 miles away to have a quantity of atta for consumption by a sick man, according to medical advice. The man was asked to submit a petition and then it would be considered. He submitted his petition to the Supply officer concerned where he waited the whole day, and next day this gentleman came and complained that he had waited for the last two days for some atta and he did not know what had happened to his petition submitted some 24 hours back. Probably this man had to go without any atta even after waiting for two days. If that be the case, may I know if this atta and sugar are meant only for the people of towns and the people of villages have not the legitimate right to get a portion?

Sir, my hon. Friend the Mover has mentioned that on the 24th of August last the Government was pleased to convene a Food Conference and though there was limited accommodation in that conference I was fortunate to be one of the members. We were then given to understand definitely by the Hon'ble Premier that the recommendations of the Food Conference would be given effect to.....

Mr. BAIDYANATH MOOKERJEE: On a point of information, Sir, was he coming from a nominated body or an elected one by whom the Food Conference was constituted on the 24th August?

Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN: He should remember better as he was also a member of that conference.

Mr. BAIDYANATH MOOKERJEE: But there were members, Sir, who were nominated.

Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN: We have been told by the Hon'ble Premier that according to the recommendation of that conference he would issue orders to the District and Subdivisional Officers to form food committees for necessary guidance and advice. In that Conference of 24th August I particularly pointed out to the Hon'ble Premier that we had had enough of experience about that sort of advisory committees and advices from private persons might not be accepted by the authorities concerned. Thereupon, I remember, the Hon'ble Premier told me in that conference that those advisory committees would have certain status and recommendations or advice would be binding on the Subdivisional or District authorities. Let me now cite an example of my experience which I gathered in one meeting. In my Subdivision a food committee meeting was held on the 1st of November last where I was also invited to be present in my capacity as a Member of the Legislative Assembly as amongst other Members of the Legislative Assembly of my Subdivision. I was the only person to live in the town and the rest living far away from it. One of us lives in Calcutta, another one at Sylhet, one is an Hon'ble Minister here and another is Babu Shibendra Chandra Biswas. This meeting was to be held in the Debt Conciliation Office and Chairmen of Local Boards and Municipal Boards and some other gentlemen came to attend. But there was none except the said Supply Officer from the official side. The time was fixed at 5 p. m., for the meeting and we waited and waited until about 6 p. m., he arrived and told us that there was no reason to wait for him as he had nothing to do with that Committee. He said that according to the Government letter he was to convene a meeting and so sent to us invitation letters and that it was we people who were to decide what to do. He further said, "when you come to a certain decision on a matter, you send the recommendations to me and I shall then see how far those can be accepted". If that is the case, Sir, I may enquire as to who is to preside over the meeting? Is it not the Subdivisional Officer to do so? I called for the Government letter and it was found that there was no mention that the Subdivisional Officer was to be present in such advisory meetings. Everybody there came and complained to me personally that there was no necessity of such a committee to sit. Since then, Sir, I have bidden a good-bye. I think this advisory body is nothing.

Nobody at all cares to accept the recommendations of this advisory committee. The Subdivisional Officers do not care to act in accordance with the committee's advice. What was the intention of constituting such committees? Why, we were given to understand that the recommendations of this advisory committee known as Food Committee would be accepted by the Subdivisional Officers. We hear that unless there is co-operation between the Government and the public no useful purpose will be served. Food Committees have been formed in every Subdivision but the local authorities feel reluctant to seek the co-operation of such committees. That is the state of affairs about the food problem in the Province. If they don't want public co-operation let them say that. Let them come forward and say "we don't want the co-operation of you, the public". Sir, there were two conferences at Sylhet and in one our Hon'ble Prime Minister was present which was held in the

bungalow of the Deputy Commissioner. I heard him saying to us that he wants co-operation of the public at large. I say, Sir, if the Hon'ble Prime Minister wants our co-operation why the District and Subdivisional authorities should not act upon his wishes?

Sir, it will be a news to you all that even my recommendation was turned down by one Forest Ranger. When I went home during the Puja holidays I found that there was a general order by the Subdivisional Officer of Habiganj to distribute standard cloth to deserving persons. Some mysteries and barbers who are my neighbours approached and requested me to recommend them to the Ranger for giving them some standard cloth. The Chunarighat Ranger was appointed by the Subdivisional Officer to be the distributing authority in my thana. I wrote a slip to the Ranger with a request that they were very poor and as their Puja was coming they might be supplied with standard cloth. They went to him three days. On the third day he said "unless you come up with your chowkidar I am not prepared to give you any thing. I must have identification. Unless the chowkidar comes and identifies you I cannot give you standard cloth." After being disappointed and disgusted they probably did not go to him again. Sir, this is the manner how Government officers follow the orders of the Hon'ble Premier. But I don't know if he cares to know whether his orders are carried out or not. I learnt that there was a distinct order from Government before the Puja and the Id. to supply standard cloth to the poor people. Did the Hon'ble the Prime Minister care to know whether the poor people at all received any cloth or in what way that was distributed.

Sir, incidentally I may mention something about the distribution of kerosene. It does not come under food discussion but it comes under supply matter. The biggest anomaly which has been created in the Province from one corner to another is with regard to the distribution of kerosene. In pursuance of the wishes of this House during the last Session the Government decided to withdraw all prohibitory orders on the distribution of kerosene. But, a very novel procedure has been followed in the district of Sylhet. The Sylhet district authority did not come to any definite decision over the question for some time and as a result there was chaotic situation everywhere for want of kerosene. Black marketing was in its form. Then, Sir, after two or three months orders have been issued that there should be rationing. The present arrangement is that the consumer must have a card for his kerosene. One tin of kerosene which measures about 14 or 14½ seers has been allotted or rationed for one hundred families. This is the arrangement in my Subdivision. For these one hundred families is only one tin of kerosene containing 14½ or 15 seers at least at all sufficient? No matter whether these hundred families contain two hundred, three hundred or four hundred people.

Sir, in my village I found a serious trouble over kerosene distribution. Petitions after petitions were coming to the Subdivisional Officer that the distribution was not adequate and properly conducted. The Sub-Deputy Collector and the Daroga went there but the dispute could not be settled. I personally went there and held an enquiry and I myself made the distribution. Sir, what was that distribution? Each of the families had to be given only a powa or half a powa or two kutchas and in this way the distribution was made. I had to take two or three coins with me to make the measurement with a 'choonga'. Even the biggest family could not get more than a powa in a week. This was the former system and now that system has again been introduced in our Subdivision. I enquired of the Subdivisional Officer what was the reason of re-introducing that system while there would be no rationing of kerosene. I have been told that the Deputy Commissioner had passed an order to the effect that rationing should be introduced again otherwise proper distribution could not be expected. They wanted proper distribution. I was also told that according to the arrangement made with the Burma Oil Company the Government has no hand over the wholesale dealers but Government can only ascertain the names of persons who can be retail dealers. The wholesale dealers are to be fixed by the Company itself. You know, Sir, the Company have got their sub-agencies in each Subdivision. This sub-agency had to supply the names of the wholesale dealers to the Company and

the sub-agency is bound to sell kerosene only to the wholesale dealers. Then after taking the list of the wholesale dealers from the sub-agencies the Subdivisional Officer of each Subdivision has to fix up the persons who should be retail sellers and from them the consumers are to get the oil. Now, Sir, in making allotment of retailers how things are happening let me describe it. Maulavi Madaris Chaudhury who is a very honest officer is in charge of Supply in my Subdivision and for the last two months that gentleman has been embarrassed in making proper allotment of retailers but he cannot make his two ends meet.

People from Nabiganj have been allotted to receive their tins from Habiganj which is at a great distance and people from Paniunda village which is about 20 miles from Ajmiriganj have been allotted to Ajmiriganj. He is to go there and get his allotted kerosene which involves him a great inconvenience and expenditure. Then let me tell you the plight of the consumers. There are a good many consumers in one village and they have been allotted to a retailer whose house may be at a distant village. These consumers are to go to this retail seller to get only a pawa or half a pawa of kerosene.

Mr. JOBANG D. MARAK : Sir, this question is outside the scope. Should he be allowed unlimited time ? Is it not a fact that rationing of kerosene was abolished and it has been enforced again ? I was allowed one bottle of kerosene monthly with a permit but after that there was an order that no permit was necessary and again there was another order enforcing the rationing system.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER : How long will the hon. Member go on ?

Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN : Only a few minutes more, Sir, and I will finish. Let me tell you how Government this time secured paddy from the cultivators. This is a very revealing feature of the thing that all poor cultivators were subjected to tortures in the name of securing paddy. I have been told that the biggest merchant in my District was let loose. Not a single maund of paddy was seized from their houses whereas the poor cultivators who did not possess more than 100, 80 or 70 maunds were subjected to various tortures. There were hundreds of complaints and I can prove from Government record that these poor people were subjected to tortures and their paddy was seized. These poor people entreated the officer not to seize their little quantity of paddy which they badly needed for the maintenance of their own family members and for the expenses of cultivation which was coming next, but the officer would not hear them. The Sub-Deputy Collector or other officer deputed for the purpose of securing paddy did not care to go to the villages and see for himself what quantity of paddy remained in the granaries of the villagers. He stayed in the Dak Bungalow or some other place and asked the villagers to meet him there. If any of the cultivators said that he had only 25 maunds as against 100 maunds arbitrarily estimated by the officer, the latter would say "All right let us come to compromise and let me have from you say 30 or 40 maunds". This sort of action on the part of the officers had given rise to many complaints and as a matter of fact many people came to complain before the Subdivisional Officer alleging the tortures they were subjected to in the hands of the officer. Sir, that is the state of affairs which was going on in my part of the Province. But strangely enough Government have not taken a single maund of paddy from those who could well afford to part with large quantity of paddy. These officers as I have said did not care to go and ascertain for themselves what quantity of paddy was available in each family. They simply acted on the report of the village chowkidars or other *tout* and prepared a list of persons from whom such and such quantity of paddy would be seized. In this way these poor people were made to part with all that they had. But in the case of big people these officers would not dare to ask what quantity of paddy they had in their stock. They would go to their houses, have a cup of tea and come back by giving a *saalam*. Sir, this is the manner in which the officials secured paddy in Subdivisions.

Now people are complaining that although paddy has been seized in their godowns Government are not taking delivery of those in all places. This is a general complaint in some places of my Subdivision. Only yesterday I have been told by one hon. Member of this House that 5,000 maunds of paddy secured by Government were lying at his godown for the last seven months, in spite of petitions submitted by him. Only the

other day that paddy has been taken delivery by the Ispahani and Company ; but in the meantime he had to keep watch over three godowns at a heavy expenditure.

Permit me, Sir, to make mention of the condition of the Baniachong village. In spite of special officers for supply and other special works what is the condition of that village ? The lot of the people of that village is pitiable. I asked the local officer to distribute paddy to the people as free doles, but the officer told me that he could not do it in the absence of orders from the District authorities. The Government ordered some paddy to be sold at concessional rate, *i.e.*, at Rs.12 a maund. I personally went to Baniachong and saw that people were suffering from malaria epidemic and were not in a position to purchase paddy even at a much lower rate. They don't earn even 8 annas a day, and the deadly disease has taken away their capacity to work. Even if paddy were supplied at 4 annas a maund they could not have purchased it. I returned very much disappointed, and made a complaint to the Subdivisional Officer to allow free ration to ailing and deserving families but he declined. It was reported that people at Baniachong were not coming forward to make purchase of paddy at Rs.12 per maund. I told the Subdivisional Officer that they were not in a position to purchase it even at 4 annas a maund as these people had no means to buy.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: The hon. Member has already spoken for more than 40 minutes. He should finish now.

Maulavi ABDUR RAHMAN: I am finishing now, Sir.

My concluding remarks would be, as has been suggested by the hon. Mover, that a permanent Committee, either in the name of Food Board, Food Committee or Economic Board, must be constituted, keeping in view that the Committee become a fully represented one in character. Mr. Chaudhuri remarked this morning that Mr. Buragohain may be taken as a representative from the Ahom community. This should not be the only criterion. What I want is that representatives of the Province, who have imagination, farsightedness and have got the time and energy to devote to this work should only be nominated by the Government. Sir, this Committee's work will not be over in a year or two ; it will have to continue its work for some years to come.

As regards distribution of supply, the Hon'ble Prime Minister should deeply understand that owing to non-execution of their orders at times the Government is becoming very much unpopular with the public. To cite only one instance, 800 maunds of sugar were spoiled at a certain Subdivision. It was meant for distribution at controlled rate, but the quantity was not distributed and had ultimately to be given to the sweet-meat dealers

With these words, I beg to resume my seat.

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHAUDHURI: Sir, I have requested Maulavi Ashrafuddin Md. Chaudhury, who has got first hand knowledge of the acute situation in Calcutta, to speak to-day, if you permit him, because he is going away to-morrow.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: If the hon. Movers of the Motions agree I have no objection.

After a pause.

All right, Maulavi Ashrafuddin Md. Chaudhury may speak.

Maulavi ASHRAFUDDIN MD. CHAUDHURY: Mr. Speaker, Sir, what strikes me most in this matter is that the food problem to-day is not an isolated problem of this Province alone. This is an All-India question. The hon. Members also know that there has been a lot of agitation over this matter in the Central Assembly. The whole country is agitated on this issue.

In this matter, I should say, the administration of the whole of the Government of India is involved. The foundation of the British Empire in India may be shaken if this problem is not properly tackled. The Military alone should not be the concern of the Secretary of State ; the civilian people who have been entrusted to his charge should also be looked after by him. The Military alone do not constitute the British Empire in India. The policy of the Government of India should be changed.

I find, Sir, certain questions were put by Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan about the quantity of rice given to the Military from the purchase made by Messrs. Steel Brothers and what the civilian requirement was. The Hon'ble Premier replied that the figures for the supply of rice to the Military could not be given in the interests of security. After this reply, Sir, what struck me was what is the good of debates on the food problem on the floor of this Provincial Assembly? As everybody knows, the Secretary of State has been anxious to restore provincial autonomy in the provinces and there has been anxiety on the part of provincial Governors to restore provincial Governments. But is it only to look after the needs and interests of Military in the name of Indian Puppet Ministers? Should the needs of the civilians be overlooked altogether? I am afraid, if the British Government or the Secretary of State for India would not seriously think about the food problem of the whole of India along with the needs of the people of Assam which is practically in the forefront of war, they will meet the same reverse as they met in Burma, Malaya and other places. The lives of the civil people seem to be ignored. It is the Civilians which should co-ordinate with the Military. We expected now that changes might be coming with the arrival of the new Viceroy. We have seen with what interest and devotion he visited Calcutta and some other localities and attended to the needs of the destitutes. My Friends here have been too much anxious to have committees after committees. But how far can they carry on with these committees? Can they supply our needs unless there are facilities?

Mr. JOBANG D. MARAK: Guidance.

Mr. ASHRAFUDDIN MD. CHAUDHURY: Unless we are supplied what is the use of guidance? These committees may come to the help of the solution of the food problem of some of our fortunate Members who may be in those committees. But it is not the solution of the food problem of the Province. My request to the Government should secure experts at the centre and there should be a uniform and harmonious programme for all the provinces as provinces are inter dependents upon each other. We have seen in paper how the Province of the Punjab has brought serious charges against the Government of Bengal. We have seen how one province clash with another province in the matter of price control. There is no harmonious working amongst the provinces. The Government of Assam should change its policy and should not stop exports to Bengal of its surplus paddy and rice. They may say, let them perish, let them die, but we should not be miserly in the protection of our rice at the cost of humanity. At the same time they cannot expect materials to come from Bihar. There should be reciprocity in the matter of supply. These are matters of provincial committees. You must be assured of a regular and proper supply. That is a matter of secondary consideration. We are not yet in the war. We do not know what will be the position when there will be actual raids? How things will stand then? In Assam we are fortunate to the extent to which Bengal has been. There, for want of food people die like dogs and cats. Fortunately we are not having any such things now. So, Sir, who knows what will be the position tomorrow. My Government should make it a point to have one uniform and harmonious programme in all the Provinces. There should not be line within a line. I may assure them of my support. These are matters for experts. These are not matters for committees for Assembly Members meeting leisurely. If Britain has not got economists and scientific experts in the Secretariat of State, the Imperial Secretariat or in the Provincial Secretariat or even at home, then they should ask for people from United States of America. I find there is deterioration in these people who are today running the administration of this country. They are irresponsible and in many places corrupt. My Friend Mr. Abdur Rahman has said much about maladministration and mal-distribution and the corruption of our people. I should urge here one point that public servants should be trained the spirit of service. There should be no distinction between class and class, and man and man. Administrators should be no distinction this country and its people. But unfortunately the system has become rotten. We have mostly a set of irresponsible and degenerated administrators both in centre and

in provinces. Their deterioration has brought about demoralisation of civilians. So, I again say that these public servants should be taught that they have come here for rendering service. The food problem of India, food problem of this province or that province has exposed the back ground of administration of India. It is a serious problem. This problem concerns foods of the millions of people who are entrusted in their charge and care. The British Empire is confronted through this problem with a bigger problem. It will have to decide now or never whether they should purify its machinery of administration. If it be indifferent to implement honesty and purity, it will suffer irreparably and it will not be able to solve food problem. It will not be able to solve many other vital problems with which Britain and India are linked.

Mr. A. WHITTAKER: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am glad that you have allowed an intervention from one who, according to Mr. Abdur Rahman, is sinister, provocative and dishonourable. Listening to Mr. Abdur Rahman I am reminded of the words of one Prime Minister of England describing MaCaulay, who used to intervene in Parliamentary debates as frequently as Mr. Rahman. These words were "I wish I was cocksure of anything as MaCaulay is of everything." I wish I was as cocksure of any of these difficult questions which make up the food problem as Mr. Rahman is of every question.

There are certain elements in the food problem of Assam which have not yet been touched upon by any of the speakers. This morning we listened to the Prime Minister's extremely skilful defence of the policy of 1943. But what interests me more than 1943 is 1944, and I should like to take some lessons from 1943 to consider what we should do in 1944.

First of all, Sir, I should like to consider the question raised by Mr. Abdul Bari Choudhury, namely, that this Province is not a surplus Province. It seems to me from evidence that Mr. Abdul Bari has produced that the price of rice is rapidly falling in the Surma Valley as it is in the Assam Valley, that abundant supplies of old rice are now on offer. In fact sellers are so eager that Government Agents cannot take all that they were offered. This is proof conclusive that in this Province there was a surplus this year and part of this surplus is now coming on to the market. Far from condemning the Prime Minister for having exported to Bengal and for having supplied to the Army, I think all of us who criticised him earlier in the year should now join in withdrawing that criticism and congratulate him on the courage which refused to listen to those panic-mongers who were barking so vigorously in the earlier Session of the year.

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHOUDHURI: Is barking a parliamentary term, Sir?

Mr. A. WHITTAKER: I think it is, Sir.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: Perhaps in the House of Commons it was said: Let the dogs bark but the caravan will go on.

Srijut ROHINI KUMAR CHOUDHURI: He said that some Members barked in the earlier session of this Assembly.

The Hon'ble the SPEAKER: I do not think it is a proper expression.

Mr. A. WHITTAKER: I withdraw that expression, Sir, which is thought improper.

Babu RABINDRA NATH ADITYA: Dog is a parliamentary term, but barking is not.

Mr. A. WHITTAKER: It seems to me that a second factor has been left out of the situation and that I should describe as God's goodness. All the crops in 1943, Sir, have been remarkably favourable—boro, aus, sail and aman. God might not be so good in 1944 and it is high time that the Administration should begin to make plans now to deserve the benefits of 1943 against the possibility of an unfavourable 1944.

We are hearing a great deal about rationing. In fact, there are amendments to this Motion recommending universal rationing but there will be much difficulty in rationing rural areas. In this Assembly, Sir, it is extremely difficult to distinguish between WISH and FACT—between that which is greatly to be desired and that which is possible. I agree, Sir, that rationing is greatly to be desired but it does not seem to me to be possible in the rural areas. The only State in India where it has

been possible is Travancore which is a thickly populated State with 90 per cent. of the population literate. There would not be sufficient paper for one thing to issue individual ration cards to the 12 million people of Assam. Moreover, Sir, and more important, there would not be sufficient staff. In England at the present moment, the Ministry of Food has rationed 46 million people with a staff of 36,000 trained men and women. Where would you find in Assam any comparable staff to deal with Assam's 12 million people and where would you train such recruits? This does not mean, Sir, that nothing at all can be done. The worst feature of the present system, in my opinion, is that the man with money can buy any rationed article and in any quantity. The most urgent improvement in the Food Administration of this Province is to introduce some kind of practical socialism which will see that there is bread for everybody before there is cake for anybody. Rationing, Sir, is essentially a question of good administration and it is no disgrace that we have not got the administrative resources in this Province to take up such a job. But we can do something which I would call "bulk rationing". The main difficulty about the present system of Government supply is that too many imported commodities stop in the bottle neck of district and subdivisional towns. They never get out to the people for whom they were intended except by way of a very extortionate Black Market. Consumers' Co-operative Societies, Village Defence Parties, any Corporate Body which exist in a village should be used for this kind of bulk rationing. If the villagers know that at a certain time and date and at regular intervals, certain quantities of rationed food will be put into their area, I think, we can all assume that these villagers will see that it gets to the consumers. What defeats the villagers at the present moment is the indifference or the inability of the local officers to deal with this problem of sharing the shortage.

We shall hear a lot about the hoarder and the profiteer. I think these two despicable specimens will always be with us because human cupidity and fear are their creators. By definition a hoarder or a profiteer is a greedy and selfish person and he is usually a coward. He has sufficient cunning to evade most of the regulations and fears none of the sentences which a third class Magistrate delights to impose upon him. But we must remember—and this is important—that he can be frightened into acting reasonably. If the hoarder acquires stocks, one certain answer is for the Government itself to acquire greater stocks, to sell those stocks and renew those stocks. The one thing the hoarder and the profiteer cannot stand is the risk of incurring financial loss. If a rival dealer can beat his prices the profiteer must run to cover. The only rival dealer I can see is Government itself. Against a Government which buys wisely and trades efficiently neither the hoarder nor the profiteer can possibly stand. The private citizen will not carry stocks if he believes, knows and sees that Government itself is carrying stocks from which they can supply him. The trader cannot profiteer or hoard if Government is prepared to under-sell him. These are certain weapons—more certain than the numerous regulations. There is of course, Sir, as you are aware, another solution but Russia is the only country I know where Government uses live ammunition to deal with profiteers.

The next element in this situation is the coming crop which promises to be a record one. In six weeks time, Government's problem is not going to be to maintain a maximum price: but it will be to maintain a minimum price in the interest of the cultivator who will put this bumper crop on the market. Government in their price structure have built a house on which they have put a roof through which, we hope, no one has been able to climb. Government has now got to put a floor into this house, through which the cultivator cannot fall. In my opinion, Sir, the most practical way to ensure a fair price for the cultivator would be for the Government to buy large stocks during the first three months of 1944 so that these may be available for supply to the public during the later months of the year. If Government does not do this, you may be quite certain that the private merchant will, and you will be paving the way for the recurrence of the high prices in the summer of 1944 similar to the high price we experienced in the summer of 1943. The existence of such Government stocks alone is sufficient to prevent the speculative activity of the hoarders and the profiteers whilst the volume of such purchases is sufficient to prevent the price dropping

to unprofitable levels for the cultivators. The problem of 1944 is the same as that of last three years, *viz.*, to secure more stable prices throughout the whole 12 months. In the Surma Valley, this will be particularly difficult.

We have already heard accusations against the Indian Tea Association for their competitive buying. I would like to remind Mr. Abdul Bari Chaudhury who has made these accusations, of the dictum of the greatest English Liberal Newspaper: "Comment is free but facts are sacred". Mr. Abdul Bari Chaudhury's facts are seldom sacred because they are not accurate. Competition in the Assam Valley has been regulated under a quota system since July. From that time there has been no competition whatever from the Tea Industry. I should also like to remind Mr. Abdul Bari Chaudhury that out of the Tea Industry's population of one million two hundred thousand people—men, women and children—no-body has died of starvation; we have no Baniachongs in the Tea Industry (*hear, hear*).

Another element in the present situation and also of the 1944 situation is the problem of malnutrition. The existence of malnutrition at the present day cannot be disputed. Its cost is not limited to isolated tragedies like that of Baniachong. It is a recurring cost, the bills for which will be paid during the next 25 years. The bill is not going to be paid by our generation but by the coming generation. In the majority of the families there are one or more victims of malnutrition. The supply of protective foods of vitamin foods such as milk, eggs, vegetables and fish will not become easier during the next 3 years. There obviously was never enough to go round even in peace time. In war time, there is an absolute famine in these classes of food. Therefore, Government must arrange that these foods go to the people who need them most, that means, Sir, to the coming generation. In England to-day, under all the rigours of austere rationing and penal taxation, the health of the people, the common people, whom Roosevelt described as the "forgotten men," the health of the forgotten men is better now than in peace times and is improving because each person secures a basic ration. The improvement in physique, Sir, in England is most marked in children, and why? Because Government recognised, that in a time of shortage, that shortage must be shared and the ordinary ration for school children must be supplemented by an issue of free milk daily and a free midday meal. In England where everyone is living dangerously, war has become a time for the State to adventure with welfare experiments. In Assam, Sir, the war has become a reason for Government putting most of its beneficial schemes into cold storage. Instead of experiments and initiative we get excuses and inertia. Instead of an administration which should be mobile and accessible, we have officers who are completely immobile and, through mountains of papers, are hardly ever accessible. Instead of warmth and humanity we get frigidity and the machine. When the administration is given a problem it tackles it not by investigation but by instinct and believe me, Sir, instinct is a miserably poor guide for food administration. The present generation, Sir,— and by the present generation I mean my generation, your generation, Sir,—is perhaps past praying for but we can still give a square deal to the next generation—the children who are now attending our primary schools. Why should not the revenue from the cess on the sale of rice go to provide milk in certain schools and 'chapaties' and 'luchies' in other schools. I shall be told there is no milk, there are no vegetables, there is no wheat. If Government were to prevent all milk being sold to army personnel as they could certainly do, because the army has a large stock of milk-tinned and powdered, they will be surprised to find how much fresh milk will be forthcoming. Why not exchange our surplus rice for wheat? Why not make an improvement in school children's diet; the substitution of wheat for rice would make an enormous improvement in the physique of school children. In Bengal I once made a successful experiment by giving school children of the age of 12 a wheat diet — wheat in a cooked form is far more easily distributed than rice.

I agree that the army needs fresh vegetables, but because the army has superior purchasing power, it should not be able to buy all the vegetables. There are such things as quotas which can be arranged for the civil population.

I am not going here into details, Sir. My plea is for experiments directed by the State. The war must not be a period in which all social invention ceases. War is bound to be a period of shortage but a rising generation can and should be sheltered from the consequences of shortage and unplanned distribution.

The most successful General in this war is reported to have said that in his army the difficult tasks are done instantly and the impossible ones take a little longer. I should like that maxim to serve for the Government of Assam — the impossible tasks take just a little longer.

A word about my Friend, Mr. Buragohain's proposal to set up a Standing Committee of 7, 6 of whom should come from this House and the 7th from the Upper House to advise Government on the supply problem of this Province. At the first sight this looks a harmless proposal but it proceeds on two remarkable assumptions. Firstly, that this Assembly has a monopoly of the ability necessary to advise Government on this intricate problem. Secondly, that there is six times more ability in the Assembly than there is in the Upper House. Both these assumptions, Sir, I would submit are demonstrably wrong. I suggest that no Government could fairly accept Mr. Buragohain's proposal. There are many persons outside

Babu RABINDRA NATH ADITYA: It might be that one in the Upper House may be equal to six in the Lower House.

Srijit SURENDRA NATH BURAGOHAIN: There are 108 Members in this House and 22 in the Upper House. So the proportion is 6 : 1.

Mr. A. WHITAKER: There are many persons outside the Assembly whose knowledge of Assam's problems is far greater than that which the Assembly's supermen can possess. More important perhaps is the fact that many of these outsiders are daily finding a solution to the food problems of their own local areas. They may learn a great deal from being associated with the legislators but I feel confident that the legislators would learn a great deal more from being associated with them. And finally, Sir, I shall end with a quotation from a recent issue of the Economist which was criticising the Government of the United Kingdom. This is what it said:—

"Democracy in the 20th century needs fire in its belly. It is an internal combustion engine that cannot run on one cylinder only."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is true of any Government of Assam that tackles the food problem. It needs fire. It cannot run on one cylinder. It must run on all 10 cylinders (*laughter*) and if you will allow a simile it is a machine which needs a supercharger to get up speed and gain height.

Mr. JOBANG D. MARAK: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think there are foodstuffs in Assam and they are in sufficient quantity and we have got proof of this fact. But, as the hon. Mover has just now said, they are not properly distributed and owing to this lack of proper organisation for distribution the people are suffering. With your permission, Sir, I go one step backward; Rai Bahadur Hem Chandra Dutt, Member of the Legislative Council, proved by facts and figures that Assam is a deficit Province. I refer to at page 52 of the Council proceedings of last July and August Session a resolution submitted by Babu Hem Chandra Dutt stating that Assam was a deficit Province by about 3 lakhs and 30 thousand maunds of rice in 1942-43 and there was no reply forthcoming from the Hon'ble Premier to this fact. In spite of that deficiency, Sir, there was influx of all sorts of people to this Province, *i.e.*, Military people, labourers and unemployed people, from the neighbouring provinces. I want to know from the Hon'ble Premier whether the statement is correct, as the figures were authoritatively quoted and taken from this Marketing Officer, Dr. N. Das, Ph. D., I. C. S. Sir, it is no matter whether the Indian sufficient foodstuffs in Assam, as the hon. Member has just said, there are proper organisation by appointing necessary staff for their distribution so that people do not suffer any more and do not feel their scarcity.

Sir, one other matter I want to point out to the Hon'ble Minister in charge of supply of food that people are also suffering for want of foodgrains of good quality,

and I may tell him that the rice that is supplied to the hospitals for the consumption by the patients is not at all satisfactory. On a visit to the Reid Sanitarium by myself and my Colleague Mr. Benjamin Ch. Momin we were met by the Superintendent of the Institution. He told us that due to bad rice patients were not thriving well; they were suffering from stomach trouble, etc. On hearing this I approached the Hon'ble Medical Minister to kindly see that proper arrangements might be made for the supply of good rice. I have now got the sample of rice that is supplied to this Institution for the patients, and the quality of rice that the Hon'ble Ministers are taking. So my request is to make proper arrangement to supply the Institution with good rice for the patients.

I do not, Sir, like to waste the time of the House by speaking any more about rationing scheme by Government. I know that Government are doing their best to check export of our production to other places outside the Province. The Hon'ble Premier in his reply spoke of the Government plan for distribution of foodgrains, such as production, distribution and price control, etc., which are the cardinals of the Government scheme in their contemplation. I am sorry, Sir, that I do not agree with the Government in their scheme and policy regarding price control of various commodities wherein they plan to reduce price of rice and paddy from 5 times to 3 times whereas they are not, reducing the price of iron, nails, etc., which are essentially necessary for the use of cultivators for making their carts, plough, etc., the price of which (iron, nails, etc.) has gone up 12 to 16 times from what it used to be, although the Government have the special powers to regulate the prices of these imported commodities as they have said in their plan for price control of various articles.

*Dr. C. G. TERREL: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the subject which is being debated is of the utmost importance, and it is incumbent on all of us to give it every possible consideration and to contribute in any way which may help those responsible at the head to arrive at the right solution in the administration of what is universally recognised as a problem of exceptional difficulty. With this in view I would like to bring to the notice of Government the desirability of much closer co-operation between the Medical and Agricultural Departments. Full advantage should be taken of expert medical and scientific research and experience in planning any extension of agricultural development to meet the food shortage situation. All rationing schemes should be scrutinised by nutrition experts in order that their probable effect on the diet and health of the population can be assessed. In England and the United States no single step in regard to food situation is taken without it being carefully examined from this point of view.

Dr. Aykroyd—Director, Nutrition Research under the Indian Research Fund Association, has made a study of the whole problem and his valuable findings in relation to balanced diet and food values are available in a very simple form for all to make use of. Apart from actual shortage in quantities, it may not possibly be universally recognised that the relative deficiency of certain essential vitamins in diet produces the most serious and adverse effects on the health of the people and reduces in considerable degree its working efficiency and resistance to disease. The latter is of special importance, and particularly so in war time, and unless a reasonable degree of essential vitamins is maintained in the diet, it is to be anticipated that there will be increasingly less resistance to disease and that epidemics will prevail. As such it is desirable that every possible use should be made by Government of the scientific knowledge concerning these questions which is available and at their disposal.

In this connection and as a matter of interest, it would not, I think, be out of place to mention a matter of recent experience. A few months ago I completed the second six monthly report on the medical organisation of the project with which I have been entrusted, and made certain comments in a general way relating to the

condition of the newly arriving labour recruits, and I quote for your information the two relative sentences :—

“I have for some time noticed an increasing lack of vitality and resistance constitutionally—particularly among the Bengali labourers, and for this reason they seem more easily than before to succumb to diseases—rather unexpectedly.”

“I mention this as a matter of interest and suggest that the shortage of food and associated vitamins throughout the areas from which these people are recruited is probably responsible. It is at any rate certain that the majority appear to be suffering from a marked shortage of food when they arrive.”

These observations which are recorded more than 3 months ago do not refer to only a handful of individuals, but to the very many thousands on this project whose health and welfare have been a matter of constant concern to me for a long time.

Before concluding I would like to mention one small point which might be of practical value in the months that lie ahead of us.

Even in the event of an enormous improvement in the outlook for food distribution and supply it is certain that the vitamin shortage will be a serious one and play an important role. It is therefore suggested that Government should procure stocks of common vitamin tablets which might then be made available for distribution in areas where deficiency was especially pronounced. Vitamin ‘B’ is contained in useful quantities in various Yeast Tablets preparations made by proprietary firms and the same applies to vitamin ‘C’ which is contained in the form of Ascorbic Acid Tablets which are freely used by the services and have proved their worth.

Adjournment

The Assembly was then adjourned till 11 A.M. on Thursday, the 25th November 1943.

Shillong :

The 23rd December 1943.

A. K. BARUA,
Secretary, Legislative Assembly, Assam.

A. G. P. (L.A.) F. No.112--126+2--29-12-1943.