

# KERALA FOOD: E.M.S. GIVES THE FACTS



Kerala is 50 per cent deficit in food. The Congress leaders of Kerala, instead of persuading the Congress and the Government leaders at New Delhi to give Kerala its due are concentrating all their fire on the Kerala Government. The PSP leaders are threatening struggle. The RSP has already launched a satyagraha with the slogan: 'To the gallows with the Ministers!'

Kerala Chief Minister in his statement below has given the plain facts which disclose where the real blame lies and appeals in a manner that should make sense to all except those who seek to play politics at the cost of people's food.

The text of the Chief Minister's statement reads:

**I** WANT to assure the parties of the Opposition and the general public that the Government is as concerned as they are with the difficult food situation in the State. Food is a problem which, as the Prime Minister observed recently, should be dealt with on a national plane, beyond political or other differences and disputes. I would, therefore, appeal to them all to help the Government in working out a policy which all of us can sincerely and faithfully carry out in the interests of the entire State.

During the recent discussions on the food situation in our State, the question has been raised as to whose is the responsibility for finding a solution for this problem: the Centre's or the State's? I hope that everybody concerned will put an end to this way of posing the question and realise that the food problem cannot be solved either by the Centre or the State alone; it can be solved only if there is the closest and most sincere cooperation between the Centre and everyone of the 14 States in our country.

## Till Formation Of South Zone

Let me make it clear that, so far as we in the Government of Kerala are concerned, we are prepared to take the entire responsibility which are ours as the Government in a State which has the utmost deficit with regard to foodgrains. Let me, at the same time, remind my friends in the Opposition in our own State, as well as responsible persons in other States and at the Centre, that we will not be able to discharge our responsibility unless we receive the full cooperation of all of them.

I hope everyone will agree that, while it is the responsibility of every State Government to see that the stocks of foodgrains available within their respective States are properly and equitably distributed, no State Government can, in the present circumstances, shoulder the responsibility of getting supplies from other States unless these supplying States and the Centre create the necessary conditions for it.

This was actually the division of labour between the Centre and the State of Kerala till the Southern Food Zone was formed, as can be seen from

the fact that, till the formation of the Zone, the Centre used to supply a fixed quantity of foodgrains every month to our State. It was with this supply made by the Centre that the Government of Kerala ran hundreds of fair-price shops.

After the last general elections and our assumption of office, we deliberately adopted the policy of expanding the activities of these fair-price shops with the hope that it would help stabilising the price level in the open market. Experience has proved that, so long as these fair-price shops continued, the majority of people were guaranteed a minimum quantity of rice; this exercised a healthy influence on the open market. This would have been the position even now if these supplies were forthcoming.

Unfortunately, however, the situation deteriorated after the formation of the Southern Food Zone. The expectation of the Central Government that the formation of the Zone would lead to free movement of rice from the surplus to the deficit areas within the Zone and meet the full requirements of the deficit States was not fulfilled. The year 1958 has been a period of rapid rise in prices and acute suffering for the people of the Zone. The price level today, not only in Kerala but in other parts of the Zone as well, is higher than at any time in recent years.

## No Help To Get Supplies

So far as our State is concerned, the formation of the Zone did not help us in getting those supplies which are necessary for us to run the fair-price shops, and which used formerly to come to us from the Centre. We have all along been feeling that, since the Central Government introduced price control in the four surplus districts of Andhra after the formation of the Zone, the Central Government should have procured the stocks in Andhra at the control prices and supplied to us as they used to do before. If this was not possible, they should have enabled us to purchase in Andhra at prices at which we could have got those supplies.

that the Central Government did not do either. On the other hand, it said that the very formation of the Southern Food Zone meant that Centre's responsibility to supply any State in the Zone ceased; it was for the respective State Governments to get supplies from Andhra or other surplus areas in the Zone. On the other hand, it prohibited us from buying in the surplus areas of Andhra at prices above the controlled rates—this at a time when stocks were not available at or below the controlled rates.

## Orders Had To Be Cancelled

As for the other surplus area in the Zone, i.e., the Tanjore District in Madras, there again, the Government of Madras, and on its advice the Central Government, prohibited our Government till very recently from entering the market and buying rice. Orders for 10,000 tons of rice to be purchased from Tanjore had to be cancelled on the advice of the Government of India.

Let me illustrate our difficulty from what happened in recent months:

Between the formation of the Southern Food Zone and March 1958 we purchased rice in Andhra to the extent of 15,100 tons. These purchases were made at prices ranging from Rs. 32 to Rs. 34 per bag. These, as you can see, are at the controlled rate fixed by the Central Government.

## What Really Happened

From March 1958 onwards, we have been trying to do the same. Actually, we called for tenders to the extent of 70,000 tons from July to September 1958. But no tenders were received in response to this, because the prevailing market rates at that time were above the controlled price. The Central Government did not accede to our request that it should itself procure supplies at controlled rates and give it to us or allow us to purchase at prices above the controlled rate. It actually asked us to buy at any price from anywhere except the four districts of Andhra, which means asking us to buy rice in a place where it is not available!

Let me mention in passing

that, if we were able to buy the 70,000 tons for which we had called for tenders, that itself would have made us subsidise to the extent of Rs. 49 lakhs if the supplies had come at the controlled rates and of Rs. 108 lakhs if it had been at Rs. 40 per bag at which we were allowed to buy after the November meeting of the Food Ministers from the Southern Zone. This would show that it is not our alleged "unwillingness to subsidise food supply", but our inability to get supplies, that created those difficulties.

I am sorry that the difficulties created in our way by the above-mentioned policy of the Central Government are not realised by my friends in the Opposition who accuse us of blaming the Centre when these bare facts are mentioned by us. I hope that they will all agree that the responsibility for securing supplies from outside—or rather, creating conditions in which supplies from outside can be procured—rests on the Central Government. I hope that the entire people of the State will join the Government in demanding of the Central Government that it should

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## For Pantji's Attention!

**T**HE Communist Party cannot even think of building a house without the CID poking their nose into it.

For some time, the Communist Party has been thinking of having its own building in Delhi to house the offices of its National Council.

When negotiations began with the Government of India, the Party was asked to submit a blue-print of the building.

A Bombay firm of architects was commissioned to do the job. The blue-print was duly submitted to the concerned department of the Government.

A few days ago, a CID Inspector called on the architect in his Bombay office along with an assistant, duly established his authority and asked the architect to make a copy of the building plan of the Communist Party available to him.

The architect was quite surprised—he had not expected this at all in our much-trumpeted democracy. He postponed the interview.

Next time, the assistant came alone. The architect got his brother, a well-known person, to sit in the inner office in case he needed help.

The architect told the

CID man: Why should I give you the copy? If the client comes to know, I will lose the contract. And the client is bound to know because my brother is M. G. Desai of the Meerut Conspiracy Case.

It was the assistant's turn to get surprised, he had not known about M. G. Desai. He left hurriedly.

This was rather embarrassing. To avoid such unpleasantness in the future we would suggest to Home Minister, Pant to instruct all departments that the Communist Party should be asked to submit everything in duplicate. One copy can then be quietly handed over to the CID.

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# Kerala Food

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either supply us the quantity of rice that is necessary for continuously running the fair-price shops, or in the alternative, create such conditions in the surplus areas of Andhra or anywhere else where we can freely buy rice at rates which are reasonably low for our people.

Recently, however, some change has been brought about. The Central Government has permitted us to buy rice in the surplus areas of Andhra at prices above the levels which had been fixed by it as controlled prices. We have already made arrangements for the purchase of 10,000 tons under this arrangement; nearly half of this has already been loaded and is shortly expected to arrive. We are making arrangements for further purchases on this basis. Our Minister for Food, and the officers of the department are proceeding in a couple of days to Hyderabad for making a more stable arrangement for regular supplies on this basis; we hope that this will enable us to run the fair-price shops in the coming months.

*I would also take this op-*

*portunity to request my friends in the Opposition to realise that the difficulties which we are facing in this State are part of the difficulties which the entire country is facing today. The rise in prices of foodgrains is an all-India phenomenon and is not confined to this State. That is exactly why the Prime Minister and other leaders of the Central Government are expressing their concern at this and are appealing for a national approach to this problem. I hope that the parties of the Opposition in this State also would look upon this as a national problem and help the Government in solving it in the best interests of the entire people.*

Our Government proposes shortly to convene a meeting of the State Food Committee which was formed some time ago. I hope that the parties of the Opposition represented in the Committee would offer constructive suggestions which, if accepted and implemented by the Government, will help the entire people.