

industry may be given. Further measures are under consideration.

Mr. Speaker: There is no time now. Question-hour is over.

Short Notice Question and Answer

CLOSURE OF TEA GARDENS IN ASSAM AND BENGAL

Shri K. P. Tripathi: Will the Minister of Commerce and Industry be pleased to state:

(a) whether a large number of tea gardens in Assam and Bengal (mostly Indian owned) are facing closure by December 1952 by the combined effect of slump in tea prices and contraction in credit facilities by banks;

(b) whether Government has any scheme of saving these gardens by providing or arranging for finance, and, if so, in what way; and

(c) what would be the amount required and what would be the agency through which it would be issued?

The Minister of Commerce and Industry (Shri T. T. Krishnamachari): (a) Government have received information that some of the Indian owned tea gardens in Assam and Bengal intend closing down by December 1952 presumably for the reasons stated by the hon. Member.

(b) Government are now engaged in consultation with the Reserve Bank in examining what steps can be taken to ensure that banking finance through Commercial Banks is available to the affected tea gardens and others for next year's production.

(c) Estimates of requirements put forward by the interests concerned are sometimes as high as 4/4½ crores of rupees especially in respect of Assam tea gardens alone. The requirements of West Bengal tea gardens and South Indian tea gardens will be in addition to this figure. No scrutiny has been made of these estimates. Pending examination referred to above, Government are unable to say in what form the facilities required can be provided.

Shri K. P. Tripathi: May I know whether it is a fact that mere banking finance would not be adequate, and that finance would be available from existing Banks only if Government underwrite or cover some risk? If so, are Government considering the question of covering any risk?

Shri T. T. Krishnamachari: The question is based on a hypothetical consideration that the estates would need something more than the finance

that commercial banks could possibly give them. If that consideration is answered in the manner in which the hon. Member wants, there will be time enough for an enquiry. I might also mention that Government is very much exercised about this matter. Last week the Secretary of the Commerce and Industries Ministry went down to Calcutta. He had consultations with the Chairman of the Central Tea Board and other tea interests available in Calcutta. This senior officer of the Ministry is scheduled to go to Bombay at the end of this week with the intention of discussing the whole matter with the authorities of the Reserve Bank. What we could do, Sir, is a thing which I cannot envisage at the moment. All that I can tell the House is that we are trying to do our very best.

Shri K. P. Tripathi: May I know Sir, whether it is a fact that this subsidy which was given by the United Kingdom for tea was withdrawn, and whether it is also a fact that there was a ceiling on retail prices wherefore the prices did not rise after the subsidy was withdrawn?

Shri T. T. Krishnamachari: I might admit that this matter was brought to my notice on a previous occasion by the hon. Member. It is very difficult to relate cause and effect in this matter. The facts are as the hon. Member has stated them, viz., that the subsidy has been withdrawn and that the retail prices have not shot up to the extent that they should by the withdrawal of the subsidy, but whether that fact can be related to any intention on the part of people to depress prices is a different matter altogether. The information that I have at my disposal indicates that there are several other factors operating in this connection. Hon. Members in this House who know about rationing will know that oftentimes a commodity is consumed to the maximum extent which the ration allows only when there is rationing. The moment rations are relaxed, people do not stockpile in their houses. It is possible that in the United Kingdom, because rations have been relaxed, stock-piling has stopped and they are not buying even as much as 3 oz. which they were allowed when rationing was in force.

Another fact which I am told conduced to this depression in prices, is that because of a certain amount of stock carried by the U. K. Government when they were single purchasers of medium quality tea, after covering a large portion of these stocks, there also seems to be a fair amount of stock in the hands of the people who deal in these goods. I

am told that this is possibly the cause why the offtake is a little low, but in these matters one person's guess is as good as another's, and I would not be able to say anything very positive.

Shri K. P. Tripathi: May I know whether it is a fact that in the Chittagong auctions in Pakistan, B. P. and B. P. S. teas were selling at prices ranging from Rs. 1-2-0 to Rs. 1-8-0 whereas in the Calcutta market, the same quality of tea was selling at Re. 0-9-0 to Re. 0-12-0?

Shri T. T. Krishnamachari: I am not in a position either to confirm the hon. Member's information or deny it, but I am unable to deduce any conclusions therefrom.

Shri K. P. Tripathi: May I know, Sir, whether the Government of India wish to raise the question of stabilisation of prices in the ensuing Commonwealth conference?

Shri T. T. Krishnamachari: It is a question which I am not in a position to answer. In the Commonwealth conference perhaps the commodities which are exchanged with the Commonwealth countries might come up for consideration, but I do not think that this subject is on the agenda, as far as my information goes.

Shri A. C. Guha: The hon. Minister has stated that he has information that certain tea gardens intend to close down by this December. May I know if he has got any report either from official source or from the papers that some gardens have already closed, and if so, what is the number?

Shri T. T. Krishnamachari: I am obliged to my hon. friend for pointing out the discrepancy in my answer. It is a fact that some gardens have closed.

Shri A. C. Guha: What is the number, and the number of labourers involved in these gardens?

Shri T. T. Krishnamachari: Unfortunately, the staff at my disposal or the facilities that I have do not guarantee accurate information in this regard. Fourteen tea gardens in Cachar, two in Tripura, two in the rest of Assam, and two in West Bengal are supposed to have closed down. And the estimate in regard to labour thrown out is said to be about 15,000.

Dr. S. P. Mookerjee: The Minister has referred just now to a conference which was held in Calcutta about this matter. Is the Minister aware that there a suggestion was made that there should be a rationalised scheme for reducing production to be taken
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up immediately? When does Government expect to arrive at a decision on this point, and what steps will Government take to see that labour is not adversely affected thereby?

Shri T. T. Krishnamachari: This question of restriction of production is always brought up, and though I have not scanned the report of that conference—I have not got the report yet, except what my Secretary has told me—I can quite understand that this was also a subject discussed. The implications of a reduction are far-reaching, and we have to examine them. About the other matters, I am not in a position to answer the question now.

Shri Venkataraman: Has any single garden closed down or threatened to close down in South India?

Shri T. T. Krishnamachari: South India seems to be strangely quiet in this matter.

Shri Venkataraman: I am just leading to another question. Has the Government cared to inquire how much of this crisis is due to high managerial costs, visiting agents, managing agents and so forth, and has the Government ever looked into the question of fixing or limiting the expenses on the managerial side?

Shri T. T. Krishnamachari: All these suggestions will be taken into consideration, if we have an enquiry committee.

Shri Venkataraman rose—

Mr. Speaker: Order, order. The hon. Member is trying to make suggestions for action.

Shri Venkataraman: One more question. The official team which the Commerce Ministry appointed, recommended certain measures, particularly relating to labour. That official team recommended that the Plantation Labour Act should be postponed, as also the Minimum Wages Act. May I know whether the hon. Commerce and Industry Minister did not give an undertaking to the House that no recommendation affecting labour would be made by the official team without a member or a representative of labour being associated with such an inquiry, and if so, does the Government propose to adopt the recommendations made by that team, so far as labour is concerned?

Shri T. T. Krishnamachari: I am afraid, my hon. friend has not correctly represented the assurance that I gave on the floor of the House. I did say that Government would not consider any recommendation which detrimentally affects labour, but at

that time I had in view only the application of the Minimum Wages Act. The Plantation Labour Act is yet to be planned, and I cannot speak in regard to an Act, the application of which is in the hands of my hon. colleague the Minister of Labour.

The hon. Member would also appreciate the fact that the Enquiry Committee did ask labour representatives to tender evidence before them, and I should say in this connection that the Government feels that their inquiry was conducted in a manner which was completely impartial without any bias in favour of either the one or the other interest, the sole objective being to find out some way of affording relief to the tea industry as a whole, which means the estate owner, labour and everybody else involved in the matter.

In regard to what could be done on the basis of the recommendation, it is a matter which, I think, is now engaging the attention of my hon. colleague the Minister of Labour. And the House perhaps knows that he proposes to have a tripartite conference some time in December in Calcutta, and we probably have to await what comes out of that conference.

Shri B. K. Das: May I know what steps have been taken, since our withdrawal from the International Tea Marketing Expansion Board, to create a better market in foreign countries?

Shri T. T. Krishnamachari: Our withdrawal from the International Tea Marketing Expansion Board does not put an end to any propaganda that was being done by the International Tea Marketing Expansion Board, because we are committed to pay them the contribution for the expenditure that they have budgeted until 31st March 1952 or that they have entered into contracts which go beyond that period. So there is no gap or lacuna which should be filled up immediately.

Mr. Speaker: I shall allow just one more question.

Shri B. K. Das: May I ask whether there has been any further decline in the demand in the foreign countries since our withdrawal?

Shri T. T. Krishnamachari: I am afraid one cannot really relate this question of decline in demand with our withdrawal. And the hon. Member may be aware that the International Tea Marketing Expansion Board was spending a very little amount from its total funds in the U. K. market. One of the markets on which they had been spending the bulk of their budget, almost coter-

minous with the amount that we contributed to them was in America. I can assure the hon. Member that the propaganda in America, which they had undertaken is being continued and I do not think that we have suffered any loss because of our withdrawal from the Board.

Mr. Speaker: Order, order. There are so many hon. Members who are anxious to put questions. I have allowed 15 minutes for this question, and we have been carrying on with this one question for so long. There shall be no more supplementaries on this.

I am going over to the next item.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

MAJOR ENGINEERING WORKS

*681. **Shri U. C. Patnaik:** (a) Will the Minister of Planning be pleased to state whether the question of associating Army and Marine Engineers with Civil Engineers in the construction of major engineering works under the Central Government has been examined by the Planning Commission?

(b) If so, do Government propose to place the relevant papers on the Table of the House?

The Deputy Minister of Irrigation and Power (Shri Hathi): (a) No.

(b) Does not arise.

UTILISATION OF INDIA'S MANPOWER

*682. **Shri U. C. Patnaik:** Will the Minister of Planning be pleased to state whether the Planning Commission has examined the question of utilising the vast manpower of India for national service by mobilising training and reorganising them on a defence-cum-development basis?

The Deputy Minister of Irrigation and Power (Shri Hathi): The subject is under the consideration of the Planning Commission.

STOCK REGISTERS IN RIVER VALLEY PROJECT ORGANISATIONS

*694. **Shri Krishna Chandra:** Will the Minister of Irrigation and Power be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Estimates Committee in its fifth report for 1951-52 under para. 135 has reported that stock registers of the various stores, plant and machinery on charge in the various project organisations specially in Hirakud, were not maintained;

(b) whether Government have made any enquiry into the matter and if so, with what result;