

## Weekly

## Notes

### Strange Cargo

**S**HRI Chakravarli Rajagopalachari is the consignee of a Strange cargo of wheat mixed with dust and empty husks that is lying in the Bombay harbour. The skip that has brought this cargo of 9,000 tons is one of the four acquired by the newly floated Far Eastern Corporation in which the Government of India are 51 per cent. partners, Seindias hold 27 per cent. of the shares find rest are subscribed, or are expected to be subscribed, by the outside public. The crew of the ship and the Indian officers on board who had been hitherto on the Australia run complain that they had never carried such rotten cargo before. Dust and empty husk are carefully blown off before wheat is shipped from Australia, and had they been on the Australian run, they complain, they would have put up a demand to their union for dirty cargo allowance, usually given for carrying coal! The ship is S.S. "Harmac Chemainus" and its sister ship, S.S. "Harmack Crofton", now lying in Calcutta, has carried a similar cargo, both from Baltimore,

Of course the ship's officers would not know whether this is the wheat which we are getting under the new Wheat Agreement, but they do know that it must be containing at least 25 per cent. of dirt. If this is the sort of wheat we are getting, are we getting it cheap under the International Agreement? There was some talk of starting a State Trading Corporation. The Commerce Ministry have been lukewarm about it and for very good reasons, too, since they have not got the men to run

it. The Food Ministry must be having some sort of check about the stuff they contract to buy and for which we pay through our nose, in dollars. Much has been heard of the success of bulk buying by the British Board of Trade. It has been conducted so efficiently and intelligently that Britain has made enormous savings in the purchase of raw materials and food stuffs. Food purchases are also arranged in bulk. Though the data for a comparison would be naturally wanting, it would still be interesting to know what savings our Food Ministry has effected in this particular type of bulk trading.

### Bombay Port Blacklisted!

SHIPPING congestion in Bombay has again been assuming serious proportions. It has been highlighted by the decision of the shipping lines to raise the freight rates to Bombay by 25 per cent, on account of the "serious delay in the turn round of vessels." Every day that a ship lies idle, because the Port Trust cannot find a berth for her and arrange for the loading or unloading costs the shipping lines, on an average, £300 It would be interesting to know if the average period for which ships are being held up now in the port of Bombay has lengthened so much as to justify the rise in freights. Perhaps it has.

The problem of congestion is not new. There are no figures ready to hand of the shipping entered and cleared, month by month, in the port of Bombay. The totals for all the Indian ports probably smoothen out the wider dispari-

ties. Nevertheless, even these reveal an extraordinary state of affairs. To take the figures for the last financial year, in April, 1948, the number of vessels cleared were 20 less than those entered. In the *next* month there was a sudden spurt of activity; 56 more vessels were cleared than entered but for every succeeding month, up to November, the number of ships kept waiting went on increasing, adding 377 vessels to the total. The situation became so grave that the Ministry of Transport had to do something about it. Representations came from the highest quarters imaginable. When shipping is held up on a large scale, even the Bank of England gets concerned, and one should not be surprised if there is pressure even from the diplomatic quarters. In the next three months, the port authorities got more energetic but again things seem to have slackened.

Until the small port of Kandla is developed, Bombay will have to handle a much larger tonnage than in the past, thanks to the diversion of shipping from Karachi. An additional strain is imposed by food ships which can probably be, but are not being diverted to the other ports in large numbers. There is, on the top of this, chronic trouble with dock labour. The quick turn import policy has also aggravated the situation. The O.G.L. brought in its train shiploads of cargo which are still to be cleared. The Foodgrains Clearance Committee have been going round the ports, but it is not reported that the Commerce Minister has been doing his rounds, too, considering that he, too, has contributed his share to

the congestion.

The Ministry of Transport published a very ambitious programme for expanding the port facilities. When it is carried out, both Calcutta and Bombay would be equipped to handle an additional two million tons a year. But by that time, probably, the problem will have solved itself.

### Food Imports By Quantum

A CORRESPONDENT enquires if the disparity in the figures of food imports discussed in these columns may not be accounted for by the imports from Pakistan. Now imports from Pakistan may come either by land or by sea. Those coming from Karachi have been included in the returns of sea-borne trade since October, 1947. And it is from Karachi, as far as can be gathered, that the bulk of food imports have arrived. East Bengal may have been the granary of undivided Bengal but since partition, it has not had enough to feed its own people and food prices there have stood consistently about those ruling in the year of the Bengal famine.

May be there have been imports of food across the land frontiers. If so, they have not been recorded in the statistics of land borne trade; according to these returns imports of an order of 5000 tons only reached Indian overland during the year 1948-49.

There is the same wide disparity between the figures of food imports issued by the Food Ministry and those compiled from Customs returns whether one goes by quantum or by value. According to the estimate of the Director-General of Commercial Intelli-

gence and Statistics, the import of foodgrains during the period of twelve months from April 1, 1948 to March 31, 1949 was 1,683,344 tons; according to the Ministry of Food, the import of foodgrains during the period of eleven months from April 1948 to February, 1949 was 2,618,872 tons, This is an unbridgeable gap.

While looking for the possible sources of this discrepancy, it came to light that in the estimate supplied by the Ministry of Food, milo and semolina are included as items of foodgrains, while in the classification adopted by the Director-General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, they are treated as 'Provisions and Oilman store'. Even then the discrepancy cannot be accounted for.

The total imports of milo during the 11 months ended February, 1949 amounted to 257,710 tons and that of semolina to 7,777 tons.

*The Monthly Survey of Business Conditions in India*, another worthy Government publication publishes the quantity of imports as given by the Director-General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, in its section on 'Agricultural Situation'. In another section, viz. that on "Foreign Trade", the value of food imports is given as issued by the Food Ministry without, bothering at all that the sets of figures obtained from these two sources vary so widely. The two tables are reproduced below. They should speak for themselves.

TABLE I

#### IMPORTS OF FOODGRAINS

(Vide *Monthly Survey of Business Conditions in India, March 1949*).

(Quantity in tons)

Name of foodgrain	Progressive total April '48 to Feb. '49.
Wheat	1,298,655
Wheat flour	133,803
Rice	798,550
Maize	33,591
Millets	28,484
Milo	257,710
Barley	60,300
Semolina	7,777
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,618,870</b>

Source: Ministry of Food, Figures relate to imports on Government account.

TABLE II

#### IMPORTS OF GRAIN, PULSE AND FLOUR

(Accounts Relating to the *Sea-borne Trade and Navigation of India, March, 1949*).

(Quantity in tons)

	Twelve months, 1st April to 31st March 1948-49.
Barley	58,844
Beans (dry)	2,582
Jowar and bajra	4,735
Pulse	30,982
Rice in the husk	2
Rice not in the husk	563,243
Wheat	705,551
Wheat flour	93,493
Other sorts	223,912
<b>Total of grain, pulse and flour</b>	<b>1,683,344</b>

Source: Director-General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics