

W e e k l y N o t e s

**Minister for Food versus
Minister for Agriculture**

SHRI S K PATIL, Union Minister for Food and Agriculture, when speaking as Food Minister in Bombay and Madras, is positive that the current food problem is temporary and man-made. But when he gets down to letter-writing as Minister for Agriculture, he loses his self-confidence. He opens his heart to the State Ministers and shudders with fright at the awful food shortage that looms ahead.

Both in Bombay and Madras, Shri Patil assured everybody that there was nothing wrong with the supply of food except the manner in which it was being distributed. Any panic or alarm on the food front was really not justified. All that was needed was that producers, traders and consumers should stop hoarding. The Minister's point was not only that last year's crop was excellent, but that in recent years the food supply was increasing much faster than the population. The rate of increase in food, said Shri Patil, was about 5 per cent per year, while the increase in population was only of the order of 2 per cent. In other words, not only do we have enough food today, but the trends are such that we would have even more later on.

But when Shri Patil writes to the State Ministers, he is frightened at the prospect of a shortfall of 28 million tons in 1966 if we do not go all out to reach a production target of 110 million tons by that date. To emphasise his point, he argues that though we have had for the current year a record production of 73.5 million tons, we have not seen any reduction in food prices. There would obviously be more demand for food as the population increased, and unless we pushed up our rate of increase in food output to 8 per cent per year, we would be faced with an appalling situation. Therefore, suggests Shri Patil, the Minister for Agriculture, that we go all out to produce more food; and if we fail to do so, we shall apparently be finished and done with.

Whom are we to believe—the Minister for Food or the Minister for Agriculture? Surely, if food

supply is increasing at 5 per cent and population at only 2 per cent, why should we expect to be so terribly short seven years hence? Apparently, what is scaring Shri Patil is not trends but targets, especially the foodgrains target for 1966. But if the target is all that important, why bother about the trends, especially when they are apt to tell a different story?

The whole thing is so designed that one wonders whether the objective is to confuse or reassure people about the food position and prospects. If Shri Patil does not think that food supply is increasing twice as fast as the population, the least he should do is to refrain from saying so. If, on the other hand, he does believe in these trends, he ought to stop frightening himself and the rest of the country and concentrate on solving the problem of distribution. It is at best pointless and at worst criminal to confuse the people by saying one thing today and quite the opposite tomorrow.

Some Light on Heavy Industry

DESPITE the so-called crisis of confidence on the food front, nobody expects the programme for heavy industries to be assigned anything less than top priority in the Third Five-Year Plan. Even so, it is good that the Minister for Industry, Shri Manubhai Shah, should have drawn attention to this explicitly in his address to the Mysore Chamber of Commerce some days back. Unless a major expansion of heavy industries forms the core of the Third Plan, it cannot claim to be a step forward towards the ultimate goal of industrialisation.

Besides emphasising this point, Shri Manubhai Shah threw some light on the elements that would make up the programme for heavy industries in the next Plan. Inevitably, the steel industry and power generation get the most attention. The target for steel at 10 to 11 million tons will be nearly twice the probable output at the end of the Second Plan; and in respect of electricity, capacity will go up from 7.5 million kw at present to over 15 million kw. The complex of industrial units that would be built around these two is truly impressive,

if one assumes that the Minister was talking about projects on which Government had taken firm decisions. And there is good reason for assuming so. The heavy machinery project, which will produce every two years a complete steel plant of one-million-ton capacity, is already under way. So are the foundry forging plant and the heavy electricals plant. The Minister added that Government was planning to establish several medium-size foundry forges in the country and two more units for the manufacture of heavy electrical equipment. The list mentioned by the Minister also includes four btr aluminium plants and a fertiliser factory in every State. This is apparently only a part of the programme for industries; but even this part is big enough to impress,

Shri Manubhai Shah said something else which is likely to be of considerable significance in the future. While he did not say anything about the public or private sector in respect of forges or aluminium plants, he made the point that in such fields as the manufacture of heavy electricals and intermediaries for the drugs, plastics and dye-stuffs industry, Government would not bar privately-owned units. And speaking as he was in Bangalore, he was careful enough to indicate that quite a few of the new industrial units would be set up in the South. He has, to be sure, not given us the whole programme; but what he has said should mollify some of the disgruntled.

Life Insurance Corporation

THE Life Insurance Corporation has made public its accounts for 1958 within nine months of publishing its accounts for the preceding period of 16 months, ending December 31, 1957. For this promptness, the Corporation deserves a word of praise. It would seem that, undeterred by the stigma of the Mundhra episode, the real responsibility for which a series of Commissions and Boards have not been able to fix in a convincing manner, the L I C, under its new Chairman, is making special efforts to achieve the tasks that lie ahead.

For those who revel in accounts and ratios, Shri Gopalkrishnan has