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**CASE STUDY A REGULATORY OPERATION: SIMULTANEOUS
RAIDS ON 106 RICE MILLS, 10TH AUGUST, 1974**

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Suddenly 15 persons emerged out of a closed door meeting being held in Collector's Chamber, looking quite thrilled and excited. Within minutes, they departed for different destinations accompanied by penny packets of policemen, gathered at short notice from different police stations of Raipur town. This happened at 11.45 A.M. The story was repeated at 1.30 P.M. When similar parties left for different locations in the town itself. At 2 P.M. sharp nearly thirty parties struck to different rice mills all over the District. Thus began the biggest operation of raiding and seizing the records of 106 rice mills and prominent Mandis in the District. It was a feat which was accomplished in barely 12 hours on second Saturday, the 10th of August 1974. This paper is meant to be a factual record of how the operation was planned and how it was quietly executed in Raipur and what were the problems and pitfalls.

The State Government had been concerned for quite some time regarding non-fulfilment of even revised rice levy targets. Against a target of 7 lac tonnes only 2.25 lac tonnes had been procured from the whole State. Out of this also, the contribution of Raipur Distt. alone was 1.25 lac tonnes. There were widely entertained rumours of large evasion of levy by the millers. This was despite the fact that the electricity meter of all mills had been jointly sealed by M.P.E.B. and Food & Civil Supplies officials in the beginning of the season and despite the fact that all exit points of the district had been sealed with the help of police and Homeguards. A large number of raids had been organized during the peak season and there was also a case of a rice smuggler being detained under M.I.S.A. In other words, all possible efforts to achieve the target had failed.

Keeping this in view, the State Govt. decided that stern and drastic measures would have to be taken against the millers. Some times in the last week of July, three Officers were picked up and a sort of task force was constituted. The Officers were:---

- (1) Shri S.C. Behar—A former Regional Manager of the Food Corporation of India and presently special Secretary to Govt. in Agriculture Department.
- (2) Shri N.B. Lohani—Managing Director of the State Commodities Trading Corporation and a former Managing Director of Apex Co-operative Marketing Federation, now registration of Co-operative Societies.
- (3) Shri Devendra Kumar—Special secretary, Co-operation Department. For many years he had been a Collector at Rawa, Sehore and Bhopal.

The details of the operation were drawn up and its timing was decided in the beginning of August. The Scheme was submitted to the Food Minister who okayed it after discussing it with the Chief Minister.

The task force of three officers reached Raipur on the morning of 9th August 74 by train. By a sheer coincidence the Chief Minister and Food Minister also visited Raipur on the same date to have a close look at the drought situation. However, this coincidence made the local officials and non-officials think that these officers had come to Raipur as members of the C.Ms party. Their eagerness to evade C.M.s meeting did raise some doubts but every body was so busy with the visit, that no body took any notice of their presence.

At 4 P.M. the C.M. left Raipur, shri N.B. Lohani also went to Bilaspur accompanying the Commissioner and the Collector. What transpired at Bilaspur is essentially what took place at Raipur as narrated below.

At 5 P.M. a closed door meeting was held at circuit house at which Commissioner and Collector, Raipur, Collectors of Durg and Rajnandgaon and Shri Behar and Shri Devenrakumar were present. At this meeting, the purpose of the visit of the team, the aim and the details of the operation were given out by shri Behar. As this was being done, the participants visualized their problems, and questions like 'where to find so much staff? How to avoid taking staff from the food Department? How to prevent leakage of the plans? Will stock verification be done at every mill? were posed.

The participants were unanimously of the view that local food department staff could not be relied upon. A suggestion, was however, made that this staff could be sent from one district to another. Even this suggestion was neither accepted nor presented very strongly. Therefore it was decided that staff could be taken from Agriculture co-operative, revenue and general Administration Deptts. Then arose the question of coverage. In a Distt. like Raipur, where the number of mills is above a hundred it is not possible to mobilize so much of staff and the necessary compliment of vehicles and policemen to raid every mill. On the other hand, it would have been unwise to be selective. The only alternative was to leave certain far-flung areas altogether. Consequently, Balodabazar, Basna and Saraipalli were left out of the purview of the raids. Regarding vehicles, it was decided not to release those vehicles which had been requisitioned for C.M.'s visit.

Finally, arose the problem of collecting so much staff for a meeting on holiday without betraying the purpose. A way out was found by deciding to call meetings at the district and tehsil headquarters to discuss important matters i.e. invigoration of Administration crop condition, scarcity works etc. All concerned were telephonically informed and SDOS were asked to call meetings at 1 P.M. They were told that these would be addressed by either Collector or Addl. Collector.

After this, there was no activity till the next morning. At 9.30 A.M. on 10th August 74 shri Behar, Distt. Magistrate, and the Superintendent of Police met at DM's residence and worked out the

composition of various parties. Ample care was taken to ensure that no person was sent to an area where he had served earlier. This was done to avoid embarrassment of raiding the establishment of known persons. Local officers, having jurisdiction were to be picked up from the tahsil head quarters except in the case of Tilda, Neora Abhanpur and Rajim where there is no local administrative establishment. In these cases, the area Naib tahsildars were attached to the parties from Raipur itself. In all 30 parties were formed out of which 18 were to operate in the town and the remaining were to go to various parts of the Distt.

At 11 A.M. all Naib Tahsildars of Raipur tahsil, Tahsildar, Deputy-Collectors, Assistant Collectors, Joint-Director and Deputy Director of Agriculture, Dy. Registrar of Co-operative Societies and two Asstt. Registrars, Additional Superintendent of Police, City Supdt. Police, Dy. Supdt. of Police and Town Inspector assembled for the meeting in Collector's court room. Those officials who had been selected for conducting the raids in the town itself were asked to come at 1.30 P.M. after lunch. Others were retained and the doors were closed. A Naib tahsildar was asked to stand 20 feet away from the room to ensure that no body came near it. It was a second Saturday and so a holiday. Therefore, no private persons were to be found in the Collectorate building. The S.D.O. (Phones) was contacted and asked to stop all outgoing and incoming trunk calls till 3. P. M.

After this started the briefing. Shri Behar was also present. The briefing was very detailed. The names of officers constituting various parties were announced. Officers were told to reach their destination by 2 P.M. and spring into action as soon as possible. The steps were to be taken in the following order:

- (1) Paralyse the telephone exchange by requesting the Supervisor not to allow any call to be received or booked.
- (2) Move from one mill to another, lock up the office and telephone and post a policeman outside and not to allow any movement to and from the mill.
- (3) Seize the important records namely meeting register, sales register of rice, broken rice and bran, purchase register of paddy, bill book, log book of electric meter, receipt book, paddy, broken rice and bran stock registers, gunny bag stock register and all records pertaining to dal and oil mill where they are located in the same premises. A copy of the Board displaying stock and prices was also to be got prepared and siezed. Nothing was to be given on Supradnama. All records were to be brought to Raipur Collectorate and deposited for detailed scrutiny.
- (4) Stocks were to be physically verified but not to be weighed except where it was apparent that it was far in excess or short of the declared stock.
- (5) In addition, mandi records of Bhatnara and Dhamtari mandis were to be seized by the Joint Director of Agriculture and the Dy. Director of Agriculture—respectively.

After the briefing the parties left for their destinations. The zero hour fixed was 2'O'clock. At 1.30 P.M. the group of officers selected for the town also assembled. Apart from the briefing, they were given the precise location of each mill. While this was being done it was found necessary to constitute a few more parties. Therefore, three more Dy. Collectors available in the town were also called. They were the Administrator of the Municipal Corporation, Chairman, Town Improvement Trust and Regional Manager of the State Commodities Trading Corporation.

The experience of all parties going to tahsil head quarters was practically the same. They found all functionaries gathered in S.D.O's office with all details concerning rain fall, state of crop, condition of agricultural labour etc. At first they felt relieved that instead of Collector/Additional Collector only a Deputy Collector had come but in no time they realized the gravity of operation they were to execute. Same process repeated itself, doors were closed, no body allowed to come near or go home. The group was again divided into sub-parties and the men from Raipur were attached to them. However the parties going to Tilda—Neora and Abhanpur—Rajim were on their own. The former party tried to get some policeman from Simga. All that they could get were two homeguards. At Tilda Police station apart from the Sub-Inspector only one constable was available. The Block Development Asstt. and the Food Inspector came to know of the arrival of the party at 5.30 P.M. and contacted it immediately thereafter. At Abhanpur, however the B.D.A. and his staff were found waiting though not for the party but for the Development Assistant to Collector, who was to arrive on an inspection tour.

The team reached Tilda a few minutes before 2'O' clock and went straight to the police station. The Thanedar was called from his house. He came within a few minutes. Without being told the purpose he was asked to accompany. After repeating his question twice, he sat down in the jeep. He was requested to lead to the biggest of the running rice mill. On the way came the telephone exchange, where the incharge was requested to close it down for one hour except for a call from D.M./S.P. Raipur. At the first mill, the identity of the leader was disclosed and the office was locked and a constable was posted to ensure that no body left the premises. The owner was asked to wait for the return of the team. After another two big mills had been sealed in the like manner, the team divided itself into two and sealed the remaining eight mills also. Thereafter, started the process of seizing documents and verifying the stocks. This was again done by both the teams.

The teams finished their work late in the evening. They started reaching Raipur a little after mid-night. The last team returned on 11th. late in the forenoon. All the teams operating in the town finished their work by 9, O'clock in the evening. A sort of a reception centre had been established at the Collectorate and an armed police guard had been posted.

Two days after the operation, detailed scrutiny of the records was started. The purpose was to discover irregularities and inconsistencies in the records. The relevant portions of the mill records were also compared with mandi, octroi, licensed food-grain dealer and Monthwise electricity consumption records. Large scale irregularities were discovered which showed that most of the mill owners had indulged in mal-practices. However, no illegally possessed stock were unearthed during these raids. This fact gave rise to the criticism in certain quarters that the raids were ill timed. The argument was that these should have been organized in February or March during the peak days. In off season there was no question of any stocks being found. While it is very difficult to surmise as to what would have happened if the raids had been organised during the peak season, certain possibilities and difficulties can be mentioned.

- (1) It is possible that unaccounted stocks would have been seized but at the same time it is also true that millers would have alleged that due to round the clock milling operations it was not possible for them to maintain latest minute to minute records.
- (2) Millers would have threatened to close down the mill thus creating a crisis for growers as well as for consumers.
- (3) It would not have been possible to issue a duplicate set of register and books to 106 millers so as to enable them to function without undue dislocation.

The follow up action proved to be a bigger job than the operation itself. Analysis of records and tabulation of information of ten proforma was undertaken with the help of 3 Dy. Collectors, Election Supervisor and 12 Auditors of the Co-operative Deptt. These ten detailed proformas were prepared in Raipur district only. Wherever full information was not available, it was dug out from periodical returns available in the food office. The tedious process came to an end in the middle of October 74 when detention orders under MISA were passed against three rice-millers in all comprising five persons. Only in case of seven mills no irregularities were detected and hence the millers were not proceeded against. In the remaining 99 cases, show cause notices were issued. After considering the replies filed and hearing the arguments the case were finally disposed by 10th January, 1975. The Millers were punished for keeping in view the gravity of irregularities proved against them. In nine cases milling and food grain licences were cancelled, in one case both the licences were suspended for one year, in 22 cases, forfeiture of security was ordered and in 21 cases warning was given. Forty six cases were closed as nothing substantial could be found against the Millers after considering their replies.

Before concluding, a word about the utility of the operation would not be out of place. No such regulatory operation has ever cured the disease for good. Such operations can at best curb the evil for a short duration and reveal the modus-operandi of the offenders.