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## Kidwai Presents Two Faces

THE unrepentant and incorrigible empiricist that he is Shri Kidwai is entirely unpredictable. Circumstances have now tilted him up to an international plane where he is performing the same capers that are his wont. Wheat and rice, the East and the West, to these he presents two entirely different faces. The International Wheat Agreement which guarantees a higher price, in order to help the United States to feather-bed her farmers and maintain farm incomes, he has signed though Britain held out from it. To the demand that India should enter into an agreement for wheat with Soviet Russia, he replied that the Government would be prepared to do it provided Russia was willing to sell wheat at the price which the Punjab farmer gets.

Front Burma. Shri Kidwai wanted rice at the internal price prevailing in that country. Eventually he climbed down, how far it would not be known until the Burmese Trade Delegation visits this country some nine next month and the terms of the barter deal are finally agreed upon. But from Burma he has wrested consent to a barter agreement in place of the high export price demanded by the Burmese Rice Export Board, the same that it charges from all importers. This is not an inconsiderable achievement in itself. That it was not difficult for India to gain some concessions how much still remains to be seen—does not detract from the value of his achievement, judged purely on its merits. Whatever may be said, on a broader view, about seeking a bilateral agreement instead of a more general solution, with all the major rice exporting countries. Of the latter, there are besides Burma, only Thailand and Indo-China.

India was in a position to take the lead and initiate negotiations for an agreement to which the other rice importing countries in the East could be willing parties, to stabilise the rice economy of this part of the world. But that is not Shri Kidwai's metier. His flare is for the expedient solution sought on a swift assessment of the immediate situation. That he has an unerring eye for his opponent's weak points, a certain wily awareness of the latter's needs and readiness to meet them for striking a deal, will not be denied. All these Shri Kidwai played to perfection. But his trump card was the present lopsided trade relations between the two countries, a very unbalanced state of affairs which has continued for years. In the past, the pattern for this trade had been set by an average import of Burma rice of 2 million tons; in the last few years, rice imports have hovered around only a lakh tons. Only in the years in which India buys more rice from her is the unfavourable balance of trade with Burma reduced. With Japan now entering the Burma market in a big way, Shri Kidwai will earn the gratitude of the millowners, if he can utilise this trump card to some advantage, if not to get rice cheaper, at least to secure a market for the export of cotton textiles which have been dwindling.

Why did Shri Kidwai turn quite a different face to the West on the question of wheat? Was he intimidated into agreeing to a price which on commonsense view does not appear to be such a bargain after all? There are wheat exporting countries other than US, Canada

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