

SHRJ S.S. AHLUWALIA: I have not said that. Please don't try to please the Press. *(Interruptions)*.

SHRJ K. RAHMAN KHAN: What I would like to clarify is this. You have talked about Islam. You have talked about the qualities of Islam.

SHRJ S.S. AHLUWALIA: Certainty.

SHRJ K. RAHMAN KHAN: With regard to the issue of Shahi Imam, he has stated that he represents the entire Muslim community. He does not. *(Interruptions)*

SHRJ S.S. AHLUWALIA: No, no. I did not say that.

SHRJ K. RAHMAN KHAN: You said it and then you withdrew it. *(Interruptions)*

SHRJ S.S. AHLUWALIA: No, no. Nobody is interested to listen to him.' *(Interruptions)*

SHRI SANGH PRIYA GAUTAM: You condemn Shahi Imam. *(Interruptions)*

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Khan, you have made your point very clearly. Now, nothing more is required.

SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Sir, whatever is objectionable, that should go out of the record.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have told this thing to him. He will himself look into it.

Now, the House is adjourned till two o'clock.

The House then adjourned for lunch at eleven minutes past one of the clock.

The House re-assembled after lunch at six minutes past two of the clock,
[The Deputy Chairman (Shri Md. Salim) in the Chair.]

SPECIAL MENTIONS - Contd

Strike by Postal Employees.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM): Now, we will take up the remaining Special Mentions. Shri Satishchandra Sitaram Pradhan. Not present. Shri Manohar Kant Dhyani. Not present. Shri S. Viduthalai Virumbi.

SHRI S. VTOUTHALAI VIRUMBI (Tamil Nadu): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I am raising an important issue which is going to affect the whole nation. The Federation of National Postal Organisations (FNTO), the National Federation of Postal Employees (NFPE) and the Bharatiya Postal Employees' Federation (BPEF) have given notice of an indefinite strike from 2nd May. If the strike commences, as stated, I feel the services in 1.6 lakh post-offices throughout the country, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, may be completely paralysed. What we understood through the media is that the hon. Minister of Communications, Ram Vilas Paswanji, has been sympathetic towards the demands of the employees. But, at the same time, he had expressed his concern about implications on the finance side. In 1998, from 9th to 16th July the postal employees had gone on strike on several issues and a joint meeting was held between the Department and the employees. In that meeting some consensus was arrived. After that, the Government had given an assurance that it would implement the consensus that was arrived at the meeting. On 16th July, 1998, when the strike was called off, Sushmaji, the then Minister of Communications, assured the nation as well as this august House that "since the employees totally believed the Government and the employees have decided to call off the strike, definitely the Government would provide more facilities. The Government would yield to their demands more than what they have expected". But the ground reality is totally different. Now, the strike call is actually given on two or three points. I quote:

"Implementation of the positive recommendations of Justice Charanjit Tahvar Committee on extra-departmental employees with particular reference to grant of status and pension."

This is number one. (2) Acceptance of agreed proposal signed on 18th December, 1998 on the revision of pay scales and additional increments of various cadres in the Department of Posts. (3) Upgradation of 10% of BCR i.e. Biennial Cadre Review, posts to H.S.G. I in clerical cadre and provision of similar percentage of posts to H.S.G. I in all cadres viz. Postman/Mailguards.Group D, etc. in the Department of Posts. Sir, it is also their demand that the status of extra-departmental employees as well as pension of the employees be brought on par with that of the Central Civil Services employees. Their other demand is about the promotion. There are two promotions for them,- the first promotion is made after they have

rendered 16 years of service, and the the second promotion is done after they have rendered 26 years of service, *i.e.* Biennial Cadre Review. So, Sir, this is the problem. One promotion is after rendering 16 years of service and the second is after rendering 26 years of service, *i.e.* BCR. That is true. Only two promotions are being given now. Their demand is, they want to be on par with the Government employees as well as the Telecom employees. For that they have already given a notice also. We came to know that hon. Minister had agreed to come back and meet the Union leaders before 5.00 p.m. on 30th of April. He will convey to them whatever is there in the mind of the Government. Today; it is 28th; then 29th, 30th, 1st May is holiday, and the strike is going to commence from May 2. Therefore, I would request the Government that, after this Private Members' Business is over, to come out with a *suo motu* statement so that we know the Government's mind. Otherwise it will affect the nation. Therefore, I appeal to the Government come out with a *suo motu* statement. Before the statement, if they have already met the Union leaders, they should inform the House, as to what has transpired between the employees' leaders and the Government. (*Interruptions*).

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM): Please conclude.

SHRI S. VIDUTHALAI VIRUMBI : Sir, the accusation of the Union leaders is, the major demands agreed to by the Government, in 1998, during the strike between July 9-16, 1998, have not been implemented. The major points of those agreements have not been implemented so far. Therefore, I demand that Government should explain, what are the points agreed to between the employees and the Government. And what are the points which they have already implemented; what are the demands yet to be implemented by the Government; whether the Government proposes to take any action to expedite the process to implement the assurance given, to the postal employees. In case, they have not given or in case they have completely implemented the proposal, let them come out with that. But we believe the union leaders, and they are right when they say that some of the demands are yet to be implemented. Therefore, the financial question comes in. But here, Sir, that one thing is clear *i.e.* 20% posts of Supervisor as well as 6% Operative Staff Posts have already been rationalised. Since they are rationalised, the financial implications will be very less or very negligible. Therefore, citing the reason of financial implications, it cannot be postponed any further. That is my point. Sir,

therefore, I would request, through this august House, that Government should take this strike notice seriously and it should come forward to the House with a *suo motu* statement before the House adjourns, that the Government will take action in such a way that, whatever demands they have already agreed to, will be completely implemented; without any hesitation or without any further delay. The demands put forth by the union leaders should be looked into in a peaceful atmosphere and the strike should be averted. With these words, I conclude.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU (West Bengal) : Sir, at the very outset, I thank Mr. Virumbi for raising this issue. The issue is regarding the strike by the employees of one of the biggest employers of this country, that is, the Postal Department. This House has a special role to play in this whole question. You will remember, Sir, in the height of the strike that took place in 1998, this House had played a very important role in forcing the Government to negotiate with the Postal employees. It would have been better if this Special Mention had been made in the morning when Sushmaji was present in the House. You would also recall, and perhaps, this was unprecedented in this country, that at that point of time the agreement between the Government and the employees' organisations was read out in the House first. Perhaps, even before going to the Press, the Minister came here and read out the text of the agreement between the Government on the one hand and the postal employees on the other. Mr. Virumbi has placed the entire charter of demands. I will not dilate on that. But what I would like to particularly emphasise is the question of the ED employees. The postal employees had a very long-drawn struggle. The postal employees had shown in the past and they have shown now in this case also a remarkable sense of unity cutting across their political lines. All the trade unions have come together, including the BMS. Earlier also, in spite of their initial dithering, the employees had forced the Government to commission this committee headed by Justice Talwar and Justice Tahvar had made certain recommendations about the ED system. Now, if you compare the postal traffic and the number of post offices in the country as compared to those that were there at the time of the independence, you will find that there has been an almost seven-fold increase in the number of post offices and there has been an almost ten-fold increase in the number of letters and other postal traffic that moves in the country. Sir, I would also like to draw your attention and, through you, the attention of the House that while we are

now talking of Internet in every village and we are talking of making cellular telephone services wider and wider, still for a majority of the people in this country a post card or an inland letter remains a major medium of communication with each other. Therefore, the importance of the postal services in this country cannot be under-estimated at the cost of the nation itself. With this huge increase in the postal traffic as well as the number of post offices, we have seen that there has been no corresponding growth in the number of postal employees. Earlier, the Postal Department had this authority that, at least, at the Group-C level *{Time Bell}* Sir, just two minutes. This is an issue where Rajya Sabha has a special responsibility.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM): But the other Members also want to associate. You cannot take the whole responsibility of Rajya Sabha.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: I crave your indulgence, Sir. I am relating certain issues that will be receiving the support from other Members as well. But, Sir, there has been no corresponding increase in the number of employees; the reasons have been two-fold. Before 1984, the Department of Posts had the autonomy of recruiting its own people. But, after 1984, through an executive order, this right had been snatched away from the Department of Posts, and, now, it has to be processed and approved by the Department of Finance. And, there, in spite of the fact that the question of recruitment is awaiting their approval for- years together, the approval has not been given. The other issue is regarding ED. employees...

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM): You associate yourself with the issue regarding strike by postal employees.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Yes, Sir.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM): You just confine yourself to the points raised by the hon. Member.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Sir, these are the main issues, namely, the autonomy of the Department of Posts and the regularisation of E.D. employees as departmental employees. Sir, it is a barbaric system which is continuing from the British days. Practically, it is these E.D. employees, about three-and-a-half lakh employees, who are shouldering the entire burden of running the Postal Department, and it is an inhuman system that you have the Contract Labour Act, where the labourers, who are doing a

perennial kind of work for the whole of the year - work which is of a permanent nature - are not treated as regular employees. Here, the Government itself has to implement that Act. But it will not have the moral authority to implement it because in the case of the Postal Department, they are treated as E.D. employees. Earlier, suo motu statements had been made by the Government giving an impression that all is not well and everybody concerned will be taken care of. But, for two years, the employees have waited, and they have had a number of consultations with the Government and with the management of the day. But nothing has come out. So, they are forced to go on strike. It will disrupt the normal activity. It is a major public utility. Therefore, the Government owes us an assurance that it will, immediately, settle the issue so that the employees would not have to go on a strike.

SHRI V. P. DURAISAMY (Tamil Nadu): Sir, I associate myself with this Special Mention and I hope that the Communications Minister would be communicated about the sentiments expressed by the hon. Members of this House.

श्री संघ प्रिय गौतम (उत्तर प्रदेश) : उपसभाध्यक्ष महोदय, श्री विरुम्भी ने जो मसला उठाया है, मैं उससे अपने आपको ऐसोसिएट करता हूँ।

SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA (West Bengal): Sir, I must, first of all, thank my learned friend, hon. Member, Shri Virumbi, for raising a very, very pertinent and a relevant issue...

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM): You only associate yourself with it. Already Mr. Basu has elaborated on the matter.

SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: I am just associating myself with it. The hon. Member, Shri Nilotpal Basu, also has spoken about it in detail. This is an important issue. I would like to know whether the Government is thrusting upon the postal employees some such situation so that the intention and objective of the Government to privatise the Postal Department can be advanced. I say this because it is a question of an assurance given and the assurance failing. The Government had given some assurances only two years before, namely, in 1998, and this assurance and the recommendations of the Talwar Committee could not be implemented. So, the Government has failed. I would like to know whether the Government is trying to fulfil its earlier objective of regularisation of the postal employees. This explanation also should be given.