

MOTION REGARDING JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE HOUSES ON THE ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES (AMENDMENT) BILL, 1988

THE MINISTER OF FOOD (SHRI S.S. BARNALA): Madam, I beg to move: "That this House concurs in the recommendation of the Lok Sabha that the Rajya Sabha do join in the Joint Committee 8 of the Houses on the Bill further to amend the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, and resolves that the following Members of the Rajya Sabha be nominated to serve on the said Joint Committee:—

1. Shri Sangh Priya Gautam
2. Shri Vedprakash P. Goyal
3. Shri Adhik Shirodkar
4. Shri Bhuvnesh Chaturvedi
5. Shri Sankaralingam
6. Shri Ghufan Azam
7. Kumari Nirmala Deshpande
8. Shri Barjinder Singh Hamdard
9. Shri Ashok Mitra
10. Shri Gaya Singh"

The question was put and the Motion was adopted.

SPECIAL MENTIONS—Contd.

Devastating Floods and Sinking of Mruli Island in Assam

SHRI PARAG CHALIHA (Assam): Madam, Assam has a distinction of having comparatively the highest number of rivers, mostly as tributaries of the mighty Brahmaputra. The vast riverine and non-hilly areas around the Brahmaputra cause devastating floods almost every year, destroying millions of hectares of cultivable lands, destroying countless number of dwelling houses, besides drowning hundreds of cattle as also human beings—old and young, men and women—almost perennially. The scourge has gradually grown to alarming proportions, pwticu-

larly after the great earthquake of 1950 which virtually destroyed the entire topography of Assam. The bed of the Brahmaputra has risen almost ten times since the earthquake, resulting in siltage, extensively overflowing innumerable bunds and embankments causing inestimable and untold misery and loss to millions of people every year.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM) In the Chair: In the recent floods more than 60 people died and countless number of cattle perished and more than one-and-a-half lakh people have been rendered homeless, forced to take shelter in relief camps maintained by the State Government.

The financial help from the Central Government, including relief materials like rice, *atta*, mustard oil and kerosene, has not been supplied sufficiently and the help of the Agriculture Department, supplying seedlings for fresh cultivation, has not been forthcoming so far.

It is, therefore, to urge upon the Government of India to arrange an immediate visit of the Prime Minister and the Agriculture Minister to visit the flood-hit areas as early as possible and arrange adequate urgent measures for necessary relief to the people for their relief and rehabilitation. It is further requested to arrange a permanent solution to the scourge by fully dredging the Brahmaputra and take steps for undertaking the long-pending river-valley projects of Subansiri and Deband which could contribute substantially not only to lesson the impact of floods but would also generate considerable electric power at comparatively lower cost thus opening vistas for establishing varied industries therewith.

Inter alia, the Brahmaputra Board which was constituted by this Government, remaining only as a shapeless, disfigured showpiece, needs to be risen from its long slumber and put into proper use.

DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA (Assam): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I want to draw the attention of the entire House to the point regarding violation of human rights to a section of population in the World's biggest river island situated in Assam, that is, Majuli. Probably, many of the hon. Members are not aware that it is the biggest fresh water island in the world inhabited by more than 1.5 lakh people. And till today even after 50 years of independence, the island is not connected to the main land by any bridge, with any road transport. This could have been done. In 1971, the total boundary area of this island was 1,200 sq. kms. Last year it was reduced to only 640 sq. kms because of constant threat of erosion by the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries which have formed in the Island.

Recently, when the Restricted Area Permit for foreign tourists visiting the North-East was lifted, more than 300 foreign tourists visited the Island because it happens to be the most pollution-free area in the world after the Amazon valley. But, our countrymen know very little about this Island. Environmental disaster has been caused by the reversed system of the Brahmaputra and the Barak in Assam. Because of the heavy siltation from the neighbouring hills the bed of the entire river has come up and the river has become shallow. There is no particular original channel of the river. When the rainy season starts water flows in all directions. In Assam rainy season starts from the month of April and lasts up to October. Most of the area remains disconnected during the rainy season. I can cite examples. For the last five years some parts of Assam, that is, the Jonai Sub-Division, the Dhemai Sub-Division, the Dhokoakhana Sub-Division and the Majuli Island have been disconnected from the rest of the country. The road connection, the National Highway 52, had been breached at several places; and submerged at several other location. The only railway line connecting areas, to

parts of Arunachal Pradesh has remained delinked for the last three months. It is seen that the Government is not at all serious about the problem faced by the inhabitants of this great river island. They wonder as to how their land will be saved this year. This year, more than ten villages of Majuli Island have been washed away by the flood.

There is another thing which is happening which affects the poor farmers. Whenever the smaller rivers bring in a huge quantity of sand and soil, it is just covering the paddy fields, the cultivable lands. The poor farmers are now landless. This year, because of floods and erosion, we have lost more than sixty seven lives. More than ten lakh population has been rendered homeless. The loss to the standing crops and property amounts to more than Rs. 4,000 crores.

Sir, if we really calculate the quantum of cumulative loss caused by floods and erosion in Assam, it comes to more than Rs. 160,000 crores during the last fifty years. Had there been a proper planning to control the Brahmaputra river system, by dams, and multi-purpose river projects, we would have produced more than 75,000 MW of power, not only capable of meeting the requirements of the entire country, but also exporting power to the neighbouring countries. But no planning was done.

Only for namesake, a number of commissions were formed, including the Brahmaputra Flood Control Commission which, ultimately, led to the formation of the Brahmaputra Board. But, till now, nothing has happened. The Brahmaputra Board has invested a huge amount of public money only in the name of investigation. Not a single dam, not a single project, has been commissioned by this Board. If we allow this national loss, at the rate of Rs. 4,000 crores per year, to go on, how can we develop the economy of Assam? How can we develop the economy of that part of the country?

Of course, a number of schemes were formulated. There were different schemes. Money was allocated. But the point is, no Centrally-sponsored scheme could be taken up in those areas. This is because it is vulnerable to floods. Even housing schemes, water supply schemes, irrigation schemes, could not be taken up—it was not practicable—and the benefits could not go to the common people.

This area deserves the special attention of this House as well as of the Government. The problem, the environment problem, should be taken up very seriously. It should not be treated in a very causal manner; that it is just a relief and rehabilitation work, which is the responsibility of the Government of Assam. It is an environment problem. It is a national problem. It is an international problem. The Brahmaputra system has emerged from China. It flows through the Brahmaputra Valley and finally it falls into the Bay of Bengal.

Today, the entire system has collapsed. There is, practically, no development. The prime land in Assam is with the tea gardens, (time bell rings) There is not much cultivable land available to the peasants, to the farmers. Out of the cultivable land available, at least, ten per cent has been submerged by the river. In certain places in Ohemaji and Dibrugarh, the Brahmaputra is now 15 kms. wide, whereas it was just 1.5 kms. wide in 1950. In some places, there is, practically, no river. The river-bed has come up because of heavy siltation. The river, the water, is flowing in different directions. As a result of this, several towns, including Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, the entire Majuli Island, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia, are being threatened.

I know that an assistance package of Rs. 500 crores was announced by the Prime Minister. But no tangible work has been done. No planning has been done to tackle the situation so that we are in a position to protect the farmers and other people living in these areas.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM): Dr. Sarma, please conclude.

DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: What crime the people in these areas—Jonai—part of Arunachal Pradesh; and Dhemaji District—have committed? Why should they be debarred from having their minimum right of communication either by rail or by road, for the last fifty years? I want to ask? This is the situation there. Practically, there is no National Highway. It was breached....

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

DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: I am coming to the point.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM): Please come to the concluding point.

DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: This is a serious problem. It should not be treated casually. Of course, everywhere, there are floods. I am not talking only about the floods. My point is that the Majuli Island needs special protection. If it is properly protected, we can develop this into an international tourist spot. If it is properly protected, it will be a national asset. But that has never been taken care of by the planners. Whether these bureaucrats are from the Planning Commission or from other organisations, they cannot visualise the situation there. They only send some Central team. On the basis of its assessment, they give some lump sum grant or loan for relief and rehabilitation.

But, what about a permanent solution? We, the Members from all the different States, are asking for flood relief. We are asking for a permanent solution to the flood problem. But, is there any serious discussion on this? Was there any serious discussion? Are they taking into confidence Members of Parliament from different flood-affected areas? Was there any special debate on a permanent solution to the flood problem? We are raising this issue every year in the rainy season. When winter comes, that is forgotten.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM): You can write to the Chairman for a debate. But you cannot convert a Special Mention into a full-fledged debate. You have to conclude now. There are other issues also. There are other Members also. You have made serious points.

DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Sir, before, I conclude, I want to make one request that a special debate should be there in future. The Government should send immediately a special team to assess the situation, and it should give immediate assistance for relief and rehabilitation. I also request especially the Surface Transport Ministry to take special care to give communications to those people who have been denied of these for the last seven years. This is my submission.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM): Shri Dara Singh Chauhan.

SHRI YOGINDER K. ALAGH: Sir, I want to associate myself with him. Give me one minute.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM): No, I have already called Dara Singh Chauhan.

Non-Inclusion of Bhar/Rajbhar in the S.C. List

श्री दारा सिंह चौहान (उत्तर प्रदेश): उपसभाध्यक्ष महोदय, मैं आपके माध्यम से सरकार के संज्ञान में यह बात लाना चाहता हूँ कि इस देश में रहले वाली ऐसी जातियाँ हैं जिनकी संख्या करोड़ों में है और इनमें से एक जाति है जिसे भर/राजभर नाम से जाना जाता है। आजादी के 50 साल बाद भी, यह जाति जिसकी देश में करोड़ों की संख्या में है इनकी सामाजिक, शैक्षणिक और आर्थिक स्तर की स्थिति बहुत ही दयनीय है। आजादी से पहले ब्रिटिश शासन काल में भर/राजभर जाति को क्रिमिनल जराबम पेशे जाति के नाम से जाना जाता था, अपराधशील जाति कहा जाता था। बाद में वह क्रिषनल ट्राइब्स के नाम से जानी जाने लगी। आजादी के बाद 1952 में "क्रिमिनल ट्राइब्स-1924" को रीपील करके डी-नोटिकाइड यानी बिमुक्त-जाति कर दिया गया। इस बिमुक्त-जाति को बाद में अनुसूचित जाति की श्रेणी में शामिल कर दिया गया और महाराष्ट्र मध्य प्रदेश, त्रिपुरा व अरुणाचल प्रदेश में भर/राजभर जाति

अनुसूचित जाति की तरह सीरियल नम्बर 17 पर है। समय-समय पर जितने भी कमीशन व आयोगों का गठन हुआ, चाहे पिछड़ा वर्ग आयोग हो, चाहे सर्वधिक पिछड़ा वर्ग आयोग रहा हो सभी ने एक संस्तुति की है कि भर/राजभर जाति की स्थिति बहुत ही दयनीय है। इस नाते इनको अनुसूचित जाति की सूची में शामिल किया जाए। इसी के तहत उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार ने एक बार नहीं ग्यारह बार भर/राजभर जाति को अनुसूचित जाति में शामिल करने के लिए केन्द्रीय सरकार से सिफारिश की है। लेकिन केन्द्रीय सरकार की उदासीनता के कारण भर/राजभर जाति को अनुसूचित जाति की श्रेणी में शामिल नहीं किया गया। जिसके कारण आज भी उनकी समाजिक, आर्थिक, शैक्षणिक स्थिति में बराबर गिरावट आती जा रही है और वे इस देश की मुख्य धारा से कटते जा रहे हैं।

महोदय, आपके माध्यम से मैं सरकार के संज्ञान में वह लाना चाहता हूँ कि भर/राजभर जाति जो कि तमाम प्रदेशों वे पूरे हिन्दुस्तान में पाई जाती है इसको अनुसूचित जाति की श्रेणी में शामिल करके उनके लिए तमाम विकास के रास्ते खोले जाएँ। इसी के साथ मैं अपनी बात समाप्त करता हूँ।

श्री गांधी आजाद (उत्तर प्रदेश): उपसभापति महोदय, धन्यवाद। मैं अपने को माननीय सदस्य दारा सिंह चौहान जी के साथ संबद्ध करते हुए इस बात को आगे बढ़ाना चाहता हूँ कि भर तथा राजभर जो जातियाँ हैं इनका आज सामाजिक स्तर जो है वह इस देश में जो अनुसूचित जाति और जनजाति के लोग हैं, जिनके साथ अछूत का व्यवहार किया जाता है, भर और राजभर लोगों के साथ भी वैसा ही व्यवहार किया जाता है। शैक्षिकरूप से उनकी ऐसी हालत है, मैं पूरे देश की बात कर रहा हूँ, इस समय एक भी सिंगल आदमी भर या राजभर जाति का न आई.ए.एस. है, न आई.पी.एस. है, न पी.सी.एस. है। एक भी सिंगल आदमी इन सेवाओं में नहीं है। उनका शिक्षा का स्तर गिरा हुआ है और आर्थिक दशा भी ऐसी है कि आज इस जाति के 90 प्रतिशत से ज्यादा लोग गरीबी रेखा के नीचे हैं। इनका मुख्य पेशा अपने श्रम को बेचकर, परिवार सहित अपने श्रम को बेचकर गुजर-बसर करना है। कहने का मतलब यह है कि जो संविधान में अनुसूचित जातियों के आरक्षण की व्यवस्था की गई है उसके अन्तर्गत जिस तरह से सीशली और एजूकेशनली बैकवर्ड लोग शामिल हैं, ठीक इसी तरह से भर और राजभर को भी इसमें शामिल किया जाए।