

The House reassembled after lunch at thirty three minutes past two of the clock. The Vice-Chairman (Shri Jagesh Desai) in the Chair.

Shortage of Petrol and Petroleum products in Darjeeling

SHRI RATNA BAHADUR RAI (West Bengal): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, my special mention is regarding the shortage of petrol and petroleum products in Darjeeling. We were given to understand by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas in its Annual Report that as against the target of 48.75 million tonnes of crude oil in 1987-88, the oil refineries processed 47.75 million tonnes of crude oil in the year, representing an achievement of 99.9 per cent of the target and 102.2 per cent of the capacity. Moreover, it is clearly stated in this report that the demand and supply position of petroleum products in the country is closely monitored by this Ministry in consultation with the Oil Marketing Companies and the Oil Co-ordination Committee.

Despite such a rhetoric regarding the production of petrol and petroleum products and its distribution on the part of the Government, Darjeeling is facing an acute crisis of petrol and petroleum products since the second quarter of 1989. The drastic cut in the allocation of this life-blood of modern civilisation naturally pushed the alround activities of Darjeeling to a staggering halt. As all sorts of vehicles were locked in garages due to the drought in petrol pumps, daily passengers and commuters underwent insurmountable hardships. Even serious patients were not spared. Movement of essential commodities for the people of Darjeeling including the victims of Darjeeling agitation and landslides came to a standstill. Unprecedented rush of tourists after three years of disturbances was frustrated to a great extent. Tea gardens were facing closure, due to this

fuel crisis. This paralysis of under-developed infrastructure of this region naturally provoked prices galore of essential commodities. Transport fare too touched its exorbitant heights for the common people.

Sir, it was reported that in protest against this whimsical and arbitrary action of the Government and oil companies, petrol pump dealers went on strike and the North Bengal Petrol Dealers Association, North Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry and other organisations irrespective of their political leanings sent representations to the Government. The State Government too had urged the Central Government to revoke this restriction. Hon. Minister of this Ministry has accepted this fact in his answer to my Starred Question No. 289. But contrary to the hon. Minister's assurance to direct the oil companies to meet the genuine demands, only 10 per cent of the shortage has been reportedly restored.

Sir, I beg to submit that this sudden curtailment coincided with the worsening of Indo-Nepal relations. Rumours were afloat that this drastic cut was to check the smuggling of petrol and petroleum products across the border. But it is reported that smugglers are continuing their illicit operations through other border areas and making their hey-day. Government should evolve other effective and stringent strategies to check this but should not make the people a scapegoat. Otherwise, Government's intention — it may be a noble one — will be misconstrued as the people may think that the Central-Government have made the Nepali population of Darjeeling victims of its wrath for Nepal.

Hence, it is my humble request to the concerned Ministry, through you, that considering the appalling dimensions of difficulties faced by the people at large, increasing number of vehicles flow of tourists and accelerating reconstruction works in Darjeeling,

the concerned agencies should be directed to lift restrictions immediately and restore the shortfall of this life-blood to its genuine limit.

Problems Faced by Particle Board Industry in the Country

SHRI R. S. NAIK (Karnataka): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I rise to draw the attention of the House, through you, to an important matter. The matter is in regard to the particle board and medium density fibre industries which are facing disaster due to the wrong policy of the Government.

About 10 units of particle board industry are in operation in our country. Besides these units, the Government has recognised and permitted some more such units in the small-scale sector to encourage and accelerate industrialisation and industrial development. They are producing about 40,000 tonnes annually to meet the requirements. There is no doubt that the ideal substitute for timber in the country is only the particle board comprising medium density fibre boards. These products are manufactured from waste raw materials like saw-mill waste, wastes from factories which are using timber as raw material, forest wastes like lops, tops of trees and branch-wood as well as agricultural wastes like baggasse, rice husk etc. They also prevent the deforestation of forests for construction and other uses. They can also replace, in a large way, the components used in house-building, for furniture, for packing-cases and other purposes.

Sir, this industry is playing a very important role in the economy of our country. It also pays about Rs. 4 crores as tax to the Government. I am specially concerned over this matter. Out of the ten units, four units are established in Karnataka. As a matter of fact, one unit is there in my home-town, Dandeli, in North

Kanara District. About 600 workers are employed in this unit.

Sir, I have received a letter from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Sirsi in North Kanara District. They have written a letter to the Government and have sent a copy to me, asking me to take up this issue in the House. Therefore, I am making this Special Mention.

A serious threat is being posed to the very existence of this industry. This is because of the bilateral agreements by us with some of our neighbouring countries, particularly, with Bhutan. Bhutan has set up a particle board unit with a capacity of 25,000 tonnes per year. It is said that this has been established with the help of some foreign financial institutions. Money has been given at a lower rate of interest. Machines have been supplied free through the UNDP. Besides this, the said unit gets waste materials at concessional rates from the Bhutanese Government.

Our Government has allowed particle board to be imported into India from Bhutan without any restriction, in the sense that there is no import duty or any countervailing duty. Whereas, in India, the particle board industry has to pay two types of duties. One is the 10 per cent excise duty on the factory cost of the particle board and the other is the 15 per cent excise duty on resins used therein. No such duties are payable by the Bhutanese industry. The import duty on the import of wood panel from other countries is now 100 per cent. Then, there is a countervailing duty. The total duty comes to 110 per cent. But the Bhutanese industry is totally free from all this. The Bhutanese particle board industry is selling materials in India at a cheaper rate and sending materials in India at a cheaper rate and sending materials on a large scale where our industry cannot compete with the. Therefore...