

LENS reaction to the recent newsprint allocation Policy

♦442. SHRI MAHENDRA PRASAD: Will the Minister of INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING be pleased to state;

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the reaction of the Indian and Eastern Newspaper Society to the newsprint allocation policy recently declared by Government to the effect that the said policy was inadequate; and

(b) if so, whether any detailed report has been submitted by IENS in this regard and Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI AJIT PANJA):

(a) and (b) Yes, Sir. However, the Government feels that the Policy announced by it is fully satisfactory as it takes into account all aspects of the newsprint situation in the country.

SHRI MAHENDRA PRASAD: Sir, while spelling out the salient features of the newsprint policy on 17th November 1986, it was pointed out by the Minister that the policy is based on the principle of self-reliance. May I know whether Government have any comprehensive programme to make the country fully self-reliant in respect of newsprint, by augmenting the production capacity in the country, keeping also in view the quality and cost factors; if so, may I know what are the details of the comprehensive plan and by when it is likely to achieve self-sufficiency and what according to this plan, would be position by the turn of the century, that is, year 2000? May I also know the present import content in the total newsprint requirement in the country and how far it is proposed to be brought down during the ensuing three years under the new policy?

SHRI AJIT PANJA: Sir, newsprint is a controlled item and import; it is canalised through the State Trading Corporation. For this year, we approximate that the total need would be 5 lakhs metric tonnes and imports, as we have fixed up now, 2.70 lakhs metric tonnes. Sir, the *ad hoc* allocation already made for this year by

R. N. I, is 3.95 lakhs metric tonnes, of which 1.80 lakhs metric tonnes is of imported variety. Sir, the shortfall of indigenous newsprint is made up by import. But Sir, as you know, there is a constraint regarding foreign exchange reserve. Foreign exchange policy is there and, therefore, although there are not many mills for producing newsprint, I understand that three more intents have been issued for the purpose of setting up new newsprint factories. But, Sir, along with that, a lot of us are concerned about the ecological balance that is required to be made. The forest reserves are gradually going out of the control and might create difficulty, and it is creating difficulty now because of flood in some places and drought in some places.

• So, taking into view all this, we have decided that some will be imported, and regarding the need of the newsprint users some will be used for indigenous purposes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Second supplementary.

SHRI MAHENDRA PRASAD: Sir, it is a well known fact that a large number of newspapers, specially small newspapers which are entitled to cent per cent imported newsprint, misuse their quota of newsprint, diverting it into the black market. May I know whether this matter has been gone into by Government before laying down the newsprint policy and what was the result of such exercise or study, if any, detailing the facts and figures indicating the total amount of imported newsprint diversified by such unscrupulous small papers during a specified period of, say, one year, and whether...

MR. CHAIRMAN: It is over. Mr. Minister.

SHRI AJIT PANJA: Several steps have been taken. When I placed this policy in this House, those were discussed. But for the information of the hon. Member, I may mention that regular monitoring has been taken to resort for the purpose of lifting of indigenous newsprint by the newspapers to ensure that this validity period of authorisation is reduced to three months. We know within three months

whether they are lifting or not. Then we look into it by monitoring.

So far as lifting of Indigenous newsprint quota is concerned, if the quota is not lifted, then his quota of the entire imported newsprint for the whole year is forfeited.

Thirdly, there are those who are found to have given false certificates regarding circulation. A measure has been taken to debar them from getting any further allocation of imported newsprint.

As far as the *bonafide* users are concerned, there will be no difficulty because it has been made performance-oriented. As soon as they tell us that they have increased their circulations, their avocation would be increased.

SHRIMATI JAYANTHI NATA-RAJAN; Sir, my question relates to the policy statement made by the Government on 13th November, 1986 wherein it was stated that newsprint policy would cover 5 per cent growth rate. But in the newsprint allocation policy that was announced two weeks ago, there was no such provision and it was a zero growth policy. There was no provision for growth of newspapers. They were entitled to lift their entitlement on the basis of last year's performance. Will the Minister take this into consideration and provide for growth? They are silent on that in the new policy.

SHRI AJIT PANJA; Sir, the growth rate has been taken care of. Whatever has been stated in the policy also takes care of five growth rate. While this policy was being framed, it was demanded that there should be an automatic growth rate of five per cent. That creates difficulties. Therefore, now we have to take the overall growth of five per cent, meaning that if any particular newspaper or periodical proves before us that there has been an increase of five per cent, they will be entitled to it. Otherwise, automatic growth rate calculation creates difficulties.

SHRI BIR BHADRA PRATAP SINGH; Mr. Chairman, Sir, one aspect of the matter was pointed out in the second supple-

mentary, namely, that certain small local daily newspapers do not utilise their quota whereas a large number of local weeklies, who no doubt sometimes indulge in yellow journalism, but also provide very good news, suffer because of the amendment in the Code of Civil Procedure. Now, they cannot get advertisements. Therefore, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he is taking into account the interest of these small local weeklies who come out in such large number and whether he will consider providing them proper aid also.

SHRI AJIT PANJA; Yes, Sir, it has been provided in No. 2 of our policy—To give encouragement to small newspapers using up to 300 metric tonnes, we have decided that they would be given imported newsprint this has been provided for. It includes weeklies, periodicals and other if they use news, print for their purpose.

SHRIMATI KANAK MUKHERJEE; Sir, we always see that indigenous newsprint is much worse in quality and much more costly than the imported newsprint. Hence, there is a bit of imbalance. What are you going to do about it in order to improve the quality and to lessen the price of indigenous newsprint? Secondly, we find that the newsprint quota for the small newspapers and specially for the magazines and weeklies with which I am connected; is a very much complicated process and we have to depend on the black market, so, I propose that the Government should supply this newsprint in sheet to the magazines and weeklies from the Fair Price Shops or make some other arrangement so that we can just buy it at the Fair Price Shop or from the Government directly. Can the Government do something for these small newspapers and especially for weeklies and monthly magazines?

SHRI AJIT PANJA; So far as the first portion is concerned, it is for the Industry Department to answer. There are complaints that the indigenous newsprint is not of very good quality and the cost is also high. It is more than the imported news, print. Sir, the point is that we have taken it up with the Industry Department. Our endeavour is to persuade them so that the quality is improved.

and consequently possibly cost is reduced. So far as the second point is concerned, we have received letters now after the declaration of the new policy from small-and medium newspapers welcoming this policy. And I don't think that the problem which the hon. Member mentioned will now arise.

SHRIM. S. GURUPADASWAMY: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I draw your attention and the attention of the House to a previous practice. Sir in the past all the debates in Parliament used to be covered in the press adequately, major important debates were published. Today they have been blacked out. One of the reasons....

MR. CHAIRMAN: That does not arise.

SHRI M. S. GURUPADASWAMY: One of the reasons is.....

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE: Shortage of newsprint.

SHRI M. S. GURUPADASWAMY: One of the reasons is that there has been too much restriction on the pages to be published by newspapers, particularly major newspapers. Sir, the Government of India has been issuing newsprint adequate for 16 pages per day. This too is inadequate. In the past major national newspapers used to print 24 pages every day. Therefore, May I ask the Minister whether he is going to revise his policy so that the freedom of the press is fully given scope for operation in this country and there should not be any restrictions on this account.

SHRI AJIT PANJA: Sir, there is full freedom of the press. It has been there before and it is still going on now. If I quote some figures, that will make it clear. From 1982-83 to 1985-86, the increase in the number of small newspapers was 660.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You are missing the point. He wants more allocation of newsprint to the newspapers.

SHRI AJIT PANJA: Sir. I am saying that the growth shows, that enough allocations of newsprint have been given. The growth....

SHRI M. S. GURUPADASWAMY: Pages.

SHRI AJIT PANJA: If the growth is there, then the demand for pages is made by newspapers. The big newspapers in number have increased. It is coming out in colour printing. Sir, it has not been told that because of shortage of newsprint they are not publishing Parliamentary debates. Up till now it has not been brought to my notice.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Maybe for other reasons. Mr. Kapil Verma.

SHRI KAPIL VERMA: Sir, as everyone knows press is the bedrock of democracy and all possible facilities should be given for its development and growth. The newspapers are complaining of lack of newsprint, particularly Imported newsprint. We know that TV picture tubes are freely brought into the country without any restrictions. So, there is need for import of newsprint and the foreign exchange should be increased. Will the Government consider this point of increasing foreign exchange for the import of newsprint? Secondly, there was a talk of a cost study of the indigenous newsprint because the cost is very high. Has it been conducted? If so what was the result?

SHRI AJIT PANJA: Sir, so far as the import is concerned a Committee went through all the details. And they found that the rate which has been fixed in the New Policy would be the correct procedure to follow. Therefore, I don't think any more import is necessary at the present juncture.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Question No. 443.

Complaints of obnoxious calls at Delhi

*443. SHRI RAMSINGHBHAI PATA. LIABHAI RATHVAKOLI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have received complaints regarding obnoxious calls being received by V. I. Ps. at Delhi;

(b) what is the number of such complaints received between 1st January, 198?