

REFERENCE TO THE LICENSING POLICY FOR LIQUOR SHOPS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

SHRIMATI ELA RAMESH BHATT (Nominated): Mr. Chairman, Sir, on 19th November, in Simla, nearly 200 women representatives of five bloks from Solan and Sirmor district of Himachal Pradesh took a four day padyatra and presented a memorandum to the hon. Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh demanding a definite change in the excise policy regarding wholesale State-sponsored licensing of liquor vends. They were voicing the demand of about 6 to 7000 village women, and also men, if I may say so. The 200 representatives were given assurance by the Chief Minister to look into the demands sympathetically. The Excise Commissioner has also agreed to review location of the 11 most objectionable liquor vends as shown by the women in their 11 villages.

Before starting for the padyatra, these women sent me a telegram to assist them in this matter. I collected the first hand information. The problem is like this.

The Excise Manual Punjab, as applicable to Himachal Pradesh does not provide any legal provision for getting the liquor shop or vend closed. The law concerning opening of the liquor vends does not provide any specific responsibility on the District Excise Officer to obtain the consent of the local people. The laws are heavily in favour of opening the shops. They are anti-people. The local people's opinion, not to have a liquor vend, does not carry any weight in the present licensing policy. As the licences are granted afresh every year, the assessment of the local, public opinion is not done any time.

The women's demands are very simple and democratic. They are demanding:

(1) Liquor shops should not be opened in their villages, unless a proper assessment of public opinion is made;

(2) The Government should issue licence only if they receive a resolution of the village with at least two-thirds

majority of the village people demanding a liquor shop;

(3) This rule should be followed every year, that is, licensing and assessment of local public opinion should be done every year.

These are very honest, straightforward demands that have been put up by these women since the last three years. Actually, these demands are the direct result of the village level camps attended by them. The camps were meant for creating Public Opinion Against Alcoholism, a scheme directly funded by the Ministry of Social Welfare. So the Government of India is aware of the bad effects of alcoholism, while the State Government is sponsoring alcoholism.

The situation in Himachal Pradesh is that during the last ten years, there has been a steady rise in the number of State-licensed liquor vends. In 1985-86, the State Government has earned Rs. 68 crores from the sale of licences. Licences may sell from Rs. 1 crore to Rs. 1 lakh. A village vend sells at Rs. 1 lakh. To recover Rs. 1 lakh, the vendor has to sell liquor worth Rs. 4 lakhs. This income is made at whose cost? The development machinery of the Government is not capable of providing villages with good roads, or electrification or drinking water; but it can ensure a liquor *theka* to the village people.

This issue is very important because all women, poor and rich, are directly affected by the Government policy of issuing liquor licences. The men drink and the women and the children suffer. I do not have to say here about the evils of liquor. I would only say that the income earned by the Government out of liquor is a sinful income extracted from the life and blood of the women and children, and income earned at the cost of Indian women's safety and chastity.

Therefore, I earnestly request the Government to accept the demands of the women of Himachal Pradesh for the coming year starting from 1st April 1987. Let not these women be let down. The promises given by the hon. Chief Minister

and the Excise Commissioner must be put into concrete measures before 31st March, 1987.

REFERENCE TO THE MYSTERIOUS BALLOON CRASH IN BHOPAL

SHRI VISHWA BANDHU GUPTA (Delhi): Mr. Chairman, I would like to bring to your notice an important matter. Balloons are generally a very safe mode of transport, but you may have come across press reports of a balloon-crash in Bhopal. It crashed in a very mysterious way. When a balloon is flown or launched by unauthorised persons filled with Hydrogen gas, it becomes a dangerous machine. In this case, it appears, the mystery is deeper because a key witness of the gas 'victims' case was asked to go on the rope of the balloon to take the flight. Now, this is never done. People travel in baskets under the balloon. In this case, this was done, perhaps, with the idea that he would be injured. I understand, the person, one Mr. Sunil Kumar, is in the hospital.

Sir, there are two or three matters in this regard which are mysterious. One is, whether this flight was authorised by the Civil Aviation Department. Secondly, whether the gas used and the balloon material used were of a safe kind, and it is not clear whether this was a manned balloon or an unmanned balloon. It is also not clear what is the purpose of the flight because it is said that his was a research expedition. Now, I do not see how seismic studies could be made while you are flying a balloon. In India, a lot of balloons are launched by the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. These Hydrogen balloons give a lot of data for research and so on. But here it is a kind of unauthorised activity and ballooning in which even a foreigner who was suspected of being a spy or who was arrested for being a spy was also involved. I would request the Government to find out the actual details in this case and also find out whether this kind of activity can be prevented and only safe ballooning is allowed in this country. Thank you.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

I. Incidents in Delhi on 5th December, 1986

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES AND PENSIONS AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): Mr. Chairman, Sir, Guru Teg Bahadur martyrdom day is traditionally observed by taking out a procession from Gurdwara Sis Ganj to Gurdwara Rakabgauj. Since tension prevailed in the Chandni Chowk after the incidents of 2nd December, 1986, the organisers of the procession in their discussions with the Delhi Administration on the night of 4th December, 1986 agreed not to take out any procession from Gurdwara Sis Ganj. Consequently curfew was also imposed in the Chandni Chowk area from 7.00 A.M. on 5th December, 1986. However, later in the morning of 5th December the organisers insisted on taking out the procession and the Delhi Administration keeping in view the religious sentiments agreed to allow a symbolic procession for which an alternate route was worked out by the Delhi Police in consultation with the organisers.

When the procession started forming at about noon, a large number of people started collecting from all sides of Chandni Chowk and indulged in heavy brickbattling and stone throwing. The Police, however, managed to disperse the violent mob. In the process of dispersing the crowd and providing clear passage to the processionists police had to first resort to lathi-charge at three places and later thirteen rounds were fired as warning shots.

At about 2.25 P.M. when the procession was fully formed and was about to move towards Red Fort, a crowd again started forming. The Police arrangements enabled the procession to move without hindrance.

Meanwhile, a few hundred persons collected inside the Gurdwara Bangla Sahib for taking out the martyrdom procession. The Police persuaded them to take out the procession from Bangla Sahib to Gurdwara Rakab Ganj, which is a short distance, without waiting for the main