

RAJYA SABHA

Friday, the 26th March, 1976/the 6th
Chaitra, 1898 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock,
Mr. Chairman in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Calcutta port with modern equipments

*391. SHRI KRISHNA BAHADUR
CHETTRI:

DR. RAJAT KUMAR CHAKRA-
BARTI :

SHRI NABIN CHANDRA BURA-
GOHAIN :

SHRI NRIPATI RANJAN CHOU-
DHURY :

Will the Minister of SHIPPING AND
TRANSPORT be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Calcutta Port Trust has equipped the port with modern weighing/measuring equipments for implementing rules laid down in section 22 of Trustees Scale of Rates and whether the Port authorities have recovered proper charges of the weightment/measurements from the parties concerned ;

(b) whether Government are aware that Calcutta Port Trust is harassing workers for giving information regarding under-invoicing and over-invoicing which is being done by some monopoly houses since 1972; and

(c) if so, what steps have been taken or proposed to be taken in the matter ?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING AND
TRANSPORT (DR. G. S. DHILLON): (a)
to (c) A statement is laid on the Table of
the Sabha.

†The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Dr. Rajat Kumar Chakrabarti.

2 RSS/ 6—1

Statement

(a) Yes, Sir.

It may, however, be clarified that the Calcutta Port Trust (CPT) normally carries out weightment/measurement themselves only in cases of doubt for which purpose they have weighing scales located at different sheds. However, CPT have introduced a procedure w.e.f. June/July, 1975, on an experimental basis, for 100 per cent test check of weightment/measurement of shed and overside cargo passing through the Port of Calcutta, using the services of sworn-weighers. It has therefore not been considered necessary by the Port Trust to carry out 100 per cent weightment/measurement of break bulk cargo by themselves which would involve considerable investment in both additional staff and costly equipment.

Appropriate charges are levied in either case in accordance with Section 22(2) of the Trustees Scale of Rates.

A review of the working of the procedure up to October, 1975 has revealed that there has not been any large-scale mis-declaration of weight/measurement during this period. However, it has been decided by the Port Trust to continue this checking for some more time till a further review is made.

(b) No such case has been reported.

(c) Does not arise.

DR. RAJAT KUMAR CHAKRA-
BARTI : Sir, from the statement I find that ultimately since July, 1975 the CPT has given the job of weightment to sworn-weighers. Is it a fact that the sworn-weighers are paid at the rate of Re. 1 by the CPT for each copy of the certificate of weightment/measurement on the steamer agents, account? Also, they are paid at a higher rate of Rs. 1.50 and Rs. 2 per M. T. for weightment/measurement on behalf of the Trustees in the case of 5 per cent and 10 per cent of the consignments respectively. Thus they are paid for the entire weight/measurement of the consignment, though they do only part

weightment or measurement. They are charging for the whole consignment though they are working only partly.

DR. G. S. DHILLON : The observations of the hon. Member are correct. They just do about ten per cent weightment or measurement and they charge for the whole. This was taken up with them and they say that they are entitled to it because after the sample checking they take the responsibility for the whole and that is the idea behind charging for the whole. I quite appreciate the concern that the hon. Member has shown, but it is only their responsibility for the whole which makes them charge for the whole.

DR. RAJAT KUMAR CHAKRA-BARTI : Is it also a fact that, in the case of overside shipment, there is huge loss of port revenue in the form of wharf toll charges, as per section 36A of the Trustees schedule of charges and the legitimate dues of the trustees are not being recovered on the quantum of under-declared weight/measurement of overside export consignment? If so, may I know whether the Ministry has taken this into consideration or not? Mostly the loadings from the other side of the river are of under-declared weight/measurement. May I know whether the Ministry has taken that into account or not?

DR. G. S. DHILLON : Yes, Sir. We had certain complaints about this and we have also some information that this practice is going on. Besides the declaration by the exporter, we have the dock challan also. Besides test-checking, I may add for the information of the hon. Member that we tried one hundred per cent weightment in all cases and we found that the total amount of under-charges realised amounted to Rs. 2.71 lakhs, including penalty. On a query, the CPT has since informed us that the total income from 18,931 challans amounts to Rs. 62 lakhs. The under-charges realised, therefore, work out to approximately 4.2 per cent. This includes approximately Rs. 1.23 lakhs as penalty charges. So, the hon. Member's observations are correct.

SHRI NABIN CHANDRA BURAGOHAIN : Sir, the international police organisation, the Interpol, has discovered that the American grain exporters had defrauded the Asian and African grain importing nations to the tune of 120 million dollars—in terms of the Indian currency, it will be about Rs. 108 crores annually—over a period of five years. The *modus operandi* was shortage of weight, fraudulent change of the account sheets and giving of lower weight than that agreed upon. Sir, India is only a meagre foodgrain importing country. I would like to know whether any occasion for suspicion about the import of American foodgrains had arisen and whether the authorities had tried to verify the weight by means of the equipment set up in our ports. If so, what was the quantum of short weight? If the answer is 'No', then is it a fact that this suspicion about short weight could not be verified for want of proper sophisticated scientific equipment in our ports?

DR. G. S. DHILLON : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I welcome the information given to me by the hon. Member and I will try to see what is the effect of such activities by these people. I could not imagine that this would arise out of this question. And if the hon. Member had told me about this in advance, I would have come prepared for it. But I must say that we do have a system of checking both for exports and imports and so far no complaint has come to us in this respect. About what he has told me, I will enquire from the Department. If you like, I can pass on the information to him privately also.

SHRI NABIN CHANDRA BURAGOHAIN : This is published in all the important papers of India as well as outside.

SHRI NRIPATI RANJAN CHOUDHURY : For the past several years many Commissions and Committees have gone into the problems of Calcutta Port and they have suggested its modernisation. In reply to part (a) of the question, the hon. Minister has said that so far as weightment and measurement are concerned, Calcutta Port

has been equipped with modern equipment. But we find that it has been left with the private parties for weighing and measuring the cargo and the result, as the statement reveals, is that it has not been able to stop under-invoicing and over-invoicing. In view of this, I would like to know from the hon. Minister what specific steps they are going to take to prevent such under-invoicing and over-invoicing at Calcutta Port. Then, I would also like to know whether his Ministry has received any information about under-invoicing and over-invoicing and, if so, what steps they are going to take to protect the workers who are passing on this information to them. Our information is that the Calcutta Port Trust authorities are harassing the workers there by resorting to disciplinary action on this or that plea, for passing on the information to the Government.

DR. G. S. DHILLON : Sir, as far as the first part is concerned, I did not say that we have modern equipment. We say that we just rely on the weighment of the sworn-weighers as they are called. And the Hindi word for them is "Dharmakanta" which I heard just after coming to this Ministry. So the word "Dharmakanta" is also there. And the second part is about under-invoicing and over-invoicing. Of course, we do try to investigate such cases. We have some checks through the Customs and also by the declarations. In certain cases, we also do test-weighing. But no fool-proof system can be made. We do feel there are certain cases of that type. In such cases, we have fixed a penalty, that is double the normal charge.

In regard to victimisation of certain employees who pass on information, there was one complaint that one of the clerks who passed on information was victimised. I have enquired into it. I found that he was transferred. That was an inter-section transfer and that was on the instructions of the Financial Adviser. But nothing has been found to show that it was *mala fide*. He has been sent to a post of his choice where he does revenue checking as usual.

SHRI SANAT KUMAR RAHA : Sir, the statement reveals that the Government has abandoned the idea of break bulk cargo measurement/weightment. In the interest of the nation, it is essential that measurement and cargo weightment should be done. By what time does the Government visualise to introduce the system of break bulk cargo weightment and measurement? Secondly, from June to October, 100 per cent measurement and weightment was done. I want to know the percentage of the cases of misdeclaration and whether any big houses were involved in the cases of misdeclaration.

DR. G. S. DHILLON : Sir, about this checking, shed and overside cargo checking as we call it, it is by weightment or by measurement. I have just stated in reply to the very first question that in the 100 per cent checking, we found so many cases and there was so much loss. I am sorry I cannot give you the exact number. But if you are particularly interested, I can pass on that information to you later.

SHRI SANAT KUMAR RAHA : Are you going to introduce the break bulk cargo measurement/weightment ?

DR. G. S. DHILLON : Break bulk cargo you mean? Break bulk cargo, as is known, is not bulk cargo and weightment is done by weight and measurement by volume, by the space occupied by it, and it applies to each as may be required.

SHRI SARDAR AMJAD ALI : My question relates to part (b) of the question. With regard to part (b) of the question, the statement says that no such case has been reported. Sir, I would not say that this is untrue, but I would not definitely say that it is correct also. The hon. Minister has agreed that there was some complaint that some employee was being harassed and he has looked into the matter and it was an inter-departmental transfer. Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether his Ministry is aware of the fact that certain employees and certain very important trade union leaders who are committed not to trade unionism but to the cause

of the country, to the cause of the society, passed on very important information not only to the Ministry but also to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, on the basis of which there was an investigation and the PAC has made very important reports against certain officers of the Calcutta Port Trust to the Ministry.

I would like to know whether this information is available with them and whether his Ministry has taken any care to go into those details. I would also like to know whether it is a fact that these employees and leaders who have passed on the information to the Ministry are not only inter-departmentally transferred, but are being posted in a place where they have no work to do and where they cannot function in the way they like.

DR. G. S. DHILLON : I have seen the observations of the PAC. Also there was a complaint from Shri Hazra, General Secretary of the West Bengal Dock and Port Mazdoor Union. His complaint was about under-invoicing and suppression of real tonnage and evasion of Calcutta Port Commissioners, charges by certain parties. We obtained a report from the Chairman of the Calcutta Port Trust.

SHRI SARDAR AMJAD ALI : And the complaint is against the Chairman.

DR. RAJAT KUMAR CHAKRA-BARTI : That is the funniest part of it.

DR. G. S. DHILLON : I have to make some observations. The Chairman has been self-critical also. But I must say that if he had been just partial, he would not have gone to that extent. Similarly, about other cases or any other complaint which is not mentioned here in my statement, I would welcome them.

DR. RAJAT KUMAR CHAKRA-BARTI : He has been transferred three times.

SHRI SARDAR AMJAD ALI : This is a very serious matter. The hon. Minister thinks that the Calcutta Port Commissioner is not indulging in this activity. I would pass this information to the hon. Minister for his kind perusal. I myself had a talk with the Chairman over the telephone. The House will be surprised to know—I do not know whether the Minister will be surprised—that this august Chairman did not want to talk to me about the problems there. I do not know what authority this Chairman is getting. Members of Parliament get information about serious corruption cases and the Chairman does not like to have any discussion. What sort of Chairman is this?

DR. G. S. DHILLON : Now that you have told me about it, I will take a very serious view of that. If the position is as you have explained, I will have to take a very serious view of that. You will not find me lacking in that.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : The Minister has taken a very serious view. I do hope that in view of what Sardar Amjad Ali has stated, the Minister will tell the House what he has done about it whether the Chairman has expressed his regret or not. If the Chairman behaves in this manner with regard to Members of Parliament and that too belonging to the ruling party, you can imagine how he is going to behave with others. I do not know the case. But I was really shocked.

DR. G. S. DHILLON : Thank you very much for your suggestion. Not only towards the members of the ruling party, but to all the parties, he should behave well.