

RAJYA SABHA

*Thursday, the 2nd May, 1974/the 12th
Vaisakha, 1896 (Saka)*

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

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Conversion of Cellular Jail in the Andamans as National Memorial

*211 **SHRI ROSHAN LAI:**

SHRI DHARAMCHAND JAIN:

SHRI SARDAR AMJAD ALI:†

SHRI N. R. CHOUDHURY:

SHRI H. D. MALAVIYA:

Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have decided to convert the Cellular Jail in the Andamans as a National Memorial;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof; and

(c) what steps Government have taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA): (a) to (c) It has been decided to preserve the Central Tower and the existing three wings of the Cellular Jail at Port Blair as a National Monument. Sanction has been issued to carry out essential repairs to the buildings at a cost of Rs. 4 lakhs. The Andaman & Nicobar Administration have also drawn up a phased programme for construction of buildings which might be required for shifting of the offices, stores and quarters now located inside the Cellular Jail building.

SHRI SARDAR AMJAD ALI: The decision with regard to this was taken as early as in 1969 and thereafter an expert committee was also set up. The Public Accounts Committee of Parliament also re-

commended to preserve the Cellular Jail as a national memorial. Now from the statement of the hon. Minister, it appears that the sanction has been given. I am interested to know as to what progress has been made with regard to the actual making of this Cellular Jail as a national memorial.

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: This scheme to preserve the Cellular Jail as a monument of national importance has been there with us for some time. But now a detailed programme has been drawn up and the Estimates Committee which had taken interest in this matter were also informed of the various items of work that would be taken in hand and when they would be finished. At present, there are seven or eight main items which have been taken in hand costing about Rs. 4 lakhs. Many of the items have been finished. There is a Nurses Hostel on the ground floor. A separate building for the Nurses Hostel is almost ready and it would be occupied in a month or two. On the first floor there are offices of the Director of Medical and Health Services. A new building for them is also under construction and before the end of the month they would also be moving out to that place. It is not correct to say that there has been delay. Funds have been sanctioned. There were difficulties on account of cement and steel. They have also been sorted out and the programme is going according to the schedule.

SHRI SARDAR AMJAD ALI: I am told the pictures of the ex-Andaman political prisoners had been hung over the cells during the British days. The ex-Andaman Political Prisoners' Fraternity Circle has been working in this regard because many of the unknown prisoners' names could not be traced from the records and for that reason their names could not be brought out. Now some of their names have been brought out. May I know whether you are taking any assistance from this Fraternity Circle to find out the names of those unknown soldiers who, for participating in the independence struggle suffered imprisonment in this jail at the hands of the British?

†The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Sardar Amjad Ali.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Does it arise?

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: We are fully in touch with the Fraternity Circle and we have been taking their advice and suggestions in this regard. So far as freedom fighters who were deported to Andamans and incarcerated in the Cellular Jail are concerned, it has been decided to incorporate their names in marble plaques and fix them on the Central Tower of the Jail. There are 528 names of such freedom fighters. But there were some doubts about certain names. We wrote to the State Governments as well as the Fraternity Circle and now a complete list of names of 528 prisoners has been drawn up. And, Sir, their names are in the process of being inscribed on the marble plaques in the Central Tower.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Mr. N. R. Choudhury.

SHRI N. R. CHOUDHURY: No questions, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Mr. Malaviya.

SHRI HARSH DEO MALAVIYA: Sir, I want to know whether the Government is aware that because the Andaman Islands were associated with the INA and Netaji there is a demand in the country that the Andaman Islands should be named as Subhas Dweep. Is the Government aware that there is such a feeling in the country and will the Government consider the proposal to rename the Andaman Islands as Netaji Subhas Dweep?

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: Well, Sir, there has been a demand of this nature. But I am not in a position to say just now what the reaction of the Government is.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Mr. Raha.

SHRI SANAT KUMAR RAHA: Sir I want to know whether the ex-Andaman prisoners and their families went to the Cellular Jail in recent times and whether they made any suggestions in connection with the plans of converting this Jail into a national memorial and whether the Government have received any memorandum from the Association of the ex-Andaman Prisoners and, if so, whether

the Government would like to give the details thereof.

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: Well, Sir, as I said, we are acting fully in co-operation with the Fraternity Circle. A group of the Fraternity Circle including their families went to the Andamans near about the Republic Day this year and some rallies were arranged and all sorts of assistance were given to them and they were given assistance and hospitality so that their trip could be made useful. They were taken round the Cellular Jail and the details that the Government had formulated regarding this Jail were also discussed with them and their suggestions were also taken note of.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Mr. Niren Ghosh.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH: Sir, some time ago I had an opportunity to visit the Andamans and I was shocked to see the state of affairs of the Cellular Jail. Countless heroes of our freedom struggle were associated with it. But I was shocked to see that the entire structure had almost been demolished. Some portions were in a dilapidated condition. This is what I saw there. Now, Sir, I would like to know whether the entire place will be restructured and the new structures that have been put up will be moved away and whether a replica of the original Andamans Cellular Jail with all the names of the freedom fighters would be kept. I would also like to know whether the place would also be made a pilgrimage centre for the people of India to visit. I would like to have a specific answer to these questions, Sir.

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: Well, even now it is a place of pilgrimage to those people who are interested in paying homage to our freedom fighters.

As regards the question about the various wings, Sir, in the original building there were seven wings which were in a star-like fashion. When the Japanese bombarded the place in 1942, some wings were damaged and the others were rendered unsafe. So, when the Andamans were reoccupied in 1945, some of the unsafe wings were demolished and all that

remain now are the three wings of the original seven wings. This Committee was there and experts were associated and the Archaeological Survey of India was associated with it and they proposed the first phase which I have mentioned. They also had this idea before them as to whether the whole thing with the seven blocks should be restructured and put in the shape in which it was before. Then it was thought that whatever remained of the wings could be kept intact and could properly be reshaped and what was thought more important was that the structure as it was should be kept intact along with the gate also and the plaques should be placed in the Central Tower. So, the idea of constructing all the seven wings was also before the Committee. But they thought that the proper way would be to do it as we are doing now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, Mr. Bhupesh Gupta.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Sir, I want to know why an advisory committee is not being constituted consisting of the representatives of the ex-Andamans political prisoners in the matter of implementing this plan. So long as this plan is not completed by implementation, the committee should remain. Has the Government considered a proposal of this kind? I would like to know, why such steps are not being taken with a view to more directly associating the representatives of political sufferers?

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: Though there is no formal committee of the nature suggested by the hon. Member, but, as I said, there is a fraternity circle which represents quite a large section of political prisoners have been very intimately associated, as also Members of Parliament. On this occasion, I will like to refer to the interest that the late Shri Kamal Nath Tiwari took in the matter. Every one of us is interested in it. But whether a formal advisory committee of the nature as suggested by the hon. Member should be there, we will consider it.

SHRIMATI LEELA DAMODARA MENON: It is said that thousands of persons had been deported to Andaman

after the Mopla rebellion. Has any record of these names been kept?

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: I need notice on that. . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Next question. . .

SHRI SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY: May I rise on a point of order? This is a very important question. The Prime Minister is not here. I may also state here, Sir. . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: This is no point of order.

SHRI SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY: I am making this request under Rule 52. The day before yesterday the Minister said that he cannot answer a particular question because the files had not been sent to him, or are only sent to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is not present. I would request that this question be postponed to some other date when the Prime Minister is present in this House. This is a very important question. . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: I over-rule this point of order. Next question.

Allegation against Railway Minister

*212. SHRI SITA RAM SINGH:
SHRI JAGDISH PRASAD MATHUR:†

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a memorandum signed by some Members of the Bihar Vidhan Sabha containing certain allegations against the Railway Minister was submitted to the Prime Minister on 20th November, 1973; and

(b) if so, what action has been taken thereon?

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) In accordance with the normal procedure, the memorandum was refer-

†The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Jagdish Prasad Mathur.