

DIFFUSION OF NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP

*94. **SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA :**†

SHRI S.G. SARDESAI :

SHRI SANAT KUMAR RAHA:

Will the Minister of INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that following the meeting of some editors with the Prime Minister the proposed Bill for delinking the newspapers from the Industrial houses and for the diffusion of ownership has been shelved;

(b) whether the Prime Minister had any discussions with the representatives of the Indian Federation of the Working Journalists in this connection ; and

(c) the latest position in relation to the proposed measure to curb Press monopoly?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY) : (a) and (c) No, Sir, A group of Ministers is at present examining certain proposals for the diffusion of ownership and management of major newspapers and news agencies.

(b) Yes, Sir.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : Last year, the same hon. Minister who had just replied to the question, held out an assurance that the measure would be brought forward as, soon as possible—I may not be exactly quoting her words. One year has passed since. May I know the reason for the inordinate delay? I should like to know in this connection whether the Prime Minister invited some editors of the big newspapers to discuss the proposed Press Bill with them and, if so, whether she included Mr. Nanpuri who had once

†The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Bhupesh Gupta.

written a letter to Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru suggesting that the Press Commission recommendation should be implemented, and also I should like to know whether the Prime Minister gave an assurance and followed it up with the Indian Federation of Working Journalists also.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : Sir, I have said that this has been entrusted to a group of Ministers who are looking into it in detail.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : My question was not that. That question I will come to. My first question was whether the Prime Minister invited some editors belonging to the big newspapers.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Let her complete her answer. She has heard your question. If she does not answer, then you may raise an objection.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : His first question was : Why this inordinate delay? To that question my answer is that this is a very serious thing which is concerned with a serious policy. So, naturally, this is being looked into by a group of Ministers who are looking into all aspects of the thing.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : A group of Ministers you require ?

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : It is a group of Ministers but it is a very small group.

MR. CHAIRMAN : A group of Ministers consisting of a small number of Ministers.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : Who are they?

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : Who are the estimable gentlemen who form the group?

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : Because they are examining the thing, it is

not possible for me to say at this stage how long they will take.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : What is that particular group of Ministers?

MR CHAIRMAN That will be your second question

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : May I answer this question? That small group of Ministers consists of Mr. Mohan Kumaramangalam, Mr. Gokhale, Mr. Raj Bahadur, Mr. Dikshit, Mr. Raghunatha Reddy and myself. The second question of the hon. Member was whether the Prime Minister invited a group of editors. The Prime Minister never invited any editor that way, but some editors came and met the Prime Minister. Mr. Nanpuri was not one of those editors who met the Prime Minister.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA . What about that assurance?

MR. CHAIRMAN Your second question.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA . You do not allow even the first question to be fully answered. You will remember, Sir, I wanted to know whether the Prime Minister gave an assurance. That part has not been answered.

MR. CHAIRMAN : What assurance?

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : I do not know what assurance. How do I know?

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI : I have not given any assurance to anybody except to say that the matter would be looked into thoroughly and that all aspects of it would be considered.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA So, it is being looked into thoroughly for one year and eighteen years have passed since the Press Commission Report.

MR CHAIRMAN : Now, please put your question

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA . Yes, Sir. Eighteen years have passed since the Press Commission made its recommendations which are supposed to be implemented. In this House a Resolution was passed in 1954. Some of us were there at that time. Now, I should like to know whether it is not a fact and I have been told by a large number of journalists here that the matter had been initially left to one Mr. Sharda Prasad that he should go into this question and prepare some kind of draft and that Mr. Sharda Prasad had made a commitment to the journalists and others that he was not in favour of such law being passed at all and that there were complications and difficulties. I should like to know why this kind of procedure was adopted when the Government was contemplating that a Ministerial Committee should be set up. In this connection I should also like to know whether the Ministerial Committee, whatever that be, has invited the representatives of the Indian Federation of Working Journalists to discuss this matter and especially journalists like Mr. Chalapati Rau, in order to come to certain definite conclusions as to the nature of the Bill.

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI . Firstly, I should like to protest. We know there is a rule in this House that we do not mention officials who are unable to answer for themselves here. It is entirely untrue that the matter was left to any official. Officials are asked for their advice and if they are good officials they have to give that advice honestly whether it agrees with the Government point of view or not, but then it is for the Government to take a final decision. As I said, we take all aspects into consideration. I am sorry there has been some delay in this matter, but the group of Ministers, who were mentioned by my colleague, have been meeting

They have met four times and are almost on the verge of giving their proposals.

SHRI S. G. SARDESAI : The explanation which has been given with regard to the delay is not at all convincing. It is not convincing for this reason that the Press Commission's recommendations have been there for years and years...

MR. CHAIRMAN : Shri Bhupesh Gupta has already said it.

SHRI S. G. SARDESAI : I am coming to that.

DR. BHAI MAHAVIR : He has to follow his leader.

SHRI S. G. SARDESAI : The Bill itself, may be in a clandestine way, has been out in the Press for almost a year now...

SHRI DAHYABHAI V. PATEL : Like Mr. Bhupesh Gupta he has to preface his questions.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Now, kindly put your question.

SHRI DAHYABHAI V. PATEL : They have the privilege of speaking as long as they like. We cannot do that.

SHRI S. G. SARDESAI : Ask him not to interfere. I will be very short. I want to put one simple question. The working journalists association, the trade unions and the Press employees of all these big monopoly papers have time and again pointed out this fact, namely, the share capital of all these big papers is extremely small compared to the various loans and the working capital which they get from other sources. This simple proposition has been there that if the share capital of these monopoly papers is purchased by the working journalists and the Press employees, the whole problem will be solved. It is a very simple proposition.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Kindly put your question. I cannot allow ten minutes

SHRI S. G. SARDESAI : I have put my question, a very simple question. Can the entire share capital be purchased by the Press employees and the working journalists?

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : As I have already said, the group of Ministers is examining all these aspects. Over and above that we have set up a fact-finding committee which is going into the economics of the newspaper industry. When we get the report of the fact-finding committee and when we get the report of the group of Ministers, naturally this question will be looked into.

SHRI S. G. SARDESAI : Till then no action.

SHRI SANAT KUMAR RAHA : Unusual delay has been made by our Ministers. My question is whether there was any pressure from the paper barons upon her Ministry to exclude their names from the list delinking newspapers from industrial houses.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : There is no pressure and the Government is not amenable to any such pressure.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : We would like to know whether the Federation of the employees, that is, those who produce the paper, the Journalists and others, will be consulted by this group of Ministers, this estimable group...

MR. CHAIRMAN : Only one question.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : I have not finished. I have not put the question. Some portion has been left out.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Please put the question immediately.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : I am putting the question.

What is the guarantee that even if such a measure is enacted it will not be a hoax like that, just like the case of the Hindustan Standard's proprietor who was called to Delhi and snubbed for writing an article? Ranjit Roy's book, "Agony of West Bengal", a publication of the Hindustan Standard, they were forced to withdraw it from the market under Government pressure. By giving licence to the Tatas, the Statesman which used to criticise the Government from Mr. Dahyabhai Patel's angle has even ceased to do that and they are completely toeing the Government line. I want to know whether these practices of the Government would continue at that time also and how they can be prevented by this measure.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : How the last part of his question is relevant to this question, I do not understand. It is not at all relevant.

MR. CHAIRMAN : You answer only the relevant portion.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : Why, Sir? Why this injustice to me? This is Question Hour.

MR. CHAIRMAN : That is not strictly relevant.

SHRI SASANKASEKHAR SANYAL : The relevancy of the question will be decided by the Chair, not by the Minister.

MR. CHAIRMAN : It is so obvious; anyone can decide.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : This group of Ministers did not consult any journalist or, as the hon. Member referred to, the Federation of employees or any body else. They did not consult others. But this group did not consult anybody.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : Nobody?

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : Nobody, no proprietors; no journalists, up till now.

(Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN : Yes, please.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : The next question he asked was whether it will be a hoax. I can say why there has been this delay; it is because they are looking into all the aspects so that whatever decision they arrive at...(Interruptions) Please let me finish.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : Government malpractices will recur.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : It is for them to judge. But I can give you this assurance that all the aspects are being looked into and we will see that whatever proposal is made, as far as possible it will be protected from any such difficulties.

SHRI JOACHIM ALVA : Out of the 23,000 tonnes of newsprint allotted, less than five people, the so-called big people—I am leaving out the Statesman—get about 17,000 tonnes.

MR. CHAIRMAN : There is another question about newsprint.

SHRI JOACHIM ALVA : Has the Government given any consideration...

MR. CHAIRMAN : I will call you at the next question.

SHRI JOACHIM ALVA : I want to know whether the Government has been moved by one main consideration that nearly four people are under the courts, namely, the Times of India proprietor is under penal consideration in the sense that he had faced charges...

SOME HON. MEMBERS : How is it relevant?

MR. CHAIRMAN : This does not arise now, this newsprint question.

SHRI JOACHIM ALVA : I want to know whether there is any consideration.

MR. CHAIRMAN : No, no. Dr. Bhai Mahavir.

DR. BHAI MAHAVIR : Has it been brought to the Government's notice that in the draft provisions of the Bill there is a clear probability that effective control of newspapers will pass into the hands of the public trustee who evidently will be a Government nominee and so, we shall have a concentration of press ownership in Government hands? So while it is desirable to delink papers from industrial houses, will the Government assure that the new arrangement will not take the form of government monopoly like the All India Radio?

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : To which draft Bill the hon'ble Member is referring I do not know. Actually at this moment, as I have repeatedly said, different proposals are being examined by these Ministers and as the Prime Minister has already said...

DR. BHAI MAHAVIR : The draft Bill was published. It came in the press. The Minister cannot be unaware of it.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : That is not the Bill which these Ministers are looking into.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : Then what are they looking into?

DR. BHAI MAHAVIR : Has this been dropped from the new Bill?

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : That is not the draft Bill which these Ministers are looking into. They are examining different proposals. After that we will prepare a draft Bill.

DR. BHAI MAHAVIR : Has that feature been changed? It may be a new draft. I am asking about the public trustee and the principle of ownership passing into his hands. Does the new draft not have this feature?

MR. CHAIRMAN : Please sit down.

DR. BHAI MAHAVIR : Have you ruled out this question?

MR. CHAIRMAN : Please sit down first.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : I have already said there is no draft. Proposals are being examined. Since it is under examination how can I say anything?

DR. BHAI MAHAVIR : You can give an assurance.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : How can I?

SHRI B.T. KEMPARAJ : May I know from the Minister how long will finalisation of these proposals take and when will the Bill be placed before the House?

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : This group of Ministers met four times. And, as I have said, this is a serious question which should be looked into very thoroughly. It is very difficult for me to say how much time it will take.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : On a point of order, Sir. It is very difficult always for the hon'ble Minister to tell how much time the Government will take.

MR. CHAIRMAN : I would not allow you any point of order.

SHRI N. K. SHEJWALKAR : I am rising on a point of order. The point is that in paragraph 1 of the question itself,

reference has been made to "Prastavit Vidheyak" and the hon'ble Minister says that they are not considering any Vidheyak. I do not know what she wants to say. Though there is no draft, is that not being considered?

DR. BHAI MAHAVIR : Obviously you will please see the question yourself.

MR. CHAIRMAN : I have seen the question.

DR. BHAI MAHAVIR : How does the Minister say that? There are many proposals. There is a proposed Bill. May I know whether that proposed Bill covers what I said or not?

MR. CHAIRMAN : Please sit down.

DR. BHAI MAHAVIR : I will obey you.

SHRI LOKANATH MISRA : May I know whether there is any proposal to exclude some of the newspapers owned by families in West Bengal and supporting the Congress (R) from the implementation of the delinking business?

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : There is no such proposal. Different proposals are being looked into. But there is no such proposal.

SHRI MAHAVIR TYAGI : Whatever be the decision of the group of Ministers in this regard, is the Government in a position to give an assurance to this House that the freedom of press and the liberty guaranteed by the Constitution would not be curbed in the least?

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : Yes, that is the whole point for which it is being looked into. Again and again I am saying that it is a serious question and we are actually very careful in this matter.

SHRI THILLAI VILLALAN : Just now the hon'ble Minister for Information

and Broadcasting admitted that there was inordinate delay and our Madam Prime Minister also expressed regrets for the delay. Let us leave the bygone . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN : Put your question.

SHRI THILLAI VILLALAN : I will come to it.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Let bygone be bygone.

SHRI THILLAI VILLALAN : Let the bygones be bygones for good. I would like to know from the Minister of Information and Broadcasting or from the Prime Minister whether at least now they can fix up any time for considering this question thoroughly in all aspects . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN : That is enough.

SHRI THILLAI VILLALAN : You are dealing with every Member in a different way.

MR. CHAIRMAN : No, no.

SHRI THILLAI VILLALAN : You are allowing certain Members to go on talking and talking without putting any question.

MR. CHAIRMAN : No, no. "Let bygones be bygones" was not a question. I have to intervene if you do not put a question.

SHRI THILLAI VILLALAN : For this delay they cannot answer and they have already expressed regrets. But now they can fix up a time-limit, three months, six months or one year; they can say that. I want that answer from the Prime Minister.

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI : I am always in favour of letting bygones be bygones, but some bygones cannot be ignored, for instance there are various types of malpractices. That was why the whole question was taken up. As my

colleague has said, the question is an extremely complex one and when representations are made, we have to look into all aspects of the question. I have informed the House that the group of Ministers have held four meetings. I feel that they are coming to the end of their labours and that we shall soon have their recommendations which will then have to be considered by the entire Cabinet.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Mr. Krishan Kant, last question.

SHRI KRISHAN KANT : The Government may like to take some time on this whole business, but in the meantime let the Government take one step to remove the unhealthy competition by the monopoly press, i.e. bringing the price-page schedule.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : Sir, already there is this 10-page ceiling on the newspapers and as long as this 10-page ceiling is there, the price-page schedule question does not arise.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Next question.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : Sir, I request you to set apart a little time for discussing this whole question because it is in our interest that we should express our opinion also on this.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : Half-an-hour discussion.

SHRI LOKANATH MISRA : I support Mr. Bhupesh Gupta's contention.

MR. CHAIRMAN : If you give me notice, I will consider it. I cannot give any promise.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : You need not give an assurance, but there is the provision.

MR. CHAIRMAN : If you give me notice, that provision will apply.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : Members of the House should be in a position to express their opinion also. Otherwise it becomes a farce.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Please sit down. I have called the next question.

SHRI KRISHAN KANT : Sir, the Minister has evaded my question.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Next question.

दिल्ली से प्रकाशित होने वाले दैनिक
साप्ताहिक और मासिक पत्र

*95. श्री ना० कृ० शेजवलकर :†

श्री प्रेम मनोहर :

क्या सूचना और प्रसारण मन्त्री यह
बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि :

(क) दिल्ली से प्रकाशित होने वाले
दैनिक, साप्ताहिक, पक्षिक और मासिक
समाचार-पत्रों तथा पत्रिकाओं के नाम
क्या हैं;

(ख) उनमें से प्रत्येक द्वारा पिछले तीन
वर्षों के दौरान कितने अखबारी कागज
की मांग की गई और उनकी मांग के आधार
पर उक्त अवधि में उनको कितना अखबारी
कागज सप्लाई किया गया ; और

(ग) अखबारी कागज के लिये की गई
मांग की जाँच करने और उसके आवन्तन
के लिए क्या प्रक्रिया अपनाई जाती है ?

†DAILIES, WEEKLIES, MONTHLIES
PUBLISHED FROM DELHI

*95 SHRI N. K. SHEJWALKAR:
SHRI PREM MANOHAR :

†The question was actually asked on
the floor of the house by Shri N. K.
Shejwalkar.

†[] English Translation.