

[2 December, 2004]

RAJYA SABHA

10,000 MW and by the year 2020, we plan to reach a capacity of 20,000 MW. Nuclear power generation is a very expensive proposition and we have a plan for nine nuclear reactors which are currently under construction, which will add 4,460 MW of electricity. Some of them are of an advanced nature which we are doing for the first time. I assure the Members that we will definitely reach the target of 20,000 MW by the year 2020 MW and we are on target.

Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour in Tamil Nadu

*25. SHRI BALAVANT ALIAS BAL APTE: Will the Minister of LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the large scale practice of bonded labour in the Redhill area of Thiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu;

(b) whether his Ministry has received the National Commission for Women's report on public hearings on the subejct; and

(c) the follow up action taken to secure the release and the rehabilitation of the victims and the punishment of those guilty of these criminal activities?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI K. CHANDRASEKHAR RAO): (a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) A representation from Sarpam Irular Thozhilalar Sangam, Thiruvallur alleging such complaints was received in August, 2004 for the first time and subsequently in September, 2004.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) As per the information received from the Government of Tamil Nadu, 372 labourers were released from bondage from the district of Thiruvallur including Tiruttani and Ponneri of Redhill area from 1997 till 30th September, 2004 including 113 labourers in the current year. In this district, out of 55 cases in which prosecution was launched, conviction was secured in 20 cases. The State Government has also been supervising the functioning of all the ricemills in Redhill area by enforcing Factories Act etc. to ensure

payment of minimum wages to the workers as well as ensuring that the factory owners do not use debt as bondage.

SHRI BALAVANT *alias* BAL APTE: Sir, the general callous attitude is reflected in the answer also. When it is reported that there were about 10,000 labourers, the answer suggests that for the first time, in August, 2004, they came to know that bonded labour existed. The answer further suggests that action is taken in respect of 372 labourers. If we compare with 10,000 this is a very negligible relief that is sought to be given. I believe, that is because the machinery contemplated by the 1976 Act is not in place even today. The revenue officer at the level of District Collector is considered to be an authority, who is supposed to be part of a vigilance committee to be established under section 13 of the Act. The vigilance committees are not established yet and the revenue officer is, therefore, not responsible to anybody and is callous. The revenue officer, when approached, says, "They are not bonded labourers and I will only mediate between the employer and the employee." Therefore, my question is: Are there any steps contemplated for the establishment of the vigilance committees? Is there any machinery to monitor the establishment of these and to monitor release of the bonded labourers?

SHRI K. CHANDRA SHEKHAR RAO: Sir, the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, 1976, deals with the whole issue. The Act is being implemented by the State Governments. As and when any complaint is received from any State, we take that as a top priority programme and the manner in which relief is expected to be provided, that is immediately sent. As such, we have no complaint pending with the Department. This is mainly dealt with by the State Governments.

As the hon. Member is suggesting, concrete steps are needed to be taken in this regard.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Do you think there is no role for the Central Government in this matter?

SHRI BALAVANT *alias* BALAPTE: Sir, about the vigilance committee, probably, he doesn't know. If he can get information and if he can insist that a vigilance committee must be established in every district, it would be nice; because, the Act is of 1976 and we are in 2004. The Act is not implemented and is only on paper. Therefore, the Minister has to say

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something about the statutory vigilance committees, which he has not said.

My second supplementary is about rehabilitation. Rehabilitation consists of giving a certificate, paying Rs. 1,000 and then providing the entire gamut of housing and employment. It is also provided that Rs.20,000 will be paid to the released labourers out of which Rs. 10,000 will be the contribution of the Centre. So far what is the contribution provided by the Centre for such releases? How these 373 labourers who have been mentioned in the reply are being taken care of under this programme?

SHRI K. CHANDRA SHEKHAR RAO: Sir, so far by now, from 1976 onwards, 17 States have reported such cases. The highest number--I agree with the hon. Member -- is in Tamil Nadu. So far by now 65,573 such bonded labourers have been rehabilitated. The Central Government has sanctioned and released to the Government of Tamil Nadu Rs. 16,61,94,000 so far. For these 373 cases money has already been released. All over the country, 2,65,905 bonded labourers have been rehabilitated. For this purpose, Rs.67 crores have been provided as a Central grant and another Rs. 67 crores have been paid by the respective State Government.

Regarding a vigilance commission, I would submit that I would examine the matter. If there is any necessity, we will definitely look into the matter and have a vigilance commission appointed.

SHRI R. SHUNMUGASUNDARAM: Sir, in his reply the Minister has not given the details about the young boys who are taken in herds from Tamil Nadu as widely published in the newspapers. I request the hon. Minister to place material and details about the young boys who are taken as bonded labourers in groups from Tamil Nadu.

SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to put a question. The hon. Minister's reply is that the information is received from the State Governments. They are supervising the functioning of the rice mills only. There are quarries in the areas of Thiruvallur and Ponneri in Tamil Nadu. A large number of bonded labourers have been detected there. Several voluntary organisations have written to the State Government. What is the action taken in this regard? The hon. Minister has been telling that it is the job of the State Governments.

Therefore, there should be a coordinated effort by the Central Government and the State Governments together to implement this Act because this is a Central Act. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether they would give direction to the State Governments from the Labour Ministry with regard to those areas where a number of quarries are there and for releasing bonded labourers who are working in those quarries.

SHRI K. CHANDRA SHEKHAR RAO: Sir, I would like to inform the hon. Member that the Government of India did react to the case of August 2004 on a complaint lodged by one Sarpam Irular Tozhilarlar Sangam. It is not only the State Governments even if we receive a private complaint in the Government of India, we respond to it. The Redhill area of Tamil Nadu comprises Thiruvallur, Tiruttani and Ponneri. A large number of complaints are received from that area. The Government of India is also concerned about the matter. We will definitely look into the matter. I will send a special officer or a special team to look into the whole issue.

Vallarpadam International Container Trans-shipment Terminal

*26. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the fact that the Vallarpadam International Container Trans-shipment Terminal, which is Kerala's dream project is waiting for approval from his Ministry for the last five months;

(b) if so, the reasons for delay on Government's part in sanctioning the project;

(c) whether Government are aware of the fact that as the Indian ports lack full fledged trans-shipment terminal facilities, the major chunk of Indian container traffic is directed to foreign hubs like Colombo, Singapore and Dubai; and

(d) the efforts Government propose to make to accord an early sanction of the project?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) to (d) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.