

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL: I am not saying that all the demands made by the people from Manipur have been satisfied. The hon. Member should not forget that that lady who is on fast, is on fast for years together when their Government was in power. *(Interruptions)* The hon. Member should realise... *(Interruptions)*

SHRI S. S. AHLUWALIA: I am saying that she had been sitting on fast-unto-death for the last four years. The Assam Rifles (Special Powers) Act was not passed in the last four years. The agitation did not start in the last four years. What is the outcome of this agitation?

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL: Sir, I am replying to the question which the hon. Member has put. That question relates to the lady who is fasting over there. She is fasting there for a long time. I am not saying that all the demands are satisfied. I am not saying that every difficulty has been removed. I am saying that we are in the process of helping the people and understanding the people, considering the demands of the people. We will do that with your help also.

Construction of cantonment in Bhadarwah

*208. DR. KARAN SINGH: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether there has been a long pending demand for the construction of a cantonment in Bhadarwah, J&K; and

(b) if so, when this project is likely to be completed?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) The Government has approved establishment of a military station at Bhadarwah in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir.

(b) The project is likely to be completed by the end of 2006.

DR. KARAN SINGH: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the militancy that has gripped the State of Jammu and Kashmir, over the last fifteen years, has not confined itself to the Valley, but also there has been a widespread militancy in the Jammu region. Poonch and Rajouri are close to the LoC. So, there was an influx from across the LoC. In Doda also there is an overflow of militant activity from the Valley.

This idea of a cantonment in Bhadarwah was mooted, Sir, over 20 years ago by me, personally. Had it been taken up at that time, it would have helped a great deal in satisfying the position there and given a sense of security. The Minister is aware that there has been a large number of people from Doda also, who had to leave their homes and who have come and are living in refugee camps.

Sir, my first supplementary is: Why has this project taken so long? Why will it take another two years before it is completed? There should be a sense of urgency.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, I agree with the hon. Member that there should be an urgency. The decision to establish a military station was taken in 1998. In fact, the then hon. Minister formally inaugurated the project on 24th August, 1998. But one of the reasons, not one, there are several reasons for the delay in the project; firstly, the terrain is difficult. The construction materials required are to be imported from outside. The local contractors are also not available. The skilled workers, which are required for this type of construction and this type of activity, are also not readily available. Moreover, the very reason of 'militancy' also stands in the way of getting the work done expeditiously. But I agree that there has been a delay. But, at the same time, I would remind that this is going to be a military station, not a cantonment. So far as establishment of the cantonment is concerned, as early as in 1962, the Government took a decision that there would be no further cantonments. Sixty two cantonments were established up to that date, if I understand correctly. From the historical point of view, the first cantonment was established after the Battle of Plassey—two cantonments were established: one at Barakhpur and another at Danapur in Bihar, almost two hundred years ago. It was decided that, after 1962 there would be military stations. In this particular place, Bhadarwah, we are going to have a military station.

DR. KARAN SINGH: Mr. Chairman, Sir flowing from this is my second supplementary. Again, a quarter of a century ago, a project was mooted for a road between Bhadarwah and Chamba which would have had an important significance not only for tourism but from the defence point of view also. Because, Sir, that gives an alternative route into the Valley. Chamba to Bhadarwah and Bhadarwah from Kishtwar, you could get into the Valley. It is an alternative route. It has a great deal of advantages.

There, again, a quarter of a century has elapsed.

Would the hon. Minister be kind enough to let us know whether that road is operable or not, yet. If not, why there is—again, the same way as the military station—such an inordinate delay in that road also being made operational?

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: So far as that road is concerned, Sir, generally I would like to say that there are requirements of many important roads which will help not only in promoting tourism but also from operational and security point of view also. But, always, there is a gap between desirability and capability; simply because of the fact that not adequate resources are readily available.

So far as this is concerned, as I mentioned, our priority is, at least, to complete the first phase of the project, as early as possible, within the date, by 2006, which we have given to the hon. Member. Let us complete this project by 2006 and thereafter let us think about others.

DR. FAROOQ ABDULLAH: Sir, the question that I would like to put to the hon. Minister of Defence is: this Chamba road was inaugurated by Sher Shah in his time in about 1878 or something like that and it had not been, then afterwards followed up by the Ministry of Defence. But the other road that is coming up, Bani i.e. Kotuwa-Bani-Bhadarwah road, that road progresses very, very slowly. Could the Minister inform this House whether the Border Roads Organisation would speed up the progress so that that will also assist Bhadarwah town being connected and that would also save us because lots of militants are living in Bani area of Jammu province? Does the Minister have any knowledge about that road?

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: The scope of the question is very much widened and various roads are coming within the purview of this question, but I do agree that if we construct the road, naturally, the connectivity would improve and even the construction work would be expedited. There is no denial to this act. But for that we require money.