

[Shri Bhupesh Gupta.]

much time even to pass the Hindu Marriage Bills or certain other Bills concerning the rights of Hindu women? How is it that the Rau Committee's recommendations were shelved for several years. People did not go wrong. It was the fear of the other elements. You see, the moment we start speaking on such subjects, we see bifurcation of thoughts and ideas. There are some Members opposite who speak dynamically with eyes to the future. There are some Members opposite who talk in an extremely conservative manner, stuck up in the past. That is what we see. And there grows a conflict in ideas and that is why we are not in a position to decide. (*Time bell rings*) You have rung the bell. I sympathise with the lady Member here.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It is now 4-45 and I will call the Prime Minister.

STATEMENT RE COMMUNAL DISTURBANCES IN WEST BENGAL AND EAST PAKISTAN

THE PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JAWAHARLAL NEHRU): Madam Deputy Chairman, I had promised this House that I would make a statement about the various unfortunate occurrences that had happened in West Bengal and in East Pakistan which are called communal disturbances. I had hoped to do so tomorrow in both the Houses and to read out a concise statement. Unfortunately, I did not know then that this House was not meeting after today. I, therefore, find myself in some difficulty in reading out that statement which is not wholly prepared yet as we expect some information by this evening or tomorrow morning. However, since this House is not meeting after today, I am giving some facts such as have come to our knowledge.

Madam, these series of occurrences began in the Malda district in West

Bengal where on the 9th March there was some quarrel or altercation between a Muslim and a Santhal woman in Digirghat village over the sale of some fruits, plums. The woman was slapped and this subsequently led to a clash between the Santhals and the local resident Muslims in which several Santhals were injured. The Santhals thereupon decided to carry out, what they call, Bitlaha, a tribal form of revenge. They were effectively prevented by police and local authorities from doing so. I may say that this type of tribal revenge, so far as I know, consists of destroying the hut, not of killing anybody, but of destroying the hut.

Then, on the 22nd March in a village nearby there was some trouble during the Holi celebrations between the Santhals again and the Muslims. The Santhals attacked the village and killed three Muslims, actually using bows and arrows for the purpose. The Muslim huts were set on fire and in one of them the tragedy occurred because the thatched roof collapsed on six more persons, who were there, Muslims, and they were killed thereby.

This was, as the House will notice, hardly a normal communal affairs. It was a mere tribal affairs. That is, some Santhals had been irritated by what they thought was discourtesy to one of their women and the Santhals reacted to it. As a matter of fact, many of the Muslims round about were given shelter by the Hindus there when the Santhals were attacking them. The local authorities took strong action and there the matter ended. Both then and later, the West Bengal Minister dealing with these questions went there and spent quite a considerable time. The Governor also went there a little later and the Members of Parliament coming from those areas also went there and remained there and much assistance was given to the families of those Muslims who had suffered.

Now, as the Pakistan Deputy High Commissioner and his First Secretary asked to be allowed to visit this district, they were enabled to do so, go round several of the villages on the 5th, 6th and 7th April. They met a large number of Muslims in various villages, went to a mosque for their prayers, meeting more people there and even addressed a meeting here and there, a small meeting in the presence of West Bengal officers. We have had some complaints that the Pakistan diplomats did not adhere to the prearranged itinerary and from place to place they met the local residents privately. There was some trouble on their trying to take photographs when they were told that this could not be allowed. In any case, they visited Malda because we wanted them to see things; we had nothing to hide. With this ended the first phase of what happened at Malda.

Unfortunately, the visit of the Pakistan Deputy High Commissioner had an unhealthy effect on the resident population and there was recrudescence of trouble in some of the areas in Malda between April 16 and 20. Now, I do not wish to connect this recrudescence of trouble with his visit. I am merely stating the chronological facts and the belief of many people there. Now, as I have said, the persons killed in these disturbances round about Malda were, I think, 9 or 10. As against this, Pakistan newspaper reports suggested that over 100 people had been killed and 600 houses and shops had been looted and burnt and 1500 girls had been abducted and hundreds of people had crossed over into Pakistan. In the second series of events in the Malda district, 4 Muslims were killed, 36 Hindus and 28 Muslims were injured. You will see the difference between the accounts given in the Pakistan newspapers and the actual facts which are well known. We have officially informed Pakistan in answer to their exaggerated protest note, in a note dated the 27th April that there have been no incidents in Malda after

April 20. Over 70 people had been arrested immediately and law and order had been again fully restored and there have been no abnormal migration from Malda across the Pakistan border into Pakistan. I say this but it is difficult to state accurately how many people may have gone over, partly because numbers of people come and go across the border there. It may be that a number of people, a little more than usual, went on that occasion from this side to Pakistan but no abnormal migration was noticed.

Now comes the second case of Murshidabad. This is rather remarkable and significant. This got a good deal of prominence in the Pakistan press. It was stated: "Fresh outbreak of violence in Murshidabad". The "Pakistan Times" of April 26 spoke of 150 Muslims having been killed in Murshidabad and large numbers of girls abducted and so and so forth. A newspaper of Dacca called the "Pakistan Observer", thereupon, sent a special correspondent to Murshidabad and his report from Murshidabad was very remarkable. In fact it said that nothing had happened here. That is the report to Pakistan in a paper in Dacca by its own correspondent. It said:

"My two-day visit to Murshidabad district areas and talks with reliable, influential non-official Muslims and officials confirmed that there had been no clash or even a minor incident in Murshidabad preceding, during or after the Malda disturbances."

There were some tensions certainly. It must be remembered as this correspondent points out, that in these areas, in Murshidabad, the population is 80 per cent, Muslim. So, the idea of the population there, the Hindus of 20 per cent, attacking the Muslims was not at all likely apart from the fact that there was nothing that happened. And if there was trouble

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the Hindus would be the greater sufferer. Now, later, some 2 or 3 days later, the "Pakistan Observer" repudiated its own correspondent—how I do not know, whether under pressure or what, but there it is. But the fact remains that there has been no incident and no communal trouble in the Murshidabad district whatsoever. These areas adjoin Pakistan. There is a river in some places and some people may have imagined that things were happening by seeing some huts being burnt in the Malda district across the river. So much for the Indian territory.

Then what happened in Dacca and Rajshahi, in the districts? Our High Commissioner went to Dacca for 4 days and some of the officials of our Mission there went to Rajshahi also—they went about. It is very difficult to get accurate figures about what happened there. In Dacca more or less perhaps one can get accurate figures but in Rajshahi and round about the districts like Pabna, Bogra, Rangpur, Khulna and Mymensing it is very difficult. One fact remains and that is, the East Pakistan Government had to send considerable number of soldiery of East Pakistan Rifles, I think, there to control the situation which presumably it would not have been necessary unless the situation was pretty bad. It is true that the soldiery has been withdrawn and the situation is, in a sense, quiet now after what has happened. We have reports that on the 26th, 27th and 28th April there were several cases of stabbing in Dacca and about a dozen people had been killed and several more injured. Our High Commissioner was in Dacca for four days. The Pakistan authorities have admitted that the situation in Rajshahi district in particular had been very serious and the Government were obliged to order the East Pakistan Rifles to stand out all over the country-side to control the situation. A Calcutta-bound train is said to have been halted on 25th April, somewhere outside Rajshahi

station and attacked and a large number of people are said to have been killed in this incident. The worst reports so far received are from Dharsha which is also a village in the Rajshahi district. Here apparently a large number of Hindu refugees had been collected and put under protection of an armed guard. On the 29th of April, for whatever reason, the armed guard was withdrawn. This was followed by an attack on the refugees in which many of them are said to have been killed. Other reports that we have received of serious trouble involving loot, arson, abduction and murder in this communal strife are from the districts of Pabna, Bogra, Rangpur, Khulna and Mymensing. The latest report is that the situation in the district has settled down and the troops have been withdrawn.

These are the facts so far as we know them. I have stated them with considerable moderation. I do not wish that this action and reaction should take place but the facts are unfortunate and bad enough and do concern us. There have been, of course, notes, etc. between us and the Pakistan Government and we have spoken to the Pakistan High Commissioner here. I have not given the exact figures as I did about Malda in regard to Pakistani places affected. Of course, I have not got them, it is difficult to get for me the exact figures there but it does appear that considerably more persons were killed in that train incident at Rajshahi and Dharsha village and roundabout. That is all.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA (West Bengal): I understand the need for moderation and I fully appreciate this approach but I was wondering whether it is not possible for the Government of India to suggest—we should take the initiative if it is found reasonable and useful—to the Pakistani authorities that there should be, to deal with the present situation as has arisen in that part—they will say of Malda and we will say, in that

part of Pakistan—a meeting of the representatives of the two Governments. It seems that if they could meet and discuss these things to find out these things and work on certain broad approaches, even approaches with regard to how these should be published or broadcast, that might prove useful, apart from the fact that such an approach will give an assurance to the minority community in East Pakistan that something is being done at a very much higher level with a view to giving them protection or preventing such occurrences. Similarly, it will give some assurance to minorities in Malda or other places, if they need such an assurance that steps are being taken. If we leave

the matter where it is, I don't know whether this will produce very good results, because it seems that people who are interested in such things, irresponsible people, communal people, are trying to take advantage of it. Therefore, I would ask the Prime Minister whether he has been thinking of such a thing. I don't say that this is an ideal suggestion. Far be it from me to make the claim that it is an ideal suggestion. But I would like to know whether on some such lines the thing could not be worked out so that representatives of the two Governments could go into these things. If it is thought useful then I would suggest this. Let the Government of India take the initiative in this matter and see how things develop. I think the statement made by the Prime Minister with regard to Malda is essentially a correct statement, on the basis of what we also know from those sources. But it is necessary to convince the people on the other side that what is being said here is true, that their grievances will be looked into. Likewise there should be a similar approach on the part of the Pakistani authorities also.

SHRI JAWAHARLAL NEHRU: Of course the idea that people should be assured and the minorities should be

assured of protection and safety is desirable. But whether a joint team wandering about will do that is rather doubtful. What might happen is this. Indeed it did happen when some persons representing Pakistan went about functioning as if they were responsible for the security and safety of the minority community on this side. The same thing may happen when people go from here to the other side also. So in the final result it is worse than before because each looks to the other side for protection. That is the difficulty. For the present I suppose, nothing has happened in Malda since the 20th April and in the other places as I have said, Pakistani troops have been withdrawn, and I believe the conditions are fairly steady. But there is the danger of migrations, and I don't know what we can do about it. We cannot stop migrations. In some degree they will come and we shall have to accept them. Some may go from here to Pakistan also. In fact, some correspondents have said some have gone. What the West Bengal Government have done when the reports of migration come is this. They ask the Pakistan Government for the address or the names of the villages where they have gone so that they can verify it. What the hon. Member has suggested is admirable in theory, but it is not quite clear in practice, at the present moment specially, how this will do much good.

SHRI A. B. VAJPAYEE (Uttar Pradesh): We have seen a press report to the effect that the Pakistan Government has instituted an enquiry into the conduct of the Deputy Commissioner in Dacca. May I know if this is a fact and whether there is any truth in that report?

SHRI JAWAHARLAL NEHRU: I don't know. There is no enquiry. But this indeed one must say, that if one reads the Pakistan newspapers, as I had just mentioned, I can very well understand the anger that the average reader must get, as the average reader in Pakistan does, reading of

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hundreds of abductions and so on. I just read out what happened in Malda, and in Murshidabad nothing happened. But if you read about Malda and other places, you will get shocked. Presumably, people who read them believe them. The difficulty is this. Newspapers should give really confirmed and reliable news. I don't want them to suppress anything, but

they should not go astray in this way. I don't know anything about an enquiry.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The House stands adjourned *sine die*.

The House then adjourned *sine die* at five minutes past five of the Clock.