

THE NORTH-EASTERN COUNCIL (AMENDMENT) BILL, 1998

THE MINISTER OF DISINVESTMENT, MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH EASTERN REGION AND MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI ARUN SHOUREI): Sir, I beg to move:

"That the Bill further to amend the North-Eastern Council Act, 1971, be taken into consideration."

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA): Now, the motion is moved... *(Interruption)*...

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE (West Bengal): Shri Arun Shourie, you must make some observations on this Bill.

SHRI ARUN SHOURIE: Sir, the Act, as you know, was enacted in 1971, and for six to seven years, there has been a feeling that the Act should be amended, and there are 3-4 reasons for it. The North-Eastern Council is a very important body. For the North-East, it is parliamentary disuse. It has been revived with strenuous efforts of the Chief Minister, and because of Governors like General Sinha, and for that reason, the functions were reviewed. Sir this Bill was first introduced in November, 1988.

The Government reconsidered it in the light of the discussions held with the people there in March, 2001. It was referred to the Department-related Standing Committee on 9th August, 2001. The Standing Committee reported in December, 2001, and that is how we are considering it now.

Sir, there are three main points for consideration in this. Number one, the imperative one, is of including Sikkim, now, in the North-Eastern Council. We are greatly handicapped in this because we have made allocations to them, but they are not able to participate in the North-Eastern Council deliberations. Secondly, Sir its status is only of an advisory body. It was conceived in 1971. It should become a regional planning body also, so that the things of interest to more than one State get focussed.

Sir, on many points, the Standing Committee and the Government are in complete agreement with:

- (1) That Sikkim should be included.
- (2) That the President should nominate the Chairman.
- (3) That the President should nominate three Members.

(4) In the Amendment which had been moved, in 1998, by Shri Advani, there was a provision that no project proposal should be considered by the North-Eastern Council till it had been examined by a Screening Committee, headed by the Secretary of the North-Eastern Council, and by the Planning Secretaries of the Region. Both the Standing Committee and the Government felt that that should not be a handicap or a hurdle. So, that has been deleted, Sir, in this new Amendment. In the Original Act, it was stated "that the Council shall meet whenever it can." The Standing Committee said that the Government has agreed that it must meet twice a year. That is the schedule that is being adhered to now.

Sir, there is only one point on which the original amendment that was proposed by Shri Advani, in 1998, the Standing Committee has agreed to, and we have taken a revised position, and that is, originally, it was proposed—today, the Council consists of Governors and Chief Ministers—that the Governors should be removed from the Council. I submit, with great respect, Sir, that that is a thing on which we have to disagree with the Standing Committee, and I mention the reasons for that.

Number one is, in the North-East, the Governors have a position and a role which is different from their role in other States. As you know, Sir, under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura, wherever there are autonomous District Councils, the Governors have a special responsibility for their development, and so on, and these consist of nine autonomous District Councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. Under the State Act, there are ten more Councils. So nineteen Councils have to be looked after, and their development is the special responsibility of the Government.

Number two; under Article 37(1)(A) and Article 37(1)(H) of the Constitution, in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, the Governors have a special responsibility in regard to law and order.

Number three, whatever the security situation in the North-East is, as you know, Sir, the Governors, over the years, have been selected, with special care, of persons who have had, in many cases, background in security affairs, and for that reasons, their participation in this is necessary.

Sir, the fourth reason is that in some of the States at least, unfortunately, there is a great turnover of Chief Ministers, and the Governors

must provide continuity in regard to their functioning in the North-Eastern Council of the States.

And also, Sir now, a harmonious relationship has been developed between the Governors and the Chief Ministers; and the Council is working well, and it is for that reason that we have recommended that the House may approve that Governors, as at present, shall continue to be members of the Council also.

Sir, there are other matters I would respond to, if the Members raise them. Sir, these are the three main points. On all points, the Standing Committee and the Government are, more or less, in agreement. It is only on the point of Governors, for the reasons I have mentioned, I request that the House should continue the present arrangement, and they also continue as members. Therefore, I move, Sir that the Amendment Bill be taken up for consideration.

The question was proposed.

SHRI RISHANG KEISHING (Manipur): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I rise to welcome the North-Eastern Council (Amendment) Bill, 1998. Sir, it is a long-awaited and long overdue Bill. In fact, the unanimous decision and aspiration of the seven Chief Ministers of North-East is that this Amendment should be brought and passed quickly. Now, it is a matter of regret that this unanimous and common decision and aspiration of the Chief Ministers, the collective desire of the Chief Ministers, has been kept pending for so long. In the principal Act, as per section 3 and sub-section 1 (a and b), the Governors who are the Constitutional Heads of the State, and the Chief Ministers, who are the Heads of the Government, were members of the Council. In such a situation, the position of the Chief Ministers gets subordinated. Even during discussions, the Chief Ministers will be sitting and listening, as the Governor would get the right to address the Council first. So, by the time the Chief Ministers' turn came, the time would be exhausted and important affairs of the State would not come up for discussion. It dampens the spirit of the discussion also. It was undemocratic. I feel that elected representatives of the State, the Chief Minister of the State, who is the Head of the Government, should not be superseded by any person, and he should not be subordinate to any. That is why we felt that it should be amended, and the Chief Ministers and elected representatives of the State should be given a proper place in

the discussions and deliberations of this North-Eastern Council. From that point of view, I welcome this Amendment. But I regret that there has been such a long delay. It is very bad for democracy. It also, in one way, reflects that the Centre does not give importance to the common wish, the collective decision, of the Chief Ministers of the North-Eastern States. The main features of the Bill have been spelt out in the Statement of Objects and Reasons. Firstly Sikkim has been made a member of this Council. We welcome it. Of course, the Seven Sisters are compact. Whereas Sikkim from the geographic point of view, is away from the Seven Sister States' Nonetheless, the problems are more or less the same, and the people of the Seven Sisters welcome Sikkim and the people of Sikkim too wish to the North-Eastern Council.

Sir, regarding this nomination, I don't know how this nomination has come. I was told that in the Standing Committee on Home, they discussed and recommended. How far it is true, it is for the hon. Minister to say. That the Standing Committee recommended that five Lok Sabha Members and five Rajya Sabha Members be nominated as members of this Council. That means, in the new Council, since Governors are out, there will be only Chief Ministers, and it will only be a meeting of Chief Ministers. I think the position of the Chief Ministers need to be strengthened. If one member of Parliament from each State is nominated as a member of this Council, I think, the position of the Chief Ministers will definitely be strengthened, and it would be a very effective forum for deliberation, for the welfare and development of this region. The Chief Minister are there. I don't know how the members are going to be nominated. But I, still, feel that it would be proper, if Members of Parliament, one each from each State, is nominated. The funds are coming from the Centre to the North-Eastern States. They will be more accountable to the Council and it will be accountable to the Parliament and to the Government of India, as far as the expenditure side is concerned. I think the presence of MPs in this Council will be of immense use for the country and the Council. I don't know what kind of people are going to be nominated by the President. I feel that the nominees should be Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members. I was told that five Members would be from Lok Sabha and three Members would be from Rajya Sabha. That would ensure one Member from each State. There are eight constituent States with the addition of Sikkim. One Member from each State would be the appropriate thing and it would be a democratic thing.

5.00 P.M.

Sir, let us not minimise the importance of the North-East. Strategically, it is one of the most important parts of the country. Some of the States in the North-East, when rest of the country won freedom, were not part of this country. They were unadministered areas during the British days. They became part of this country very late. For example, Sikkim merged with this country much later. These States are tiny and financially bankrupt. They are backward in terms of development. There are not industries. Some of the States are devoid of industry. In terms of communication and roads, these areas are badly connected. These are not the only problems. There are insoluble problems. There is the problem of insurgency in every State. So, the importance of the North-Eastern Region should not be minimised. I feel that this forum, that is, the NEC, must be a forum for the development of the North-East. The things which the State Governments cannot take up, for example, the common programme for the North-East or inter-State problems, can be taken up by the North-Eastern Council. It will be of immense use to this area. Individually, probably, many of CMs will think about their own State only and the common problems will be forgotten. Therefore, the NEC, as such, should confine itself primarily to the common problems and inter-State problems of the North-East. That is something which the country needs, which the area needs. I don't want this NEC to be financially bankrupt. The Centre must see that it becomes an effective forum for the development of the entire North-East.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA): Do you want to continue or do you want to finish? We have got one more minute. Either you can finish or you can continue tomorrow.

SHRI RISHANG KEISHING: Sir, I want to continue.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA): Okay, you go ahead.

SHRI RISHANG KEISHING: The NEC should not be left financially bankrupt. Today, every State in the North-East is facing a huge deficit budget. If they are left alone, their problems in the North-East cannot be solved. They not only affect the North-East, but also the entire country.

That is something which we should try to understand. Solving the problems of the North-East means, solving the problems which affect the whole nation.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA): Now, it is 5'o clock. You will continue tomorrow. Now we have a statement from Shri Sharad Yadav, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution regarding creation of twenty lakh tonnes of buffer stock of sugar for one year.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Creation of 20 lakh tonnes of Buffer Stock of Sugar for one year

उपभोक्ता मामले, खाद्य और सार्वजनिक वितरण मंत्री (श्री शरद यादव): उपसभाध्यक्ष जी, हमारा चीनी उद्योग आज कठिन स्थिति में है। पिछले तीन चीनी मौसमों से उद्योग के पास बड़ी मात्रा में स्टॉक जमा हो रहा है। 2001-2002 के चीनी मौसम का कैरी ओवर स्टॉक लगभग 100 लाख टन है। चालू मौसम में 170 लाख टन के आसपास उत्पादन होने की संभावना है जबकि घरेलू खपत लगभग 180 लाख टन है। लगभग 10 लाख टन मात्रा के निर्यात होने की संभावना है। इसके बाद भी चालू चीनी मौसम के अंत में लगभग 80 लाख टन स्टॉक बच जाता है।

पिछले कुछ महीनों में चीनी के खुले बाजार मूल्यों में काफी कमी दिखाई दी है जिसके कारण गन्ना उत्पादकों को भुगतान करने की उनकी क्षमता पर दबाव पड़ा है। 30.9.2002 की स्थिति के अनुसार लगभग 1,100 करोड़ रुपये गन्ना मूल्य के बकाया होने का अनुमान है जो पिछले वर्ष के स्तर से लगभग दुगुना है। इससे गन्ना उत्पादकों को कठिनाई हुई है।

गन्ना उत्पादकों की कठिनाइयों को कम करने के लिए सरकार ने एक वर्ष की अवधि के लिए 20 लाख टन चीनी का एक बफर स्टॉक बनाने का निर्णय लिया है। इससे चीनी विकास निधि से 412 करोड़ रुपये खर्च होंगे। बफर स्टॉक के संबंध में बैंकों द्वारा 374 करोड़ रुपये की अतिरिक्त राशि रिलीज की जाएगी। 786 करोड़ रुपये की इन निधियों का इस्तेमाल केवल चीनी उत्पादकों को उनके गन्ना मूल्य बकायों का भुगतान करने के लिए किया जाएगा जिसके लिए अपेक्षित कानूनी नियम पहले से ही मौजूद हैं।

सरकार ने यह भी निर्णय किया है कि वह चीनी के निर्यात को अपनी पूरी क्षमता से बढ़ावा देगी और आंतरिक कुलाई और भाड़ा प्रभारों की मौजूदा प्रतिपूर्ति के अलावा चीनी निर्यातकों को और सहायता देगी। धन्यवाद।