

[Translation]

Dr. G. L. Kanaujia : I am repeatedly requesting but you are not giving me the opportunity. It is for the fourth time now...(Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker : Look, 20-25 minutes have been taken for one question only.

[English]

I am referring this matter about the breach of privilege to the Privileges Committee for taking proper action against the Member who is repeating the same thing in the House. Now, you sit down. This will be looked into by the Privileges Committee. This is not correct. I have given 25 minutes for one question. There are so many questions and the Members have come and complained to me that other questions are not being taken up.

Now, you answer about the breach of privilege to the Privileges Committee.

ELCTORAL REFORMS

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*203. **Shri Ramashray Prasad Singh** :
Shri Chitta Basu :

Will the **Prime Minister** be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government are aware that there is need for immediate poll reforms;

(b) if so, whether the Government have considered the recommendations of a number of Committees, particularly those of the Dinesh Goswami Committee;

(c) if not, the reasons therefor; and

(d) the remedial measures taken/proposed to be taken in this regard ?

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs (Shri H. R. Bhardwaj) : (a) and (b) Yes, Sir.

(c) Does not arise.

(d) Government has already introduced in the Lok Sabha three Bills namely, the Representation of the People (Second Amendment) Bill, 1994; the Constitution (Eighty-fourth Amendment) Bill, 1994 and the Election Commission (Charging of Expenses on the Consolidated Fund of India) Bill, 1994 to give effect to certain proposals on electoral reforms.

[Translation]

Shri Ramashray Prasad Singh : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the way the Government gave reply to the question of electoral reforms raises apprehensions about the intention and the policy of the Government with regard to initiating electoral reforms. Elections constitute the main pillar of democracy but, today, this pillar has shaken. Therefore, we think that this Government believes in muscle power and money power for winning the elections.

All the hon. Members have expressed their concern over it and now the situation has reached such a stage that unless reforms are undertaken, democracy cannot be saved and entry of benevolent people into politics cannot be ensured. Therefore, I would like to know the efforts the Government has made for amending the law on the basis of the points raised by Dinesh Goswami Committee, constituted to give suggestions on poll reforms and which had submitted its report on which all the parties had expressed their concensus ?

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : Sir, with all humility, I would like to deny in the strongest words the allegation of the hon. Member that this Government is reluctant to undertake poll reforms. I would like to inform the hon. Member that the Dinesh Goswami Committee report to which the hon. Member has referred to has been studied and discussed umpteem times all the parties and amendments were brought forth to all the unanimous proposals emanating from those discussions. There were 32 proposals in the Dinesh Goswami report of which amendments were brought for 23 proposals in the People's Representation Act. Hence, it is not good to say that the Dinesh Goswami report was not studied or discussed. All the leaders of the opposition parties are well aware of the depth and seriousness with which this report was dealt with and studied. They are also aware of the points of disagreement...(Interruptions)

[English]

It does not serve any purpose if you interfere.

[Translation]

I have no objection if the points on which there was unanimity among all the parties are brought forward before the House. I am saying that three bills based on the recommendations of the Dinesh Goswami Committee regarding the points of agreement between all the parties are under consideration of the House. Therefore, I would like to say that the Government earnestly desires to enforce these reforms as soon as possible and we are willing to meet and discuss with all the opposition parties anytime, anywhere.

Shri Ramashray Prasad Singh : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the importance they attach to these reforms is manifest from his reply. That is why, they are going to give effect to these in a haste. Mr. Speaker, Sir, you can yourself see that these suggestions remained pending with the Government for so many years and now it wants to pass these in such a haste. That Committee had given the suggestion of formation of mobile booths to enable the poor people to exercise their right to vote properly as they can not make independent use of that right. I would like to know whether this suggestion has been included in these Bills or not ?

[English]

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : Sir, these are matters about amendment of rules which are not covered by the Act.

They can be done at any time by the Election Commission and Mobile Booths have been provided in sensitive polling areas.

Shri Saifuddin Choudhury : Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all agree that the electoral reforms cannot wait any longer and in the background of the Vohra Committee Report, it has become very urgent that we take steps to reform our electoral system in a proper way. Now, there are many things to be tackled like money power, muscle power, casteism, communalism, partial behaviour of the officials etc., and everybody knows about them.

Sir, the Minister has talked about three Bills that had to come, one of which could not be taken up due to many other reasons which we all know. But through the Supreme Court verdict, that is on way to settlement which is regarding multi-member Election Commission. The second Bill regarding amending of the Representation of People Act contained many good provisions. It could be further modified and strengthened. There is no doubt about it. Why can the Government not bring it immediately so that certain meaningful steps can be taken in that direction? Can the Minister tell us as to when he is going to bring that Bill?

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : Sir, so far as that Bill is concerned, we can take it up as and when the House wants, I am in your hands...(Interruptions)

Shri Saifuddin Choudhury : This is a very serious matter. You bring it. We will support it.

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : I have moved it already.

Shri Saifuddin Choudhury : Then, why is it still to be taken up?

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : You give me time.

Shri Saifuddin Choudhury : Who will give you the time?

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : It is before the House.

Shri Basudeb Acharia : Who prevents you from bringing it?

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : Sir, I have to take a proper approach. If the hon. Member remembers, we had sent this Bill to the Joint Committee of both the Houses. There were certain proposals which were modified in the Bill and on that we also had a meeting with the opposition. Sir, let me explain to the hon. Members that it was on two counts that we had earlier made a provision under Article 29A on the use of religion and religious names by the political parties. Then, there was a suggestion by the Committee saying, 'No, you include the original Article 123 of the Representation of People's Act—caste, language and other ingredients of Article 123', on which there was a total opposition from some hon. Members...

Shri Saifuddin Choudhury : Who are those hon. Members?

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : And therefore you accommodate

them saying that 'if you accept Article 123 as a whole, we can immediately pass the Bill.'

Shri Saifuddin Choudhury : There may be opposition or no opposition. It can be passed by a majority.

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : So, we are sincere and we will...(Interruptions)

Shri Saifuddin Choudhury : It is not a Constitution Amendment Bill.

Shri Inder Jit : Sir, it was any privilege to be a member of the Dinesh Goswami Committee and in the light of my membership, I would like to ask two questions.

Firstly, this Committee had strongly public funding of elections. I would like to know whether the Government is going to consider that at all.

Secondly, we had also favoured greater use of the electronic media, not merely at the national level—in terms of national broadcasts—but also at the State level. Now that we have three T.V. channels, would the Government consider the possibility of enabling candidates both for the Parliament and the Assemblies to make use of the electronic media within the State at one level? And so far as the national level is concerned, that could be monopolised by the leaders at the national level. Has the Government given any thought to this matter and since the Prime Minister is also present in the House today at this Question Hour, may I especially request him...(Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker : Why do you not use the word 'use' and not 'monopolised'?

Shri Inder Jit : Sir, I stand corrected. Would the hon. Prime Minister be good enough to throw some light on these basic issues?

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : Sir, so far as the public funding is concerned, I would like to correct the hon. Member that it was not the public funding but it was partial funding in the matter of printing of one or two copies of electoral rolls, some stationery, some posters etc. and we found that it is totally inadequate. Then, there was a question about the independent candidates and others. So, that provision has still not been implemented. This issue of public funding is a very serious one and that has not been implemented.

With regard to media, you know very well that during the election it is controlled by the Election Commission and if they want to elaborate on that provision, we can certainly sit and discuss with the Election Commission. The media is not monopolised during the elections.

Shri Inder Jit : Sir, I am conscious of the fact that there was no unanimous recommendation on public funding. But three Members—the former Chief Election Commissioner, Mr. Shakdhar, Mr. L. P. Singh and I—had recommended this and expressed the hope that the Government, even though it was not unanimous, would take this into consideration.

Mr. Speaker : No, No. Mr. Dighe, please.

Shri Sharad Dighe : Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the most desirable electoral reforms was the introduction of identity cards. During the last Assembly elections it had taken a great momentum in several States. But due to some legal difficulties in the Supreme Court as well as some administrative and financial difficulties faced by certain States, it has now been halted and I am afraid that till the next Lok Sabha elections, it may not be possible to introduce this. I would ask the Government whether it will remove all these legal, administrative and financial difficulties in the way of introduction of identity card system before the next Lok Sabha elections.

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : Sir, I would like to inform the hon. House that the Government has already removed all the difficulties, both legal and financial. The hon. Prime Minister called all the Chief Ministers as well as the Election Commissioner and took a meeting. We immediately set apart Rs. 225 crore for the States to be used for identity cards. We have still made a provision for an equal amount in this year's budget for this purpose. I am very happy to tell that this programme of issuing identity cards is continuing with the same speed.

I had already informed the House that these practical difficulties are no longer with the Central Government. They are being faced by the State Governments in having their voters out and getting them photographed etc.

[Translation]

Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Bhuwan Chandra Khanduri : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the entire House is in agreement with this fact and has said time and again that election process should be reformed. It appears that you too are in agreement with the reply given by hon. Minister. But you are concentrating more on what is a matter of controversy. There are so many things in the Dinesh Goswami Committee's Report on which there is no controversy. I want to know from the hon. Minister whether he will give priority to pass reforms without creating any controversy by collecting related facts instead of getting involved in the tangle that the Government could make excuse that cannot be brought as he has said that there is a controversy. So, I want to ask from you whether you will try to get the reforms passed, about which there is no protest by any party ?

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : We appreciate all that has been said in the House and therefore we will by our best to do it as soon as possible.

Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Bhuwan Chandra Khanduri : You have tried to ward off the issue.

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : How could I say that I will get it done tomorrow.

[English]

Shri Chandra Jeet Yadav : Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is not only a demand from all sides of the House for

immediate electoral reforms, but the Minister will agree that there is a very strong public opinion in the country also. There are many things which have been already agreed upon and there are certain things on which the discussions are going on. There will always be differences on many things. But it does not mean that if there are differences, then the necessary steps should not be taken to bring the necessary reforms. There is a unanimous demand from the Opposition and the Government has also assured in the beginning of this Session that in this Session they will bring the Electoral Reforms Bill. Now, I am again pinpointing this question. Still there are 10 days left in this Session. So, in view of the agreement from the side of the Government and the unanimous demand of the Opposition that this Bill should be passed in this Session itself, will the Minister bring this Bill in this Session itself ?

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : Sir, I have noted the demand of the House and I have assured that we will do our best.

[Translation]

Shri Ram Prasad Singh : Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was often talked about delimitation in the House and a Committee was formed about the reserved constituencies and perhaps a report has also been presented in the House. I want to know from the Minister whether the Government proposes to bring changes in the delimitation of the constituencies and reserve other constituencies in lieu of them ? The number of voters has considerably increased according to population in all constituencies...*(Interruptions)*

Mr. Speaker : No, No. This will become apparent after the Bill introduced.

(Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker : Such questions are not allowed.

Shri Ram Prasad Singh : Please tell me whether you are going to bring changes to the report of the committee about delimitation of the constituencies ?

Mr. Speaker : This all has been told to all leaders.

(Interruptions)

Shri Rajveer Singh : Mr. Speaker, Sir, people are scared of election machinery after the Vohra Committee report has been presented. I want to know whether the Prime Minister will bring such a Bill in the House, in which it should be stipulated that if any political party gives ticket to a person of criminal record then it is liable to lose its registration ?

Mr. Speaker : Do not ask this kind of questions.

(Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker : If you want, you may please move Private Members Bill.

Shri Rajveer Singh : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had moved a Private Members' Bill.

Mr. Speaker : What the Government bring in the Bill is not asked about.

(Interruptions)

Shri Rajveer Singh : Mr. Speaker, Sir, whether permission will be given to the people of criminal antecedents for contesting election or not ?

Mr. Speaker : That is in the law....

(Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker : This is not allowed.

[English]

Dr. Kartikeswar Patra : In the past, during several State Assembly elections, the Government had experienced several lacunae and loopholes and the Government had overcome those lacunae. Is the Government thinking of undertaking some remedial measures other than those recommendations made by the Goswami Committee ? What measures did the Government consider after these elections were over ?

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : The issue of electoral reforms is a matter of experience which we gain in each general election and the Election Commission makes those recommendations to the Government. We receive suggestions from the hon. Members and, sometimes, on the public demand and each one is taken care of, assessed and then brought before the House. So, it is a continuing process and whenever it is required, we always bring in these measures.

Mr. Speaker : He is wanting to know what are the remedies, according to the Government, against the use of money power, muscle power and narrow ideologies in the elections.

Shri H. R. Bhardwaj : With regard to money power, recently, they have increased the limit to make it realistic so that whatever can be legitimised has been done, and then on party donations and all such things, some law was passed; it can still be improved. These evils are there in the system and we are Cognizant of it.

[Translation]

POPULATION POLICY

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***205. Shri Nitish Kumar :**
Dr. Mahadeepak Singh Shakya :

Will the Minister of Health and Family Welfare be pleased to state :

(a) whether a committee to prepare a "Population Policy" for the country was constituted under the Chairmanship of Dr. M.S. Swaminathan in the year, 1993;

(b) if so, the composition thereof and whether the

committee has submitted the report to the Government;

(c) if so, the date on which the Government have received the report and the details of recommendations made thereon;

(d) whether any action plan has been prepared to implement the said recommendations; and

(e) if so, the outline thereof and if not, the reasons therefore?

[English]

The Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (Shri Paban Singh Ghatowar) : (a) to (c) Yes, Sir. The other members of the Group of Experts were Shri T.V. Antony, Dr. K.B. Pathak, Prof. Ashish Bose, Smt. Avabai B. Wadia, Smt. Devaki Jain, Dr. Vasant Gowarikar, Shri Pravin Visaria, Shri N. Bhaskara Rao and Dr. J.P. Gupta. The Group of Experts submitted its Report on 24th May 1994. The Report has been laid on the Table of the Lok Sabha on 14th June, 1994.

(d) and (e) A draft National Population Policy has been prepared.

[Translation]

Shri Nitish Kumar : Mr. Speaker, Sir, population growth is a big problem in the country. The increasing pace of population is marginalising the fruits of whatever development is taking place and that is how we are lagging behind in terms of development. The rapid growth of population has become a matter of concern and is being debated in the country and normally a charge is levelled that political parties are not serious about it. We all know that the report of the Committee has been presented in the House. The Draft National Population Policy was supposed to be debated during the last session, but that could not materialise. We want to know from the Minister that by what time the Government will manage to frame the National Population Policy and by what time it wants to discuss it and implement it by making an action plan on the basis of the discussion?

[English]

Shri Paban Singh Ghatowar : Sir, about the National Population Policy, we have circulated the Report given by the Group of Experts to the State Governments and various Departments. We have received the comments of the State Governments; we have to take the views of the State Governments before formulating the National Policy on Population. We have started the departmental exercise—discussion in our Department, and we are trying to formulate the National Policy as soon as possible, I will not be in a position to give a definite date as of today.

[Translation]

Shri Nitish Kumar : Mr. Speaker, Sir, you too must be understanding it and if the process of 'as soon as possible' goes on unabated the pace at which population