

I request all the hon. Members to stand in silence for a while as a mark of respect.

11.06 hrs.

*The Members then stood in silence for a short while.*

11.08 hrs

#### ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

[Translation]

#### Selling of Children and Girls

\*21. SHRI<sup>†</sup> MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN :  
SHRI MAHESH KUMAR M. KANODIA :

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government are aware that a large number of Indian children and girls are sold out in foreign countries especially in gulf countries for begging and other purposes;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether most of such children hail from the State of West Bengal;

(d) whether all such children have been deported to India by the Government of respective countries;

(e) whether Government have made any inquiry into the alleged illegal and inhuman export of children;

(f) if so, the details thereof; and

(g) the steps proposed to be taken by the Government to stop such malpractices ?

[English]

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL) : (a) to (g) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

#### Statement

130 Indian children, most of them handicapped were apprehended by the authorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia while begging in Jeddah and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The Saudi authorities did this as a part of an exercise to apprehend beggars, irrespective of their nationality, during the month of Ramadan. These children were subsequently deported to India by the Saudi authorities with the Consulate General of India, Jeddah issuing the necessary travel documents for their return to India. The deportation was done in two batches, i.e. 77 children on January 13, 1997 (consisting of 76 girls and one boy) and 47 boys on February, 3, 1997 making it a total of 124. Another 6 children, similarly apprehended, are awaiting deportation from Saudi Arabia.

As per preliminary enquiries by the officials of the Indian Consulate General, Jeddah, most of the children hailed from

Murshidabad district of West Bengal. The children had gone to Saudi Arabia on Haj/Umrah visas, arranged by organised gangs, engaged in human trafficking. The Government of West Bengal has been requested to conduct a detailed inquiry into the operation of these gangs.

Government is gravely concerned at such incidents of trafficking in children. While minimising any inconvenience to pilgrims, it is determined to ensure that only bonafide cases of children accompanying parents on pilgrimage should be permitted. A tightening of procedures is being undertaken in order to ensure that children travelling abroad are in fact accompanying their parents and not being taken by any unauthorised persons. Consideration is also being given to the issue of separate passports for children in order to serve the same purpose.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : Sir, the hon. Minister has admitted in his reply that hapless children of Indian origin are being forced into begging in Saudi Arabia and organised gangs are behind this heinous crime. This is not a new phenomenon. It has been reported that this is going on for years together. May I know from the hon. Minister whether our Mission abroad is aware of this heinous crime and, if so, what preventive measures were taken by them to arrest further recurrence of such heinous crimes ?

SHRI I.K. GUJRAL : Sir, it is unfortunate that such incidents should happen. Of course, we know that racketeers are always around who try to approach the gullible families. In these particular two incidents which are very saddening again, the West Bengal Government has taken charge of it.

They have already instituted an inquiry. Some cases have been filed already.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : It has been reported that the children of Indian origin who were found begging in Saudi Arabia had been apprehended and put behind bars by the Administration for two months. These poor children were not properly looked after by the Administration. Ultimately, the Saudi Arabian Government have deported these children on their own flight. I do not know what our Mission was doing there in Saudi Arabia. If they were aware of this incident, what action did they take ? Why did they not take up the responsibility of sending back these children to India ? Will the hon. Minister enlighten us on this particular incident ? This has tarnished the image of our country abroad.

SHRI I.K. GUJRAL : We understand that it is a normal practice in Saudi Arabia to round up beggars in the Ramadan month. In this Ramadan month, they rounded up 1600 beggars from various nationalities. Out of these, 124 or 130 came to be Indians. We have mentioned about this.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : Why did our Mission not take up any responsibility of sending these children back to India ? The Saudi Arabian Government have taken up the responsibility. They have deported these children. It is shameful ... (Interruptions)

SHRI PRAMOTHES MUKHERJEE : It is unfortunate that this is the case of my constituency. It pertains to the district of Murshidabad. The unfortunate 77 children—76 girls and one boy—belong to the different villages within my constituency. It is not an accidental case. It has become the regular feature of the racketeers. I have regards for the Haj pilgrims. There is no doubt about it. But there are some notorious people and barbarous businessmen who create temptations by offering money and the unfortunate children and their unfortunate parents fall into the trap of these temptations. They sell their children for getting some money. This business is going on for years together.

MR. SPEAKER : Put the question now, please.

SHRI PRAMOTHES MUKHERJEE : Yes, coming to my point, this Government has referred the matter to the West Bengal Government. The West Bengal Government have given them the primary shelter and treatment, and they have returned the children to their parents. This much was done. I have talked to the District Magistrate of Murshidabad today morning. Only three persons have been arrested in this connection. I want to know from the Government of India and especially from the External Affairs Minister what steps have been taken to arrest those guilty persons and give them exemplary punishment to stop this inhuman and barbarous activity ...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI I.K. GUJRAL : I hope my hon. friend would agree that this unfortunate incident which is a despicable incident occurred in West Bengal and naturally it falls within the purview of the West Bengal Government. They have taken steps. The inquiry is still going on. The three people or three persons whom they have apprehended is, perhaps, the first step. The police inquiry is going on. So, I think we must go by this. Whenever they come across third persons who are responsible, I am sure, the West Bengal Government will take action ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : Now, we go to the next Question. Question No. 22.

SHRI NIRMAL KANTI CHATTERJEE : The gang is an all-India gang.

SHRI PRAMOTHES MUKHERJEE : It is an all-India gang. It is not a district affair ...*(Interruptions)*

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE : It is an important question. Allow us, please ...*(Interruptions)*

#### Privatisation of National Highways Expansion Schemes

\*22. SHRI N. DENNIS :  
SHRI V. DHANANJAYA KUMAR :

Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state :

(a) whether the National Highways expansion schemes are to be handed over to the private sector;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the guidelines set in this regard; and

(c) the method of selecting the areas of National Highways to be handed over to the Private sector for expansion ?

THE MINISTER OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI T.G. VENKATRAMAN) : (a) to (c) Projects relating to bypasses, bridges, road over bridges and four laning of existing sections of National Highways which on the basis of traffic density are financially viable and bankable are proposed to be taken up through private sector participation. The guidelines stipulate that the award of such works will be through open competitive bidding and the selection of the entrepreneur will be on the basis of the least cost to the user.

SHRI N. DENNIS : Sir, the National Highways play a crucial role in accelerating the economic activities and development. Sections of many National Highways are in a very bad condition. The allocation of funds to this sector is too inadequate to meet the requirements. So, private participation is allowed. Though private participation is allowed by the amendment to the National Highways Act of 1955, yet the response is not to the extent expected.

May I know from the hon. Minister, what the impediments are that stand in the way of larger participation and involvement of the private sector and the steps that would be taken to speed up the process by extending incentives, encouragements and other facilities for larger involvement and participation of the private sector ?

SHRI T.G. VENKATRAMAN : Sir, in pursuance of the initiatives, as the hon. Member has asked, I would submit that the road sector has been declared as an industry to facilitate commercial borrowings. Certain tax and fiscal concessions have been given, like tax holiday for five years and 30 per cent reduction in tax over the subsequent five years to be extended, to be availed of for any period upto 12 years. There are also facilities like reduction in import duty on equipments, incentives to financial institutions as well, creation of an Infrastructure Development Finance Company with an authorized capital of Rs. 5,000 crore, enabling the entrepreneurs to have access to cheaper funds for investment in the road sector and providing capital to NHA to allow it to generate more funds. These are the incentives given by the Government.

SHRI N. DENNIS : May I know from the hon. Minister about the follow up actions that have been taken after the amendment of the National Highways Act of 1955 and also the categories of works that are identified for entrustment to the private sector as also the details of these works and the quantum of investment made by the private sector ?

SHRI T.G. VENKATRAMAN : Sir, the details of projects that have already been awarded are :