

the matter is pending with the Cabinet. However, in English the word cabinet has two meanings. Therefore, the hon. Minister should clarify about the cabinet with which it is pending.

[English]

THE MINISTER OF WATER RESOURCES AND MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRI VIDYACHARAN SHUKLA): Sir, this matter has been under the consideration of the Government for some time. Actually the Labour Minister has given an assurance to the journalists' representatives, who met him in this regard. I can assure the House and the journalist friends that within thirty days this matter will be considered by the Cabinet and a decision will be taken in this matter. We know the difficulties that are being faced by the working journalists and journalist friends and also other related difficulties. Therefore, wide-ranging talks have taken place. I would like to assure the House and our journalist friends that within thirty days, that is within the month of March, we shall take a decision in the matter and I hope it will be satisfactory to everybody in the House.

12.08 hrs.

RE: ISSUING OF PHOTO IDENTITY CARDS TO VOTERS FOR ELECTORAL PURPOSES

[Translation]

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN (Rosera): Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to draw the attention of the House towards a very serious matter for which I have been giving notices for the past 4-5 days. The Election Commission has decided that elections would not be conducted in the

States where photo identity cards are not issued by the 30th November. In this regard I would like to make a few submissions.

Firstly, I would like to make a submission about the expenditure. The Election Commission has estimated that Rs. 1100 crore would be needed for the same. As per the formula worked out by the Commission, required funds could be mobilised if the members of Parliament decide not to draw their salaries for a year. They are asking for donations. I fail to understand the logic as to how can the identity cards check booth capturing. I fear, it will go up on the contrary. Village head men will collect the identity cards of all and stamp the ballot papers in the morning. This issue has two ramifications. One is of money and the other is political. Elections in Bihar and Orissa are slated for March and it will be difficult to issue identity cards by 30th of November. It means that elections will not be held in Bihar and Orissa, and President's Rule will be imposed there, which means Shri Shuklaji will rule these states. The poor in the country do not have shelter even. Banjaras keep on moving from one place to another. Where will they keep the identity cards in safe custody? Will the Central Government or the Election Commission provide them steel boxes with double lock. ? (Interruptions)

THE MINISTER OF WATER RESOURCES AND MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRI VIDYACHARAN SHUKLA): Everybody is aware of the problems you are talking of. Please suggest some solutions to them.

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN: I would request the Government to call a meeting of all political parties; rather they have already done so. First of all, the

[Shri Ram Vilas Paswan]

proposal for issuing identity cards should be postponed. Whenever the Government proposes to implement the scheme, either the Government or the Election Commission should bear the expenses. The burden in this regard should not be shifted to the State Governments because the State Governments are not in a position to bear the expenditure on this item.

[English]

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOUDHURY (Katwa): Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support what Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan has said. A very unseemly controversy has taken place and different wings of our democracy are at loggerheads. It is very unfortunate that the Election Commission, with seemingly good intentions, is making comments and giving orders which are, really, creating a lot of confusion in the society. Now, the question is, therefore, even for Identity Cards, I want to know why there cannot be a dialogue between the Election Commission, political parties and the Government and a way could be found out. What is the hurry? Why should there be hammering on the whole system and creation of so much damage to the democratic institutions? (*Interruptions*) I am not against Identity Cards, but the question is that it has to be sorted out. One institution is not supreme and it does not have the supreme intelligence. It cannot demolish all the other institutions. I am very sorry for the way in which the whole question of comprehensive electoral reform has come to the core. Everything has to be done through legislation in this House, not by the order of any official sitting somewhere else. So, we must take up the issue of comprehensive electoral reforms and no

election must be postponed or cancelled in name that the Identity Cards are not being issued. Why had the election been postponed in West Bengal? Then, the whole democracy is under jeopardy that very important question. Therefore, I would request the Government to take up this matter very seriously, call everybody concerned and bring forward bills in this House so that it can be done in a unanimous manner.

[Translation]

SHRI JASWANT SINGH (Chittorgarh): Mr. Speaker, Sir, our party has always been emphasising that Identity Cards are very essential for electoral reforms. We are of the opinion that instead of making it a disputable matter, the Identity Cards should be made as multi-purpose cards. We were, and still are of the same opinion. Some practical problems have been highlighted by the Government and others. Our opinion is that it does not look good that disputes on this issue may become a subject matter of news in the newspapers every day. Our complaint is that if the Election Commissioner has been asking for it for a long time, why has the Government not taken any initiative to hold negotiations with it so far? It is very necessary to take the initiative in this regard. The Government should take the initiative, understand the problems of the other side and also highlight their own problems and thus find out a solution to the problems.

Secondly, I would like to submit that a committee regarding electoral reforms had been constituted under the Chairmanship of late Shri Dinesh Goswami in the previous Lok Sabha. That committee had submitted its unanimous report which is lying with the Government. The Chief Election Commissioner has

also presented a document containing 24 or 34 points regarding election reforms. Why does the Government not take initiative in this regard? If it takes initiative, the matter regarding multi purpose Identity Cards can also be discussed with the Commission.

Then comes the question of finance. I feel that the total expenditure to be incurred on it and the source through which it would be provided are matters of consequential nature. The Government has just to announce that an expenditure of Rs. 3000 crore would be incurred, then it will not be of much consequential if somebody else says that not more than Rs. 600 crore will be required in this regard. This matter should be solved through negotiations. I do not find it wise that differences regarding the extent of amount to be spent on this matter may lead to a constitutional impasse in the country.

[English]

SHRI SOBHANADREESWARA RAO VADDE (Vijayawada): Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of our Telugu Desam Party, we would like to express our views.

We are in favour of photo Identity Cards for electoral purposes. In fact, our Telugu Desam Government when it was there for seven years, in Andhra Pradesh headed by Shri N. T. Ramarao, we have given photo identity cards for cooperative as well as municipal corporation elections also. It is not a big task. The financial burden will not be so much. When we have already done it, if the Government is really serious that electoral reforms should be implemented and free and fair opportunity should be given, then it should be done. Through the electoral

process, the Government should come forward and both the Central Government and the State Government can share the responsibility of the burden.

We demand that the Government should come forward with comprehensive electoral reforms as recommended by late Shri Dinesh Goswami. We are in favour of issue of identity cards as part of electoral process and it should be multi-purpose one.

[Translation]

SHRI RAM SAGAR (Barabanki): Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Chief Election Commissioner has suggested to issue identity cards to the voters and the Government is expressing its inability to do so. I would suggest only one thing in this regard. I am sorry that this matter is getting complicated. The Government has not convened a meeting of all political parties so far. Through you, I would request the Government to convene such a meeting and take an appropriate decision in this regard.

[English]

DR. KARTIKESWAR PATRA (Balasore): We are very much in favour of implementing all the recommendations from all sides to bring about Constitutional reforms in the electoral process. Our Government is very much in favour of them. But here, sometimes there are resource constraints. That is why, there is a talk between the Election Commission and the Government, whether the money could be provided by the Central Government or by the State Government. The entire House is aware of the fact that money cannot be provided suddenly. That is why, everybody should come up with very good suggestions.

[Translation]

SHRI VIJOY KUMAR YADAV (Nalanda): Mr. Speaker, Sir, this dispute is being put up before the nation as if all the political parties are against the democracy and only one officer is in favour of the democracy. I feel that the political image that is being created in this manner will have adverse effects. The sooner the matter is resolved, the better it would be. So far as issuing of identity cards is concerned, no one is against it. But the question is how to do it and how to manage the funds? Whether in the election process.....

MR. SPEAKER: Now, what will the Government do, if people are prevented from casting their votes even after they are issued identity cards?

SHRI VIJOY KUMAR YADAV: That is what I am submitting that it is not only a matter of issuing identity cards or generation of funds, it is a question of electoral reforms in totality. For this, the Government should take an initiative and the Election Commission should sort out the problem by discussing the same with all political parties.

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAÏYEE (Lucknow): I would like to give reply to question you have asked.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, please.

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAÏYEE: Identity cards is not a solution for those who do not allow people to cast their votes. But Identity Cards will help in identifying genuineness of those who reach the polling booths to cast their votes.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER: I agree with you.

[Translation]

SHRI SHARAD YADAV (Madhepure): Mr. Speaker, Sir, my only submission is that the issue of identity cards relates to elections and as Shri Jaswant Singh has observed...

MR. SPEAKER: If you have given some suggestion, we will discuss it together.

SHRI SHARAD YADAV: My submission is that the other political parties in the country are not taking any interest in the campaign being continuously launched by the Election Commission with regard to the electoral reforms. Shri Shukla had called a meeting in which it was decided to convene another meeting to discuss comprehensive electoral reforms. It should be ascertained that the use of identity-cards for the purpose of elections does not lead to wastage of money and a constitutional crisis is not created thereby. I would like to make a submission to the Government, through you, to convene an all-party meeting on the basis of the recommendations of Goswami committee and seriously consider the comprehensive changes that can be brought about as electoral reforms and put down its views in clear terms.

[English]

SHRI P. G. NARAYANAN (Gobichettipalayam): Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also share the concern of the Members on the issue of identity cards. This is a very serious issue in view of the deadline fixed by the Chief Election Commissioner. So, this is not a matter which can be treated lightly. Issuing identity cards to the

electorates is a welcome factor. At the same time, imposing great burden on the States is not a welcome thing. The Government must come out with concrete steps to sort out this problem. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI CHITTA BASU (Barasat): There is no objection to the issuing of identity cards. But my view is, issuance of the identity card should be taken as an integral part of the total comprehensive electoral reforms. If there is no comprehensive electoral reforms, merely by issuing identity cards, I think, the problem raised by many Members, will not be solved.

Together with this identity card issue, there are other problems also. I think, the House knows that the Election Commission, recently, had issued an order by which the Election Commission had taken over the power to deregister, to delicense certain recognized parties at the national and State level, provided, they do not implement the model code of conduct. All the political parties were opposed to this idea of giving this power to the Election Commission itself. The Government also wanted to bring about certain measures.

I, therefore, want that along with this, the Government should convene a meeting of all the parties including the Election Commission to sort out all these problems and to take appropriate steps, as early as possible, for bringing about measures aimed at a total and comprehensive electoral reforms.

[*Translation*]

SHRI ANADI CHARAN DAS (Jajpur): I have a small suggestion to

make. In my opinion, there will be no need of identity cards. If the polling officer issues a certificate stating that, that particular person has used his franchise, the problem will be solved. A person who does not cast his vote, should not be issued a ration card and the names of his children should not be included in it and they should not be provided all facilities. If there is a problem in issuing such certificates then a legislation can be enacted and, if the need be, the Constitution can be amended that there is no need of identity cards, a certificate will do.

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE (Calcutta South): I would like to support the issue of identity cards. If we want to save democracy, we greatly need identity cards.

[*English*]

Sir, I found that the same names are enlisted in the voters list both in India as well as in Bangladesh. I have visited recently the Tapan Assembly Constituency in South Dinajpur district. The name of a person which was enlisted in the voters list there, was also found in the voters list of Rajshahi district in Bangladesh. I have the voters list with me.

So, my request to the Government is that it should call the NDC meeting exclusively to discuss this matter in a comprehensive manner so as to issue the identity cards in the next elections and to protect the democratic rights of the people.

[*Translation*]

SHRI SYED MASUDAL HOSSAIN (Murshidabad): Sir, from where have they got the voters list of Bangladesh?

[English]

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE: If you want, I can lay the voters list on the Table of the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Voters list is a public document.

SHRI NIRMAL KANTI CHATTERJEE (Dumdum): I do not think there is any doubt about this part of the statement that a multi-purpose identity card is useful in many ways. Even in terms of electoral abuses, it has a certain function. Let there be no doubt about that. The point that is additionally emphasised here is that it is not the only answer to the problem. That is the first point.

The second point is that it is not a total answer to the problem either. There are to be other answers for them. And for these other answers, there is a desire and this demand, perhaps, from the opposition side that whatever has been agreed to in the past, in terms of late Dinesh Goswami Committee's recommendations, should be implemented, should be gone into and a quick answer to this question should be given to the House.

The third point about which we want to express our concern is that, as has been indicated already, a confrontationist situation is development between statutory authorities. This is highly dangerous for democratic functioning of the polity. And it is that part also that has to be looked into very urgently. As has already been pointed out, three by-elections in West Bengal could not be undertaken; a Minister had to resign because no by-election could be held.

Sir, a question has been asked from that side as to why we are objecting to it. I

do not want to answer it in that fashion. We are not objecting to it.

Secondly, somebody asked a question as to why there is rigging. To that the answer is that wherever the Congress is defeated, rigging is most. That we know. Therefore what we desire is that the Treasury Benches and the Government should come out with a meeting of all political parties and try to find out the phasing of the identity card as well as the electoral reforms and try to contact the Election Commissioner.

[Translation]

SHRI NITISH KUMAR (Barh): Mr. Speaker, I would like to view the question of identity cards within the perspective of electoral reforms. The objective behind the question of identity cards is to ensure that every voter could be able to cast his vote and it is also equally important to note that the poor people who do not have a place to live in; do not have a roof over their heads, have no way to ensure the safety of their goods. In case they are issued identity cards, there is every chance of these cards getting lost or destroyed. How will such a person be able to cast his vote in such a situation because the purpose behind issuance of identity cards is to ensure that only the genuine voter should have a right to cast his vote. But in the event of his identity card getting lost, how will he be able to cast his vote. I would like to see it from both these angles.

I would like to bring it to your notice because it is being projected throughout the country that people who support electoral reforms, support the concept of identity cards and those who do not support electoral reforms are opposed to issuance of identity cards also. I would

like to say that we are not against issuance of identity cards but this problem should be dealt with in view of the practical problems involved in it.

The Central Government is yet to give its opinion on this question. I feel that the Central Government is taking it very lightly and wishes to stage a proxy-war against the Election Commission. It knows that others would raise this question and create an atmosphere conducive enough for the Government to wage its proxy-war. The Government does not want to solve the problem.

Lastly, I would like to say that I was forced to say it because the present Election Commissioner had put several proposals before the hon'ble Prime Minister regarding electoral reforms and he had sent copies of those proposals to each Member of Parliament. It has been submitted as a suggestion alongwith a letter of Deputy Election Commissioner. All the parties were agreed on the comprehensive suggestions made by Dinesh Goswami Committee regarding electoral reforms.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER: You have said that thing. You need not repeat that point. You should take your seat now.

[Translation]

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: A Bill has also been introduced in Rajya Sabha on that basis but the Government has neither formed any opinion nor made any decision. As a result thereof the case is still awaiting a decision. The case has been blown out of proportions in such a way as if someone talks about electoral reforms, it is taken as if he is against the

idea of issuing identity cards. Such type of situation is being created by middle class. It is apparent from daily newspapers.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER: You made the point and now you are just repeating them. You do not have confidence in your words.

[Translation]

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: One person is delivering speech everywhere. It seems that political parties are not honest regarding electoral reforms. I seek your permission to express my views.

MR. SPEAKER: You please sit down. Let others be allowed to speak.

SHRI NITISH KUMAR: I wish to express my agony before you. Why all politicians are being defamed. Every one in politics is being defamed. A way out must be searched for that. Sir, you should direct the Government to express its opinion in this regard at an earliest and after consulting all the politicians we should be informed about the reaction on the letter of Election Commissioner which was addressed to all M. Ps.

SHRI PIUS TIRKEY (Alipurduars): Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to submit that if it is not possible to issue identity cards to all, at least these must be issued to the permanent residents of Border areas. The main reason behind it is that a sizeable number of infiltrators from Pakistan and Bangladesh have come to India and many of them have even reached upto Delhi. Owing to the non availability of identity cards with the people of border areas, we can not check

[Shri Pius Tirkey]

the inflow of these infiltrators coming to India. Therefore, the Government should take a decision in this regard immediately and should implement it.

SHRIMATI PRATIBHA DEVISINGH PATIL (Amravati): Mr. Speaker, Sir, my opinion is that it should be discussed once for all whether identity cards should be issued or not as per democratic norms. It should be discussed with the Chief Ministers of different States and leaders of different political parties. It should be decided what are the advantages and disadvantages of this scheme. What is the policy of democracy? What is practicable and what is impracticable? There should be a full discussion on it and then it should be decided whether identity cards should be issued or not. Otherwise it will become a political issue. It would be good if we may take any decision after discussing this matter.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER: Is the Government interested in responding in any manner to this?

SHRI VIDYACHARAN SHUKLA: Sir, the Government has taken the initiative. A meeting of the Chief Minister was specially convened to discuss this matter. Various points of view were presented in that meeting. A due notice has been taken of the viewpoints expressed by the Chief Ministers. This matter has also been informally discussed between the Government and the leaders of the opposition.

We will certainly attach great importance to this matter so that it can be sorted out in a proper and amicable manner.

Really, the entire question revolves around the availability of resources to do it within a timeframe that has been set up. Otherwise, on the question of having identity cards, I do not think, there should be any difference of opinion amongst the political parties and people who are taking part in the election matter. There are only two matters:

- (a) whether it could be done within the timeframe that has been suggested; and
- (b) whether the resources can be mobilised within that time-limit.

[Translation]

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN: It should also be added as to how this card should be maintained and if any voter loses his identity card, will he have the right to exercise his franchise? All these points should also be decided.

[English]

SHRI VIDYACHARAN SHUKLA: There are many other related points, as Shri Paswan has suggested. (Interruptions) We are seized of the matter. We shall do whatever we can.

[Translation]

SHRI LAL K. ADVANI (Gandhi Nagar): Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issue of identity cards is the main issue of the discussion held just now. It was the opinion of almost every member that a unanimous decision should be taken by the Government. After all in respect of electoral reforms, the Dinesh Goswamy Committee was set up in 1990. Hon.

members from all parties including Shri Shakdhar, the former Chief Election Commissioner were the members of that Committee. A bill was introduced in the House after reaching a consensus. But there is no progress in this regard. Thereafter the Election Commissioner had himself put up several suggestions. The Government should make up its mind on the basis of those two documents. My humble submission is that the Government should do whatsoever it likes in respect of Electoral reforms during the current Budget session.

[English]

SHRI UMRAO SINGH (Jalandhar): I would like to raise the issue of non-resident Indians. As we have discussed in the question hour, there are lot of grievances. We have lakhs of Indians in foreign countries. In the case of identity cards, there will be a very big difficulty in the case of Indians who are abroad. They are earning foreign exchange worth crores of rupees and remitting it to India. So, their interests should also be taken into account while deciding this factor.

MR. SPEAKER: I think, the House has expressed its views very clearly. There is a demand from all sides that the electoral reforms should be considered and what should be done, should be decided.

The proposal of identity cards appears to be good. But there are certain real practical difficulties. How we overcome those real practical difficulties has to be decided by all concerned. It appears that the Members have desired that all concerned should put their heads together and consider this proposal and

take an appropriate decision in the matter. I think this is quite legitimate.

12.40 hrs.

PAPERS LAID ON THE TABLE

**Memorandum of understanding
between the National Hydroelectric
Power Corporation Ltd. and
Department of Power for 1993-94 etc.**

[English]

THE MINISTER OF POWER (SHRI N.K.P.SALVE): I beg to lay on the Table a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding (Hindi and English versions) between the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation Limited and the Department of Power for the year 1993-94.

[Placed in Library. See No. LT 5387/94]

**Review on the working of and Annual
Report of the Central Inland Water
Transport Corporation Ltd. Calcutta for
the year 1992-93 and a Statement
showing reasons for delay in laying
these papers etc.**

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI JAGDISH TYTLER): I beg to lay on the Table—

- (1) A copy each of the following papers (Hindi and English version) under sub-section (1)