

11.15 hrs.

STATEMENT RE. ASSAM

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI P. C. SETHI): The recent happenings in Assam in the last few days have caused us deep anguish. Yesterday, I visited a few of the worst affected areas. The brutality and the horror perpetrated on the innocent people, including children and large scale arson and destruction of properties is difficult to describe. The Prime Minister herself is visiting some of the affected places today.

The immediate task before us is to render all possible assistance in this hour of distress to the affected families. This is being attended to with utmost expedition.

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE (New Delhi): No.

SHRI P. C. SETHI: Medical relief and other supplies have been rushed. Government will do whatever is required for their relief and rehabilitation.

The prolonged agitation... (*Interruptions*).

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE: Sir, will you allow the Home Minister to mislead the House? There is a shortage of life saving drugs in Assam, and the people are dying because of it.

SHRI P. C. SETHI: We have rushed them. I have said so.

The prolonged agitation in Assam has generated an atmosphere of bitterness and distrust and disturbed harmony amongst different sections and groups. It is unfortunate that ethnic and communal passions have been unleashed in the wake of the controversies which were triggered off since the agitation.

(*Interruptions*)

One immediate provocation for this holocaust is reported to be the resentment of some sections of the people against those who wish to exercise their democratic right of franchise. It is well-known that certain elements have opposed the holding of elections and resorted to all means to frustrate the process. I deeply regret that large number of lives have been lost... (*Interruptions*).

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE: How many?

SHRI P. C. SETHI:...though not all of them have been directly connected with the elections. It is unfortunate that some political parties have chosen to lend support to these elements (*Interruptions*) and have not even condemned the violence.

Hon. Members are aware that Government have spared no effort to find a satisfactory solution of the vexed problem of foreigners in Assam. In this endeavour, apart from consultation with the Opposition leaders from time to time, seven rounds of tripartite talks have been held. When the last round of tripartite talks in January 1983 failed to resolve the deadlock, Prime Minister met the leaders of Opposition on 5th January 1983 and apprised them of the position. In the absence of unanimity amongst the Opposition parties regarding extension of President's rule through an amendment of the Constitution, the only alternative for extending President's rule which was to end by 18th March 1983, was by taking recourse to clause (5) of Article 356 of the Constitution. Government was not in favour of such a step.

[Shri P. C. Sethi

Immediately after the announcement of elections by the Election Commission, a prolonged, intensified and militant programme of agitation was launched by the ASSU and AAGSP. All kinds of intimidatory tactics were adopted and a climate of terror was sought to be created by resorting to violence. Candidates, their supporters, family members, party offices and party workers became the target of attack. One candidate, Shri Satya Narain Ram for the Assembly constituency and in another incident, the proposer of a candidate were brutally killed. In a few cases, family members of the candidates were kidnapped and thrown at the candidates and their residences. Despite the desperate attempts by the agitators and their supporters to thwart the process of filing of nominations, some 600 candidates filed their nominations for the Assembly and the Lok Sabha seats.

It is to be deeply regretted that even thereafter determined efforts were made to frustrate poll in every possible manner. In the period between the nominations and the poll large scale arson was resorted to by miscreants to disrupt communications by destroying bridges, sabotage of railway tracks and telephone lines. At some places, the mobs attacked police parties/outposts/polling booths with lethal weapons including firearms. The police had to resort to firing to disperse these mobs.

It is to the credit of our people and a measure of their courage that in spite of all odds, they came forward to exer-

cise their basic right and demonstrated that they have abiding faith in the democratic values.

Since the agitation in 1979 there has been considerable escalation in violence and a spurt in extremists activities. Government have shown utmost pertinence and restraint in dealing with the situation in spite of grave provocations. Government have strained every resource and made elaborate law and order arrangements to ensure free and fair conduct of the poll. The tragic and reprehensible incidents witnessed in Assam which have caused deep anguish deserve to be condemned by all sections of the House as violence has no place in democracy.

Government have always believed that issues may be resolved through discussion and nothing should be done to disturb peace. It is hoped that after a representative Government has taken office, the development of the State will be accelerated and the many pressing problems of the people of Assam will be satisfactorily solved. The Central Government on their part would continue efforts in finding an amicable solution to the problem of foreign nationals.

In the end, I seek cooperation of all members whatever their views or policies in promoting harmony and amity amongst different communities/groups living in Assam, what is needed now is not acrimony but a healing touch. I am sure all Members of the House will join me in expressing our anguish at what has happened and in conveying our deepfelt sympathies to the victims of senseless violence.