

13.20 hrs.

MATTERS UNDER RULE 377

(i) GRIEVANCES OF EMPLOYEES OF BORDER ROADS ORGANISATION.

SHRI MUKUNDA MANDAL (Mathurapur): The employees of the Border Road Organisation are supposedly governed by the Central Civil Service Rules. But they are also simultaneously held to be army personnel.

The BRO employees are subjected to various forms of discrimination. For example, when working in Bhutan, Army Personnel are given 'foreign allowance' but not these employees.

The employees of the BRO are doubly handicapped. They have to suffer the injustices of military 'justice', and at the same time they do not get any of the privileges that military personnel get. When they are in the forward areas the military authorities are forced to supply them with rations, since there is no alternative source of supply. But the rations supplied to these employees are of a poorer quality than what the army gets. By comparison MES employees in forward areas get full military facilities.

The pay scales of these employees are the same as those of the CPWD. But the employees have lost some amount after the last Pay Commission. While the scales were increased, the special compensatory allowance (SCA) for high-altitude was reduced, from 33 per cent (Nagaland) and 50 per cent (Ladakh) to 30 per cent and 35 per cent respectively.

In fact, the name Border Roads Organisation is a misnomer. The department has constructed roads which are certainly not 'border' roads, e.g. Kudremukh in Orissa. They have also constructed roads in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Besides

constructing roads that are not border roads, the department has also constructed building like India House in Bhutan.

These employees have to work in very difficult conditions. They work at high altitudes in extreme weather. Consequently, the BRO has extremely high accident rates. As one of their petitions to the Prime Minister puts it if memorial stones for the fatal casualties suffered by employees of BRO were placed on the roads they have constructed, then each milestone would be such a memorial stone.

Despite such adverse conditions, barrack-room discipline and total lack of rights, the employees have nevertheless organised themselves under the banner of the All India Border Roads Employees Association. But every steps of struggle has met with severe repression. In December 1979 when the employees at Tezpur had gathered to discuss their problems, the speakers at the meeting were arrested on the spot. The next day all the employees gathered to stage a dharna in front of the Chief Engineer's Office. Instead of listening to their grievances, the Chief Engineer called in the military police and arrested about 700 of the 1,000 employees. The whereabouts of many of them are still not known. So far 23 have been court-martialled and given sentences of 6 months to 1 year. One person is still on trial.

I call upon the government to make proper enquiries and ensure justice to the employees and allow the same democratic rights to these employees as are available to other government employees, including the right to form an association.

(ii) SETTING UP OF THE COCONUT BOARD IN KERALA STATE.

SHRI SKARIAH THOMAS (Kottayam): The Government of India, Ministry of Agriculture, has decided to set up a Coconut Board on lines of Rubber Board and Cardamom

[Shri Skariah Thomas]

Board for the development of coconut cultivation in the country. More than 80 per cent of the coconut is produced in Kerala. It is the first State to raise the demand for the constitution of a statutory coconut Board. Kerala's interest in the development of coconut cultivation is due to several reasons. Firstly, coconut is growing in small plots of land and the coconut cultivation has a direct bearing on the life of the common man in Kerala. Kerala's economy depends to a very large extent on the price of coconut and its oil.

Secondly, coconut disease is prevalent in 8 out of 11 districts in Kerala. Large scale replanting with the disease-resistant seedlings is very essential. The Kerala Government has declared 9 districts as disease-affected areas and started an intensive anti-disease spraying campaign. But the spraying is too costly for the State to bear the whole burden. The Government of Kerala has approached the Centre for liberal grants to carry out anti-disease operations. The decision of the Centre in this respect is not known.

Kerala has demanded that the coconut Board be set up somewhere in the State, because of the fact that the Board with its headquarters located in Kerala, will be in a better position to help the majority of coconut growers.

Until recently, Kerala was hopeful of getting the headquarters of the Board set up in the State. But, certain recent developments have created a suspicion that like many other central projects which have been promised but never given, the coconut Board may also be lost to Kerala.

Therefore, I earnestly request the government to help the Kerala Government with liberal assistance and set up the headquarters of the proposed coconut Board in Kerala.

(iii) NEED FOR RELIEF MEASURES TO THE FLOOD AFFECTED PEOPLE OF KARNATAKA STATE.

SHRI R. Y. GHORPADE (Bellary): The State of Karnataka is in the grip of massive floods affecting seven districts, namely, South Kanara, North Kanara, Shimoga, Hassan, Mysore, Dharwar and Belgaum. Such largescale floods have never been experienced in Karnataka before. The state government with its limited resources has swung into operation and has taken the assistance of the Army to rescue hundreds of people from marooned villages. The exact damage has not been assessed since the floods have not yet receded completely and the rains have also not abated. Further sea erosion has also affected hundreds of villages along the 3000 km coastline of that state.

Hence, I appeal in the name of the people of Karnataka that the Centre should send immediately a team to assess the extent of damages and help the government of Karnataka with necessary financial assistance and guidance. I should like the government of India to sanction immediately substantial amount, as the central team will take some time to report. The relief measures cannot await the report of the central team. The money advanced can be later adjusted.

13.27 hrs.

DEMANDS FOR GRANTS (GENERAL), 1980-81—Contd.

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS—
Contd.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: The House will now take up further discussion of the demands for grants of the Ministry of External Affairs. Balance of time available for the Ministry of External Affairs is three hours. The hon. Minister may reply around 3.30 p.m.

SHRI M. RAM GOPAL REDDY (Nizamabad): What about my 377? It has been admitted.