

14.02 hrs.

### COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES

#### FIFTEENTH REPORT

DR. HENRY AUSTIN (Ernakulam): Sir, I beg to present the Fifteenth Report of the Committee of Privileges.

### COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS

#### TWENTY-SECOND REPORT AND MINUTES

SHRI SHIVNATH SINGH (Jhunjhunu): Sir, I beg to present the following Report and Minutes of the Committee on Petitions:—

(1) Twenty-second Report of the Committee; and

(2) Minutes of Fifty-second to Fifty-seventh sittings of the Committee.

### COMMITTEE ON SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION

#### SIXTEENTH REPORT

SHRI M. S. SANJEEVI RAO (Kakinada): Sir, I beg to present the Sixteenth Report of the Committee on Subordinate Legislation.

### RAILWAY CONVENTION COMMITTEE

#### SEVENTH REPORT

SHRI VIRBHADRA SINGH (Mandi): Sir, I beg to present the Seventh Report of the Railway Convention Committee on Action Taken by Government on the recommendations contained in their Fifth Report

14.05 hrs.

### STATEMENT RE: RELIGIOUS AND CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS OF SIKH COMMUNITY

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS AND DEPARTMENT OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRI OM MEHTA): Government deeply regret that an agitational atmosphere is sought to be created....

MR. SPEAKER: You can lay it on the Table of the House.

SHRI OM MEHTA: Sir, with your permission I beg to lay the statement on the Table of the House.

#### Statement.

Government deeply regret that an agitational atmosphere is sought to be created on the ground of alleged Government interference in religious affairs of the Sikh community. Government has never interfered, and do not intend to interfere, with the religious affairs of the Sikh community or any other community. On the other hand, the constitutional safeguards and protections ensured to all religions have been consistently upheld and supported by the Government.

Recently, a number of Members of Parliament and other leaders of Sikh opinion met the Prime Minister and expressed their misgivings about certain matters. The first of these related to a demand that Sikh religious and charitable trusts as well as Gurdwaras should be exempted

from the obligation to file the prescribed return to Income-tax authorities. The Prime Minister explained that, subject to certain conditions, all religious and charitable trusts are already exempted from Income-tax liability. The returns, which they are required to furnish to the Income-tax authorities, are merely intended to ensure that the conditions under which the exemption from tax liability has been granted, are duly fulfilled.

Even so, the suggestion made for exempting such trusts and gurdwaras from the present obligation to file prescribed returns to the Income-tax authorities could be further gone into when the relevant Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill, which is already before Parliament, comes up for consideration.

The second point brought to the notice of the Prime Minister was that the Haryana Land Ceilings Act does not exempt the land holdings of Gurdwaras are not the only religion. I may like to mention that Gurdwaras are not the only religious institutions, which are under the purview of the Haryana Land Ceilings Act. Similar institutions of other religious denominations are also similarly placed. The national guidelines for land ceiling provide that exemption from the provisions of the law in favour of religious and charitable institutions could be made by the State Legislatures taking into

account relevant local conditions. Representations made on behalf of Gurdwaras, as well as other similar institutions, have been brought to the notice of the Government of Haryana, who are willing to consider the matter sympathetically.

The third point which came up for discussion with the Prime Minister related to the future set-up of the S.G.P.C. Consequently upon the re-organization of Punjab, Government were faced with complex matters relating to the set-up of the S.G.P.C. as also the manner in which local sikhs could have a sense of participation in the management of the local gurdwaras.

In the absence of any recently elected body representative of Sikh opinion, it has not been possible to have any meaningful exchange of views. Government, therefore, are of the view that arrangements should be made to hold elections to the S.G.P.C. Action is being initiated in this behalf, and the State Governments concerned are being advised accordingly. Other questions can be considered after a new S.G.P.C. comes into existence.

As I had stated earlier, there has not been, nor will there be, any interference in the religious affairs of any community. I would make an earnest appeal, through you and this house, that when more pressing problems are facing the country, it would not be in the national interest to create any agitational atmosphere—particularly, in matters which are dear to the sentiments of different sections of the community. Apprehensions regarding interference or discrimination are totally unfounded.