

still very much there. In spite of so much talk about socialism, do we not hear of the recurring Bechtel scandals? Do we not know how the Takru Commission is being disabled from proper discharge of its task by the deliberate bargeing by high-ups in the the Ministries, in fact, in more than one Ministry?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member may continue his speech on the next occasion.

17.30 hrs.

HALF AN HOUR DISCUSSION

PRIME MINISTER'S SURVEY OF HOOGLHY AND SUNDERBAN AREAS IN WEST BENGAL

SHRI SAMAR GUHA (Contai): I am raising this debate on the Prime Minister's survey of Hooghly and Sunderban area (west block). The Prime Minister visited this area on 23rd and 24th January 1973. 23rd January was the birthday of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. On 23rd there was an international seminar on Netaji also. We made a request to the Prime Minister to open that seminar and also attend the function at Netaji Bhavan on 23rd January. She declined. She wrote a nice letter to me in which she said that she preferred to visit the Sunderban area and the Hooghly river to look into its developmental programme. The people of West Bengal did not mind in the because they thought that her visit to that scenic area of estuarial Bengal was not a more pleasure trip but was a trip with a positive purpose for tackling the problem of the development of the Sunderbans area and also the navigability of the river Hooghly.

In 1926, Pandit Motilal Nehru was the only other distinguished personality of India outside Bengal to visit the Sunderbans area. He was so much charmed with that area that he wrote to a friend referring to the splendourous beauty of that area that 'this

land of beauty really deserved the name Sunderban'. To the poetic mind, Sunderban has a grandeur and beauty which really inspired many good poems. But in reality, Sunderbans is a land of distress, misery, object poverty and extreme backwardness. Yet this area has plenty of natural resources and immense potentiality of development, development of food development of fish, levelopment of animal husbandry, development of immense quantities of vegetables, jute, cotton, cashew nuts, coconuts and many other commodities.

West Bengal has a marginal deficit in food production. If food cultivation could be intensified in the Suderbans area, food production only from that area can very largely make up the food deficit of West Bengal.

But the problem there is the salinity of water. Being a oastal region, the salinity of water creates a trouble and a problem for intensive cultivation. The West Bengal Government has set up a Dutch expert committee to go into the problem as to how make the land free of salinity. That committee prepared a project called Delta Project of the Sunderban area. They had suggested a number of embankments, dikes, so that this area could be protected from the salinity of the sea water. With the embankements, with small and giant sluices, salinity could be controlled and a very big area could be brought under intensive cultivation.

As I have already said, if that can be brought under cultivation—there is plenty of sweet water—and if water spply can be assured, the Sunderbans alone can make up very largely the deficit in food production in West Bengal.

Now, leaving aside the question of jute which can be produced in some other areas also, there is a new potentiality for the production of cotton in that area. You know that cotton is a much-wanted commodity in West Bengal. That also can be developed.

[Shri Samar Guha]

Cashewnut production can also be developed there; also coconut. Over and above these, there is a possibility of setting up a paper pulp industry, because there is a forest area and there are plenty of materials for the production of paper pulp there.

Then, let me refer to fish production. The Sudarban area also produces an immense quantity of fish. But for want of communication facilities, what happens? The poor fishermen catch the fish but there is no ice-storage and there is no communication. The result is that what the wholesale dealer gets it at Re. 1 per kilo, sells that fish in the Calcutta market at Rs. 10 to Rs. 15 per kilo. Four types of fish cultivation are possible there: sweet water fish, brackish water fish, coastal fishing and deepsea fishing. There are the possibilities. You know how hungry the people of West Bengal, Orissa and Assam are for fish

SHRI BHAGWAT JHA AZAD
(Bhagalpur): Also Bihar.

SHRI SAMAR GUHA: All right; it is very good news. You know, Sir, that the protein content in our food is so low that fish is the only source or the main source of protein for the people of eastern region of India. So, fish cultivation or pisciculture can be developed immensely there and the requirements of the metropolitan city of Calcutta—not only that but the requirements of the industrial areas of West Bengal—can be met adequately from the Sunderbans. There is no necessity of getting fish from Bangladesh if you can set up the fish production centres in the Sunderban area. Also, there is immense possibility of developing animal husbandry in that area.

As I said, the area is full of scenic beauty, and is charming. Some may go to Venice, but the natural beauty, the scenic beauty, the forest beauty and the water beauty of the Sunderbans is unique. And then there is the Royal Bengal tiger. You know that is the only area where there is a pos-

sibility of developing a tourist centre. The tourist industry can fetch foreign exchange. It is possible in the Sunderban area to have something like a national Park, or some kind of a sanctuary where the Royal Bengal tigers can be seen. We have passed recently a Bill in this House for the preservation of the wild lives. You know that in the rainy season, the tigers have to live on the tree because the whole island gets flooded. If there are facilities provided there and they are protected, the area can be converted into a very nice, wonderful sanctuary which can attract international tourists.

I forgot to mention the production of prawn in the Sunderbans. It has been accepted all over the world that the Sunderbans prawn has the best taste, and it can also earn foreign exchange. There is the Sagar Dwip in the Sunderbans, to which over 10 lakhs of people come from all over India, on the Paush Sankranti day. But unfortunately, the pilgrims find many difficulties there, because no attention has been paid for making proper arrangements, and there are no communication facilities.

If we want to develop Sunderban area attention should be given to communications. Sometime back some feasibility survey was made of the Hasnabad-Canning Barasat railway. It appears that the results of the survey were encouraging. I do not know whether that report has been placed before the House. But it is essential to have that railway to develop the Sunderban area. There is also the question of road transport. In riverine areas the development of some inland water transport such as steam launch etc., is also necessary.

These West Bengal Government have proposed a Rs. 85 crores project for the development of the Sunderban area. But it is not in a position to provide this amount from its meagre resources. It is not possible without the help of the Central Government. Recently the Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India visited that area and he saw good prospects in

financing water transport vessels, fishing, cold storage projects, power tillers, tractors, custom service units, crop and medium term lands.

If we have to develop Sunderban we have to set up a Sunderban Development Authority. I saw a report in some paper yesterday or today that the Government of West Bengal has set apart Rs. 5 lakhs for this purpose. This amount is ridiculous. It is like a drop of water in the ocean.

The Prime Minister has cruised in the estuarian part of river Hooghly also. River Hooghly is the lifeline for Calcutta port which handles 45 per cent of our export trade and nearly 33 per cent of our import trade and serves as the economic grid of the eastern region of India on the bank of the Hooghly Haldia complex, with oil refinery ship building. Soda ash industry etc. The fate of the Calcutta port depends upon the navigability of river Hooghly. The problem of navigability of Hooghly in turn depends upon two factors; one is how quickly we can complete the Farakka Barrage. A major part of this work has been completed but the feeder canal remains. The Irrigation Minister, hon. Dr. K. L. Rao assured the House that the time schedule would be maintained for the excavation of the feeder canal. I want to know whether that time schedule will be maintained or not.

Constant dredging is necessary for maintaining the navigability of Hooghly. Calcutta port has the efficiency to do this but it has not got the equipment or the resources. I conclude by saying that Prime Minister's visit raised high hopes in West Bengal that the problems of the Sunderbans and the navigability problem of Hooghly would be looked into by the Prime Minister herself, and also by the Planning Minister and by the Government of India. I hope that the expectation that has been raised by the Prime Minister's visit to that estuarian area of Bengal will not be in vain but will be fulfilled.

SHRI SAKTI KUMAR SARKAR (Joynagar): Mr. Chairman, I am thankful to you for allowing me to put this question. To our great pleasure, our beloved Prime Minister, and leader made a visit to Sunderbans to have an on the spot study of the backwardness of the region. It is also seen from the newspapers that the West Bengal Government has already formed a broad headed by a Minister for this purpose.

In view of the removal of backwardness of Sunderbans, the 24 Parganas District deserves political division geographically immediately for better administration. The population of 24 Parganas District is more than 80 lakhs and its division is essential for better administration with a declaration that it is a backward region and with the assurance of subsidy meant for industrialisation and above all an economic planning from the Centre with centrally sponsored schemes and not the planning as envisaged by the State Government as is unrealistic and uneconomical. The ICAR, New Delhi submitted a detailed report for such economic planning considering its resources, ecology and capability about six months back but no fund is allocated till today for this scheme, through approved. There is a preposal—Sunderbans Delta Project—hanging for years after years.

May I know from the Government whether they will consider the Delta Project for Sunderbans development and also formulate an economic planning as revealed by the study report of ICAR? I would also like to know the details of the scheme of development of Sunderbans area as submitted by the West Bengal Government and what other schemes or plans they are considering.

SHRI SAMAR GUHA: It will give employment potentiality of about 60,000 man years if you develop that area.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING (SHRI MOHAN DHARIA): Sir, I am thankful to the hon. members for giving

[Shri Samar Guha]

this opportunity to Government to clarify two vital issues about Sunderbans area. I do appreciate the feelings of the hon. members. It is a lovely area which has inspired many poets. I can assure the House that various potentialities of Sunderbans area have also inspired the Planning Commission to come out with some specific programmes and we have already requested the West Bengal Government to act accordingly.

A very vital question has been put by Mr. Sarkar regarding the political or administrative division of Sunderbans as a separate district. At present it is part of 24 Parganas District. Because of the various criteria which are made applicable to the district as a whole, it has not been possible for Sunderbans area to take advantages of various schemes meant for concessional finance, 10 per cent subsidy etc. In our discussions, we have suggested to the West Bengal Government to consider the possibility of having Sunderbans as a separate district. No sooner this decision is taken by the West Bengal Government and we receive the necessary data, I can assure the House that we shall immediately take up the matter and on the basis of the data that will be available, it will be our endeavour to see that Sunderbans is declared as an industrially backward area for purpose of concessional finance. It will help to a great extent and I am sure the West Bengal Government will act in that direction.

There are many problems and there is no time for me to go into all the details. But if we want these areas to develop the area of development planning is very much necessary. The West Bengal Government has already taken action, as suggested by the hon. Member. I can again assure the House as we have indicated in the Fifth Plan approach document, the Government will strive for the development of all the backward areas and

particularly of Sunderbans, because I know from my personal knowledge that is a fairly wide area, having tremendous potential. It is nearly a district, having an area of about 4,000 sq. miles and a population of 20 lakhs. So, naturally, it is by itself a district. In view of the various suggestions that are already made here, I may assure the House that the Planning Commission has already taken up the matter with West Bengal Government and we shall, in consultation with the West Bengal Government, come out with an area development programme. No sooner the State Government takes a lead, all possible co-operation and all possible help to the extent possible will be given for the development of the Sunderbans. In fact, I have myself discussed it with the Planning Board. My senior colleague, Shri Dhar, could not be present here because he is not keeping fit. I wanted to mention it earlier because Shri Mukerjee mentioned it we have taken up this matter with the Chief Minister and the West Bengal Planning Board.

One more point regarding the minimum needs programme. Under the Fifth Plan programme, as I have stated in the House the other day, we have requested the State Governments to identify all the villages where there is no drinking water, schools communications or roads or medical facilities. This amount of Rs. 3,300 crores we would like to invest is mainly meant for such areas and I have no doubt that enough advantage will go to the Sunderban areas.

Here I would like to have all possible co-operation from the hon. members. Because, it is not enough if the potentials are there. If the potentialities are to be properly exploited, naturally the involvement of the people and the representatives of the people is necessary. Without their initiative and their leadership it will never be possible. I would request hon. Members to provide that leadership. The Government, on their part, will come

forward with all possible co-operation, including the provision of drinking water and other facilities that are needed.

As I sail in the beginning, no sooner the bifurcation of this district of Sunderbans from the present 24 Parganas takes place and no sooner it is identified as an industrially backward area, all possible concessional finance would be available. Hon. Members can rest assured that if a proper integrated area development programme is prepared by the West Bengal Government, funds will not be a constraint.

SHRI KRISHNA CHANDRA HALDER (Ausgram): As Sunderbans is a backward region, I would request the hon. Member to develop it as a Centrally sponsored scheme.

SHRI MOHAN DHARIA: While sitting here we have to look at the whole of the country. Here are several areas which are backward areas. Naturally, I cannot say that I will give priority only to Sunderbans. In the whole country, wherever there are more backward areas, we have been requesting the State Government to prepare area development programmes, and all possible emphasis and priority will be given to such areas all over the country which are called most backward. So,

is not only a question of Sunderbans. While sitting over here, we have to plan for the whole of the country, we have to take care of the whole country. You would kindly appreciate that a Minister in the Ministry of Planning, it would be unfair on my part to take care of only one district or one area. I will have to take care of the whole country. A balanced look will have to be taken. But I do concede here that... (Interruption).

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let him have his say. That is the difficulty. If I allow one Member, then every time the Minister is interrupted.

SHRI MOHAN DHARIA: As I have said here, even if it is not divided, we have requested the West Bengal Gov-

ernment to create the necessary Authority and also to prepare the programme. But I say, in order to facilitate from here, it will be easier and that is why I have made the suggestion.

Now, coming to the problem of Hooghly, I say, we have taken action in three directions. One is the intensive dredging programme; the second is the execution of the river training works and the third is the execution of the Farakka Barrage project. This House will be happy to know that since 1964-65 to 1971-72, for the dredging purposes we have spent Rs. 36.72 crores and nearly 8.4 million tonnes of dredging has been done in that area. There are six dredgers at present and one more, an asturian dredger, costing about Rs. 10 crores has been ordered and it is expected to be in service from July, 1974.

As regards the river training works, the House may be aware that the Akra Spur (bund) scheme, the Fulda point river training scheme and the Bhagirathi Hooghly works have been taken up by the Government. The sum of Rs. 8 crores will be spent in the course of the Fourth Plan but the remaining amount will not be allowed to lapse and it will be spent during the next plan period.

I am aware that a bit delay has been caused. But there were many reasons for that. Now, the whole work has been accelerated. So far as the Farakka Barrage project is concerned, as Prof Samar Guha said, nearly the whole of the work was completed by June, 1971. It is true that some more work yet remains to be done. I can assure the House that by December, 1973, the whole of the work will be completed and it will be possible for us to flow the water from the Ganges through the canal by early 1974. It is the assurance that is being given to the House because we are aware that if this constant flow and essential supplies of water are not kept, naturally, silt accumulates and various barriers are created. (Interru-

[Shri Mohan Dharja] ption) the question is not of 40,000 cusecs of water, or whatever it is but the question is that the navigability throughout the year should be sustained. Whatever water is required, that will be provided. All possible experiments are being done even today and the Central Water and Power Research Station at Poona is kept busy for the purpose. An expert advice is being taken. This House can rest assured that whatever water is required for keeping the navigability of the channel will be provided.

18.00 hrs.

There should not be doubt in the minds of any hon. Member; whether it is 40 000 cusecs or 30,000 cusecs or 50,000 cusecs—I will not go into the details—whatever water is required, it will have to be provided and that care will be taken.

I will not take more time of the House. I can assure the hon. members that the importance of Calcutta Harbour, Calcutta Port, is well recognised and the Government is well aware of it. Both the Central Government and the State Government of West Bengal will strive hard in order to maintain that importance and navigability, and both the Governments will take due care for the development of the backward areas of Sunderban.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The House stands adjourned to meet again on Monday, March 5, 1973, at 11.00 a.m.

18.02 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Monday, March 5, 1973/Phalguna 14, 1894 (Saka).

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