

12.04 hrs.

**CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER  
OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**REPORTED DEATH OF SEVERAL PERSONS IN  
SURYAPET TOWN IN ANDHRA PRADESH  
DUE TO LIQUOR POISONING**

**SHRI M. RAM GOPAL REDDY** (Nizamabad): Sir, I call the attention of the Minister of Home Affairs to the following matter of urgent public importance and I request that he may make a statement thereon.

"The reported death of several persons in Suryapet town in Andhra Pradesh due to liquor poisoning."

**AN HON. MEMBER:** The statement has not been circulated.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The statement has not been circulated.

**THE MINISTER OF STATE IN  
THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS** (SHRI K. C. PANT): I realise that the statement has not been circulated. I was on the telephone till I came to the House. I was trying to get the latest facts. That is the only reason. Otherwise, I was myself very anxious to get the statement circulated.

I am sorry to inform this House that a number of persons have lost their lives as a result of liquor poisoning in Suryapet in Andhra Pradesh. The facts of the case as available to the Government of India are that on the 15th of February, 1973 one Rajmallu, excise contractor of Suryapet obtained supplies of Government arak from Government Godown. It is suspected that illicit liquor locally known as Gudamba was procured and mixed with arak for distribution to sub-dealers in the town and in the neighbouring villages. As a result of consumption of this mixture 516 persons reported for treatment at hospitals. 104 persons were admitted in Government hospitals, out of whom 39 died.

Total number of deaths is reported to be 72.

Immediate action was taken to provide relief to the persons taken ill. Doctors, medicines etc. were rushed to Suryapet from Nalgonda and Hyderabad. The Director of Medical and Health Services and the District Medical Officer supervised the medical relief. The Collector and the Superintendent of Police and the Excise Commissioner visited the place. Enquiries were conducted into the source of supply of contaminated arak. All the arak shops have been sealed and samples have been drawn from these shops as also from Government depots for chemical analysis. A magisterial enquiry has been ordered. Six persons connected with the arak shops have so far been arrested and two excise officers have been suspended. Further investigations are in progress. The Adviser to the Governor of Andhra Pradesh who also visited Suryapet has ordered that the investigation should be conducted by a special police team. Government of India have also sent a senior police officer to make on-the-spot enquiries with particular reference to loopholes in the operation of the existing excise and laws. Assistance from the CBI is also being made available to the State Government. The postmortem examination has revealed the presence of methyl alcohol in the viscera.

The Government of Andhra Pradesh have issued orders for the payment of gratuitous relief at the rate of Rs. 500 each to the needy families of the deceased.

Two specialists from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, have left by air this morning to assist the State Health authorities in the investigation and treatment of the cases.

**SHRI M. RAM GOPAL REDDY:** I express my sorrow and sympathy for the people who have died after taking spurious liquor; this is not the first

[Shri Ram Gopal Reddy]

instance; from 1969 to this day four incidents have occurred and in each of them 50—100 persons died. A Committee was appointed Baweja committee—so that such things might not happen in future. I want to know whether their report had been circulated to the State Governments, whether the State Governments had taken any steps? My information is that people mix not only gudumba french varnish is also mixed up in liquor and people become blind. A Municipal Chairman who also contested in the mid-term elections for Parliament and lost only by a margin of 10,000 votes is also a victim of this spurious arak. . . . (Interruptions). Everybody is not in the fortunate position of being able to get foreign liquor. This is a serious matter. This liquor was supplied by Government departments and from one place to another the transport cost quoted by excise contractors is only one paisa per lorry load. What has been done by the Government to stop such things? For the last several years this is happening. I do not know when we are going to put a stop to it. Most of the people who take these killer drinks are poor people who work in fields and factories. If we go on killing our workmen like this a day may come when our country will be short of workmen. There is a tendency to drink and Government should supply pure alcohol. Every time it must be checked. In Andhra, excise contractors have become multi-millionaires. Whenever there is some election, they support some candidate or the other of their choice and dump 20 to 30 new vehicles. I have seen it myself. In the Andhra Assembly, I have pleaded that these contractors are becoming dangerously rich but unfortunately no action has been taken. For making liquor, they have got their own pumping sets and they mix in Toddy many injurious and poisonous materials. In this incident about 100 persons have been killed but every day one or two are dying without the notice of anybody. If Government is interested only in its excise income and does

not care for the lives of the poor people, Government will have to be held responsible for all this calamity. Whoever is responsible for this calamity must be charged under section 302 IPC and punished under that section. The Baweja Commission's report also may kindly be circulated to all MPs so that they may press for its implementation in their own States.

SHRI K. C. PANT: So far as Baweja Commission's report goes, various steps have been taken in Delhi because it was in relation to the tragic deaths in Delhi due to the drinking of spurious liquor that this commission was appointed. I do not want to go into all the details, but my hon. friend knows that so far as Delhi is concerned, a lot of steps have been taken. They reflect the sentiments expressed in the House when that matter came up here through a calling attention notice. Government has considered this matter in its wider implications and has issued certain guidelines to various State Governments. The Commission's report as such has not gone round but various guidelines have been issued. If my hon. friend is interested, I can cite a few of the guidelines to indicate to him the general features. For instance, reduction in alcoholic content of the intoxicants. Declaration of one or more days in every week and a specified number of days of special national or local significance every year as dry days. Curtailment of hours of sale. Adoption of a policy of local auction, i.e. liquor shops should be closed down if over two-thirds of the residents in a particular locality demand such closure. Reduction in the quantity of retail sale to an individual. Prohibition of the establishment of liquor or toddy shops in the vicinity of schools, colleges, highways, sacred places and congested areas, particularly those inhabited by labourers and poorer classes. Prohibition of advertisement of sale of liquor in newspapers or through other publicity media, etc. These guidelines have been circulated to all the State Governments.

SHRI HARI KISHORE SINGH (Pupri): With this tragedy in Andhra Pradesh, one more has been added to this series of tragedies and all of us here share the sentiments expressed by my hon. friend, the Minister of State for Home Affairs. The number of such cases is increasing day by day. In this particular case, it is reported, more than 1,000 persons have been affected and 71 persons have already died. It is further reported that a number of persons who were lorry drivers who were passing through that city have consumed this liquor. I do not know what their fate has been. It is mentioned that in this particular city 8 licensed shops have been closed. But the reports suggest that there are more than 20 unlicensed shops which are still in operation and which have not been closed. It is also mentioned that the entire quantity of liquor was supplied by one whole-saler. May I know whether the shop of that whole-saler has been closed and whether any arrests have been made? Further, was any dying declaration taken from any of the victims and, if so, whether that declaration shows any linkage between the liquor traders and other persons involved in the trade and the officials? Since the excise and police officials are also responsible for this, may I know what action they propose to take in this regard?

One point that arises in this connection is that light penalty is awarded in the case of detection of illicit distillation of liquor. It is either a fine or simple imprisonment up to six months. This is very light punishment and I would suggest that some serious punishment should be considered in this regard. Some, capital punishment, if possible or some other deterrent punishment should be considered. Then, have the government made any assessment of the extent of illicit distillation in the country? What steps have been taken for the prevention of this?

I understand from the Minister that a magisterial inquiry has been instituted. This is too serious a matter to be enquired into by an ordinary magistrate. I would suggest that the Government should appoint a high-power commission, as they did in the case of Delhi.

SHRI K. C. PANT: My hon. friend referred to a number of persons who were affected and he cited the figure of 1,000 which is given in one of the newspaper reports. I have already given the figures available with me. I do not think we need quarrel over the numbers. It is a large number.

Then he asked about the number of licensed and unlicensed shops. We will collect this information. Really speaking, these are matters into which the investigation team will go. Further the arrack shops have been closed down. This is the immediate step that has been taken. He has asked whether all the shops have been closed. My information is that it is so, including the one which is suspected to have supplied this liquor. Coming to arrests, six persons who were connected with this have so far been arrested. He wanted to know the action taken against the excise officials. Two excise officials, one inspector and one sub-inspector have been suspended.

Then a question was asked about the dying declarations of the affected people. There are many people who are alive after drinking liquor. So, the investigation team will have an opportunity of getting facts from them.

SHRI HARI KISHORE SINGH: My question was specific, whether any dying declarations were taken from them.

SHRI K. C. PANT: That would be very relevant if no body were alive after having consumed the liquor. There are people who are alive from whom statements will be taken.

He suggested two things, that punishment should be enhanced and that a high-power judicial inquiry com-

[Shri K. C. Pant]

mittee should be appointed. So far as the first goes, I am completely in sympathy with the suggestion and we will certainly examine this suggestion. So far as the second suggestion is concerned, there also I have no difficulty personally, and the Government will consider this suggestion also. The only point to be considered is whether we can hasten action to be taken, if we proceed with the magisterial inquiry committee or it will be better to have a high-power judicial inquiry committee. But we would have no objection to it in principle.

SHRI P. VENKATASUBBAIAH (Nandyal): Sir, I join with my friends in expressing my deep sympathy and agony at this grave tragedy that has taken place in a part of Andhra Pradesh. It is not a solitary incident. In the last several years, we have been witnessing such sordid and very grave events taking place because of consumption of spurious liquor.

I attribute this to the policy that has been adopted by the Central Government from time to time. We are not clear in our basic policy of enforcing prohibition. Whenever such incidents have occurred, the Central Government did not take care to see that the policy which is enshrined in the Directive Principles has not been adhered to and has not been implemented. The basic reason is that we believe in prohibition and we do not believe in prohibition. This is a sort of vacillating attitude that is resulting in the grave tragedy.

The hon. Minister in his statement has said that steps have been taken to see that the liquor that is supplied is less intoxicated. That is the very reason which is causing death to these people because a person wants to get a kick. He does not want to take this liquor. That is why illicit liquor shops have sprung up with the connivance of the officers. This has become a big racket. Apart from the Excise Inspectors, the contractors

are minting money. The illicit liquor shopkeepers are thriving with the connivance of the higher authorities and that has resulted in this type of deaths. The hon. Minister was saying that he has instructed the people to make the liquor less intoxicant. That is perhaps the indirect cause of these deaths. This point also must be gone into.

One should be very careful when we deal with such matters, specially in Andhra Pradesh, where several permits were being misused. The permits were given to take spirit. These were given on a nominal price. The people were minting money by taking these permits which they were misusing all along.

I want to know from the hon. Minister whether the Government should seriously think of not allowing contractors to enter into the bid and also run the shops. Why not the Government itself establish such liquor shops so that these contractors may not take advantage of the ignorance of the people. If they really want to serve the people better, they should think on these lines.

About the deterrent punishment, it is of no use unless the officers fully cooperate. Many false cases are being foisted on innocent people. The real culprits are never booked. That is the order of the day. That is an arrangement arrived at by the officers and also these people who are running the liquor shops.

The incidents are very graphically described in the newspaper report appearing in the Deccan Chronicle of 25th February, 1973—I quote:

“The Chronicle team was overwhelmed with grief as they went round the wards where they saw two men die within space of two minutes.

A hefty-looking middle-aged man still very much conscious saying. Death has come to my hands

There is nothing left', and in the next two minutes, he was dead. In the courtyard there were lying 21 bodies covered and as the policemen removed the covers, we saw faces some serene and some with stiff eyes, all dead."

Sir, this is the grim spectacle that has been there and it is not only these 500 or 600 people who consumed that liquor, many lorry drivers who passed that way also drank that liquor and I do not know how many people died in various places and how many villages are involved in this grim tragedy. I would like to ask the hon. Minister to take this as a warning and see that a comprehensive inquiry is made and certain guidelines are prescribed so that such tragedies may not occur from time to time.

SHRI K. C. PANT: My hon. friend has suggested that the Government should run the liquor shops. As a matter of fact, in Delhi, the Delhi Administration is running the country liquor shops after the last incident. So, this suggestion will certainly be examined.

As a matter of fact, we have advised Andhra Pradesh all the steps that we have taken here so that they may also examine whether these steps that were taken in Delhi may also be applied to Andhra Pradesh. But, the suggestion is hardly consistent with my hon. friend's basic complaint that prohibition is not being extended....

SHRI P. VENKATASUBBAIAH: Because you have given it up. There is no complaint about it.

SHRI K. C. PANT: Now, this is the kind of situation which can occur whether there is prohibition or not. When certain persons, out of avarice or greed, are playing with the lives of the people, this situation can occur even in a situation of prohibition as we have seen but there is no prohibition in Andhra Pradesh.

About the lowest intoxicating liquor, the instructions which I have read out as the guidelines we have already issued and I can only tell my hon. friend that several States are now adopting the policy of allowing the sale of liquor of lesser concentration. So, this is not something which is started by us here. But, as between strong liquor and weaker liquor we have said that weaker liquor may be sold as its effect may not be so harmful.

About lorry drivers, I cannot say anything beyond what I have said. I have already given the numbers.

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Mukhtiar Singh Malik—not here. Mr. Sezhiyan.

SHRI SEZHIYAN (Kumbakonam): I also join my colleagues in expressing my grief at the sad tragedy that has taken place in Andhra Pradesh. The hon. Minister has put the toll of lives at 72 but if it is more, I will not be surprised as many cases may not have been reported since there is a tendency on the part of those affected and near relatives not to report the matter to the local hospital or to the Government. Therefore, the death toll might probably have been more.

I also support the idea suggested by Mr. Venkatasubbaiah that this calls for a deeper probe and more close study into the entire working of the trade in liquor and licensing liquor shops. Sir, this is not the first occasion that such tragedy occurred. Reports of such incidents had been there previously also in elhi and many other places. We see the harm that is done by the illicit distilled liquor. But in this case, a new factor emerges. Previously it was illicit liquor but here in this case it is liquor that was bought from the authorised distributor that has wrought the havoc. Illicit liquor has been mixed with the authorised stuff and the result is this tragedy. Therefore, I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what is the machinery that the Gov-

[Shri Sezhiyan]

ernment has got throughout the country, especially in Andhra Pradesh, to check the quality of liquor that is being sold through the authorised distributors and dealers. Here, it is a new phenomenon. Previously, it used to be only illicitly distilled liquor finding its way through unauthorised sellers. Here, even licensed and authorised distributors have been found distributing illicit liquor.

Then, the point raised by the previous speaker Mr. Hari Kishore Singh, has not been answered. What action has been taken against the wholesale distributor who is responsible and who is the root cause of the entire tragedy—I would like to know. The Minister said six arrack sellers have been arrested. Is the wholesale included in it or not—I want to know.

And also this news has come out in the papers. The number of licensed sellers is 8 and unlicensed 22 and I would like to know as to what had been done with regard to these unlicensed sellers. Was any action taken by the Government or not? The entire people of the nearby villages should have been affected. Mr. Ram Gopal Reddy said about this. The chairman of Suryapet Municipality, who is Vice-President of Nalgonda district congress committee, has been a victim. This authorised shop has been selling such illicit liquor. One would therefore ask what action has been taken in the matter and this might spread to other places also. Regular, contaminated illicit liquor and arrack is prepared which is the cause behind all these incidents. I would like to know whether the Government proposes to make a deep study of the whole situation and try to find out the correct position as to what is to be done not only in the case of illicit liquor and unlicensed people, but even in respect of the authorised sellers, passing on contaminated stuff.

SHRI K. C. PANT: The point that my friend makes about the machinery available to the Central Government

throughout the country to control such incidents has to be reviewed in the light of the responsibility of the States and the Centre and if the Centre does something to control the machinery in the State, he will be the first to say that we are interfering in matters which are within their purview.

SHRI SEZHIYAN: What machinery is already existing there in Andhra Pradesh?

SHRI K. C. PANT: For Andhra, at the moment, we are responsible. There is tension at the moment and we are trying to do our best. We have sent very senior police officer there. CBI will help in the investigation. We have sent two doctors also of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. If necessary we will give more assistance. We will take whatever action is necessary and whatever action is called for in the light of the findings of the enquiry. My hon. friend may rest assured that we will take whatever action is called for and whatever action is necessary in the light of those findings.

SHRI SEZHIYAN: What about wholesale distributor? He has not answered that part of my question.

SHRI K. C. PANT: He had asked me a specific question about the wholesaler and whether he was arrested or not. I cannot say whether the wholesaler was arrested or not. I was making enquiries on the telephone just before I came here, on this very point, and I was told that one person against whom allegations were being made locally had been arrested. I was also told that one person was absconding. As to who that person is, I have to make enquiries (*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Let all hon. Members please sit down. I am not listening to anyone, because so many Members are speaking together.

जिनका नाम कालिग अट्टेन्शन में नहा है वे क्यों खड़े होते हैं। रूल है, सब बातें हैं, सभी को तोड़ते हैं।

(Interruptions);

MR. SPEAKER: May I request all the Members who are speaking to kindly sit down?

(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order now. There is nothing before the House now.

(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, order. May I request you all to please sit down?

(Interruptions);

MR. SPEAKER: Order please. May I request you all to sit down? All of you must sit down.

आप जिम्मेदार आदमी हैं, आप किस तरह की बातें करते हैं? आखिर यह पार्लियामेंट चल रही है। आप सब लोग किस तरह से बोल रहे हैं।

All of you will please sit down.

12.41 hrs.

...w, Mr. Banerjee.

#### ARREST OF HARYANA TEACHERS IN DELHI

SHRI S. M. BANERJEE (Kanpur): Sir, my point of order is this. You have been disallowing the Calling Attention Notice and other notices submitted in connection with the arrest of the Haryana teachers in Delhi and their demand, on the ground that this was a matter for the State Government. Now, I want a ruling from you. Mr. Nurul Hasan, the Union Education Minister, goes to Chandigarh. He makes a statement regarding the strike of the Haryana teachers. If therefore it concerns only the State Government and Mr. Bansilal, why

should the Union Education Minister go to Chandigarh all the way and make a statement?

Secondly, the point raised by my hon. friend is that the Haryana teachers,—2,000, 3,000 or 4,000 of them—have been arrested in Delhi. In Delhi there is the Metropolitan Council; there is the Union Parliament. For what are they agitating? They are agitating against the non-implementation of the Kothari Commission's award which is a Central subject? Therefore, I would beg of you to kindly allow the Minister to make a statement. Let us not take the same attitude as Mr. Bansilal.

MR. SPEAKER: If the Minister wants to make a statement on his own, I have no objection.

SHRI S. M. BANERJEE: In the past, on one occasion, you, in your wisdom, very kindly allowed us, out of sympathy, to raise the matter through a Call Attention notice in connection with the teachers of Punjab and Haryana. It is a question connected with the lives of the teachers. They have been sacked. I do not know what is going to happen to the teachers of Haryana. So, I would beg of you to allow them to make a statement. I want your ruling on this.

SHRI SHYAMNANDAN MISHRA (Begusarai): My point of order is this. Is not this Government accountable for every act of commission or omission? Here is an action resorted to by the Government of India, namely, the arrest of the Haryana teachers by the Delhi police.

Is the Government of India not accountable to us for the action taken against the teachers through its police? Secondly, the Kothari Commission's recommendations have to be implemented, no doubt by the State Government but would not the Government of India in the Department