

[Secretary-General]

- 17 The Payment of Wages (Amendment) Bill, 1976
- 18 The House of the People (Extension of Duration) Bill, 1976
- 19 The Levy Sugar Price Equalisation Fund Bill 1976
- 20 The Industrial Disputes (Amendment) Bill 1976

12 04 hrs

CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT'S PRE-CONDITION FOR TALKS ON SHARING OF GANGA WATERS

SHRI SAMAR MUKHERJEE (Howrah) I call the attention of the Minister of External Affairs to the following matter of urgent public importance and request that he may make a statement thereon

"The reported precondition laid down by the Bangladesh Government for talks on sharing of Ganga Waters and the stalemate arising out of it"

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI YESHWANTRAO CHAVAN) As the House is aware an Agreement was concluded at Dacca on 18th April 1975 between the Governments of India and Bangladesh which provided for the operation of the Farakka Barrage and the running of the feeder canal during the lean season last year pending further discussions regarding allocation of the lean season flows of the Ganga between the two countries in terms of the Joint Declaration of the Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh of 18th May 1974

In their Declaration, the two Prime Ministers took note of the fact that the Farakka Barrage Project would be commissioned before the end of 1974

They recognised that during the periods of minimum flow in the Ganga, there might not be enough water to meet the needs of the Calcutta Port and the full requirements of Bangladesh and, therefore, the fair weather flow of the Ganga in the lean months would have to be augmented to meet the requirements of the two countries. It was agreed that the problems should be approached with understanding so that the interests of both the countries are reconciled and the difficulties removed in a spirit of friendship and cooperation. It was accordingly decided that the best means of such augmentation through optimum utilisation of the water resources of the region available to the two countries should be studied by the Joint Rivers Commission for making suitable recommendations to meet the requirements of both the countries

The Government of India have extended an invitation to the Government of Bangladesh to hold talks for the utilisation of the Ganga waters at Farakka during the lean season so that a solution consistent with the legitimate needs and interests of the two countries may be found in a spirit of friendship and understanding and cooperation and on the basis of the Joint Declaration of May 1974

The Government of India have drawn attention of the Government of Bangladesh to the fact that discussions regarding allocation of the Ganga waters have always been confined to the lean season from about mid-March to about mid-May for the obvious reason that during the remainder of the year the water flows are plentiful

According to the best information and expert assessment available with the Government of India any withdrawal of the waters of the Ganga in Bangladesh or in India ought not to have any adverse consequences for either country because of the abundance of water throughout the year,

except for the lean season of mid-March to mid-May. In fact, no adverse effects in Bangladesh during the lean season last year were observed by the Indian members of the joint teams of experts that had been set up under the Agreement of 18th April, 1975.

We firmly believe that it would be in the interests of both India and Bangladesh to discuss and settle, without any preconditions, and in a spirit of mutual understanding and constructive cooperation, the problem of the Ganga waters which is one of shortage during the lean season and of flooding for most of the remaining part of the year. The ideal long-term solution to the problem of shortage in the Ganga during the lean months and floods in the region as a whole is to work in wholehearted cooperation in evolving a project or projects which would harness the abundant water resources available in the region for the benefit of the people of both India and Bangladesh.

SHRI SAMAR MUKHERJEE: Mr Speaker, Sir, from the statement of the hon. Minister, it appears that the deadlock has not been lessened though in the statement, it has been stated that the Government have extended an invitation to the Government of Bangladesh to hold talks. Whether this invitation is after their imposition of pre-condition or not, I do not know. Whether it is before that pre-condition or after that, it is not mentioned. So, that must be made categorically clear.

Secondly, I want to know whether the Government is thinking in terms of any other move to resolve the deadlock. Now, we are almost on the eve of a lean period. Today is 9th March. The lean period, according to the calculations, starts from the middle of March. So, if just at this stage the things remain in an

undecided condition, generally, the people are very much concerned and worried about the future of the port of Calcutta.

According to the Agreement made on the 18th April last year, the water released was as follows: between April 21 and 30—11,000 cusecs; between May 1 and 10—12,000 cusecs; between May 11 and 20—15,000 cusecs and between May 21 and 31—16,000 cusecs. But it is admitted by all that, to remove the salinity and siltage, to make the Calcutta port navigable, the minimum requirement is, 40,000 cusecs of water during the lean period. That is admitted by all. The expectations arose because of the last Agreement that, gradually, this will be resolved through further negotiations.

It was also a condition that the Joint River Commission will keep a watch on the effects of the release of waters according to the last Agreement. In the statement, the hon. Minister has stated that the members of the Joint River Commission on the Indian side have observed that there has been no adverse effect. But this is the version of the Indian side. There is no version of the other side. The position is that if this deadlock is not resolved, that is going to seriously affect the Calcutta port.

I would like to quote here from the latest report of the Public Accounts Committee. It says:

"If, for any reason, the discharge of an adequate volume of water estimated by experts at 40,000 cusecs and repeatedly assured by the authorities does not happen, the Committee fear that it will be a grievous blow not only to the Calcutta port but to the entire economy of the wide, populous and productive region abutting on it, as also imperil Haldia's enormous potentialities."

[Shri Samar Mukherjee]

So, the matter is of very serious concern to all and particularly to the eastern region. But from the statement of the Government I don't see much seriousness reflected in it to resolve the deadlock.

AN HON MEMBER. They also don't say that it is a deadlock

SHRI SAMAR MUKHERJEE. It is a deadlock because it imposes a pre-condition

So, you must make the whole position clear. If there is no negotiated settlement, what will be the fate and the position of giving water to the Calcutta port? And if there is delay, there will be further silting and the Calcutta port will be further affected and it would be much more difficult in future to remove that siltage and more water will be necessary. So, this is a very serious issue which requires full and thorough attention and the initiative of the Government of India to resolve it. Efforts must be there from all possible angles and people must be assured, particularly about the future of the Calcutta port.

So, I would like the Minister to enlighten us on the position.

SHRI YESHWANTRAO CHAVAN: I think that in my statement I have given information in such a detailed manner that if you had heard it carefully, there should be no misunderstanding or misconception about the future working of Farakka. We have invested nearly Rs. 156 crores in the project of Farakka and it is really meant for keeping the Calcutta port going; and naturally we are interested in the Farakka Barrage. At the same time, there is certainly a sort of campaign in the Bangladesh papers about the Farakka Barrage—that it has adverse effects on Bangladesh—and the Bangladesh Government has raised certain points. After that, we

sent them an invitation to come and discuss with us because, according to our information and expert opinion, there is no adverse effect at all on Bangladesh due to the drawing of water during the lean season.

As for the Hon Members statement regarding pre-conditions, I am not yet prepared to treat the communication we have received from them as a pre-condition. I think they will be willing to come and discuss the problem with us; I don't want to treat this as a deadlock because we want to have friendly relations and I am sure they will understand the problem and discuss it with us. But I can tell you one thing; there is no question of giving up Farakka under any circumstances.

SHRI DINEN BHATTACHARYYA (Serampore): I have not only heard the Minister but I have read between the lines of his statement. In spite of the assurance given now, I have still some questions to ask. My first question is whether the Bangladesh Government has replied to your invitation up till now or not. Secondly, have you got information from your own source that they will not insist on the pre-condition that you should first stop taking water for the Farakka from the Hooghly and then only they will start discussion? Are they not insisting on this.

My third question is this. There was a clear assurance by the Prime Minister and the then Irrigation Minister Mr. K. L. Rao in the course of discussions with the West Bengal Government where the Chief Minister Mr. Sidhartha Shankar Ray was also present, that 40,000 cusecs of water will be guaranteed for five years at least and, after that, it will be reviewed as to how much water has to be given and to what extent would it be possible to concede the demand for the safety of the Calcutta Port. My question is whether the Government

stands by this assurance even now. And when there was a talk between the Indian Government and the previous Bangladesh Government, the late Mr. Mujibur Rehman also did not say anything contrary to the assurance because it was taken for granted. So many declarations were made that 40,000 cusecs of water will be given even in the lean season. What is the latest position? Does the Government of India still stand by the assurance that was given in 1974, which was afterwards included in the agreement in April 1975? What is the reply of the Minister?

Apart from the Farakka Barrage, the total scheme that was adopted is not yet complete and that is why we find that especially in that region, there is erosion, and there is danger of the whole region being eroded and some sluice gates are necessary in certain places. Government must take care of that also so that there is no flood threat and no erosion. The guaranteed water should also be supplied during the lean season so that the Calcutta Port may be saved.

SHRI YESHWANTRAO CHAVAN: If the hon. Member will read my statement carefully, he will find the answer there. I would request him to study it carefully afterwards.

But I can tell him, since he has also put the question whether they have accepted our invitation or not, that we sent them the invitation on the 11th February, 1976 and we received their reply on the 28th February,

which neither accepts nor rejects the invitation. That is the position as it is.

The major question is about the agreement that was reached last year. I may refer you to the agreement that was reached last year for the allocation for the lean period; please don't forget the important aspects of it.

I don't want to refer to the assurance that was given earlier because I am not dealing with the subject.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA (Alipore): I hope the invitation is still open?

SHRI YESHWANTRAO CHAVAN: Of course; and not only is the invitation open but our attitude is also open on the subject.

12.19 hrs.

**BUSINESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FIFTY-NINTH REPORT**

THE MINISTER OF WORKS AND HOUSING AND PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRI K. RAGHU RAMAIAH): I beg to move:

"That this House do agree with the Fifty-ninth Report of the Business Advisory Committee presented to the House on the 8th March, 1976".

MR. SPEAKER: The question is:

"That this House do agree with the Fifty-ninth Report of the Business Advisory Committee presented to the House on the 8th March, 1976".

The motion was adopted.