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LOK SABHA

Thursday, 13th September, 1956

The Lok Sabha met at Half Past Ten of the Clock.

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(See Part I)

11-44 A.M.

MOTIONS FOR ADJOURNMENT

BRITISH PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT ON SUEZ ISSUE

Mr. Speaker: I have received a notice of an adjournment motion from Shri A. K. Gopalan, Shri Hiren Mukerjee and Shrimati Renu Chakravartty, regarding "the grave situation arising out of the statement of the Prime Minister of Britain on September 12th in the House of Commons on the Suez Issue—statement which is a clear provocation for war and the necessity for the Government of India to declare itself wholeheartedly in favour of Egyptian sovereignty and defence of world peace."

The Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs (Shri Jawaharlal Nehru): As a matter of fact, apart from the motion for adjournment, I am going to seek your permission to make a brief statement, if I may do so now.

I should like to say few words in regard to the latest developments relating to the Suez Canal issue. I would have preferred making a statement a day or so later when fuller information was at our disposal. At present we have only seen Press reports of the speech of the United Kingdom Prime Minister, Sir Anthony

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Eden, in the British House of Commons yesterday. As, however, Parliament is adjourning this evening, I may not have an opportunity to make any statement for some time, and, therefore, I am saying these few words now.

The House knows our earnest efforts to bring about a negotiated settlement in regard to the Suez Canal. It has been clear to us that any other approach to this problem or any attempt to impose a decision would not only not bring about the results aimed at but might lead to much graver consequences, the extent of which it is not possible to foresee. At the Conference held in London we pleaded with all the force at our command for steps to be taken to bring about negotiations, and certain broad proposals were set out by us. We were supported in these proposals by Ceylon, Indonesia and the Soviet Union. The majority of those present at the Conference, however, adopted, as is known, a different line.

From the Press reports of Sir Anthony Eden's speech yesterday it is not possible to assess fully the meaning and import of the action said to be contemplated by the Governments of the United Kingdom, France and the United States, until we have full reports through official sources.

The action proposed to be taken by the three Governments which purports to be in the interests of the users of the Canal and to maintain the freedom of use of the Canal seems, to say the least, surprising, and the consequences that may flow from it may well be very grave. One thing is clear and that is that the action pro-

[Shri Jawaharlal Nehru]

posed is not the result of agreement, co-operation or consent, but is to be taken unilaterally, and thus is in the nature of an imposed decision.

The Government of India deeply regret this development, which is very unusual and which will render peaceful settlement more difficult of realisation. It is not calculated to secure to the users peaceful and secured use of the Canal which should be and is what is required by the users and the international community.

The Menzies Mission which recently visited Cairo asked the Egyptian Government to accept international control of operation and administration and the establishment of an international corporation displacing the Egyptian National Corporation. Egypt has declined to accept them as being contrary to her sovereign rights and not related to the purposes which the Convention of 1888 and the interest of users, which are freedom of navigation, toll, maintenance of Canal, etc., which the Egyptian Government alone can guarantee.

The reply of the Egyptian Government has opened a way to negotiations. In the view of the Government of India, such negotiations could have led to a settlement which would have met all requirements of the users and the international community without prejudice or derogation to the sovereignty of Egypt and her national rights in respect of the Canal which is admittedly an integral part of Egypt.

I have in the last few days communicated to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the President of the United States. Our view that the situation that emerged after the Menzies Mission and the statement made by the Egyptian Government accepting all international obligations and inviting negotiations opened a way to settlement.

We appeal to both the United Kingdom and United States to consider all this and enable the develop-

ment of negotiations which will lead to a settlement. We hope that despite all that has happened and the tensions that have been engendered, the path of peace will be followed. There is here no question of appeasement of one side or another as what is to be sought and can in our view be obtained is a settlement satisfactory and honourable to all concerned.

The Government of India earnestly hope that the appeal we have made will not be in vain. Government have right through the course of this development used their influence with all parties for restraint, negotiations and a peaceful settlement. To seek to impose a settlement by force or by threats of force is to disregard the rights of nations even as the failure to observe international treaties and obligations would be. Government also regret to learn from Press reports that pilots of British, French, Italian and other nationalities are being withdrawn. This is an action not calculated to promote the use of the canal and is not in the interest of user nations. Government of India are desirous that no statement of theirs should come in the way of the efforts to lower tension and to open the way for negotiations. But, they cannot fail to point out that the steps announced to assume the operation of the canal without the consent and co-operation of the Egyptian Government are calculated to render a peaceful approach extremely difficult and also carry with them the grave risk of conflict. I should like to say that I have read the report of Sir Anthony Eden's speech with surprise and regret as it appears to close the door to further negotiations. The action envisaged in it is full of dangerous potentialities and far reaching consequence. I earnestly trust that, even now, it is not too late to refrain from any such action and to think more in terms of a peaceful negotiated settlement which only can achieve the results aimed at in regard to the proper functioning of the Suez Canal for

the good of all countries concerned as well as for the maintenance of friendly relations in the middle-eastern region and the whole of Asia.

As I have pointed out previously, the proper functioning of the Suez Canal is of vital importance to India. We are convinced, however, that this can only be achieved through peaceful negotiated settlement ensuring the rights not only of Egypt but of all the user countries.

Shri Kamath (Hoshangabad): In view of what the Prime Minister said at the very outset, may I ask, whether, in the event of the situation further deteriorating and, unfortunately, warlike developments taking place in the West, Parliament will be summoned at short notice to consider the situation?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: Under our Constitution and the rules, Parliament can be summoned at short notice, subject only to time being allowed for Members to reach here. If a necessity arises for summoning it, we shall venture to advise Mr. Speaker to summon it.

Shri Kamath: Is it a fact that the Egyptian Government has convened another international conference and has India accepted the invitation to participate in that new conference?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: So far as we know, the Government of Egypt have not convened any conference. They have thrown out the idea that such a conference might be convened, but no actual convening has been done.

Shri Chattopadhyaya (Vijayavada): May I raise a point?

Mr. Speaker: He gave notice to raise a point. Is it that?

Shri Chattopadhyaya: May I know if, in view of the deepening international crisis and the tone of the Statement of the British Prime Minister, our Prime Minister will consider the desirability of leading the Indian delegation himself to any international conference that might be held in

order to protect and save world peace? May I also submit humbly that an *ad hoc* committee be constituted by the Prime Minister—a Committee of leading Members of both Houses of Parliament including Leaders of Opposition Parties—to keep ourselves fully informed of the changing situation from time to time?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: The first suggestion of the hon. Member is rather premature. There is, at present, no convention or conference in view. If and when it takes place, we shall have to consider how best our Government can be represented. Normally speaking, the Prime Ministers do not attend such conferences. Even in the recent London Conference, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom did not go to it, except for, I think, two minutes, just for formal opening—or less than two minutes. So, Prime Ministers normally do not attend them. However, as the situation develops, one will have to see what will be the best course for us to adopt.

As regards the second point mentioned by the hon. Member, I can assure him that, if a situation so arises, we shall naturally wish to consult leaders of all groups and parties and take them into our confidence because that situation will be a national situation with which we shall have to meet as a united nation.

Mr. Speaker: In view of the hon. Prime Minister's statement, it is not necessary to give my consent to the adjournment moved by Shri A. K. Gopalan.

PAY SCALES AND SERVICES CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYEES OF LIFE INSURANCE CORPORATION

Mr. Speaker: Shri Sadhan Gupta has given notice of an adjournment motion on the following subject:

"The serious repercussions among thousands of employees of the Life Insurance Corporation of India belonging to the supervisory, clerical and subordinate staff due to arbitrary fixation of pay