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LOK SABHA

Monday, 13th December, 1954.

The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of the Clock.

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(See Part I)

12 NOON.

MOTIONS FOR ADJOURNMENT

RETRENCHMENT OF SEPOY CLERKS OF ARMY ORDNANCE CORPS

Mr. Speaker: I shall now take up the consideration of the adjournment motions. First, we shall take up the further consideration of the adjournment motion which was held over on the 11th December, relating to the retrenchment of sepoy clerks of Army Ordnance Corps. The hon. Deputy Minister of Defence will make a statement on this.

The Deputy Minister of Defence (Sardar Majithia): On 11th December, I had promised to go into this question and give the House certain facts. I find that instead of the 4,000 alleged, the total number being released is only 676. Out of these 676, 135 are those who were engaged during the war; their release was deferred with their consent, and they are going on release now. Another 79 were only engaged for eighteen months, and therefore, they also are going away in the normal course of events. Thus, the real figure left is only 462. This is necessary, as I said day before yesterday,

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in view of the fact that we are not in an emergency now, and this cadre also has to keep in relation with the strength of the Army.

Thus, you will see that the adjournment motion has not got that urgency, because that number is not there, and moreover, as I said, it is more or less a normal course of events. But I should like to add that these 462 who are going out will receive the gratuity benefits, which are their due.

Shri Damodara Menon (Kozhikode): May I make one submission? The hon. Minister has just now stated that the number that will go out now is only 462. As for these men, I understand that they have all signed for regular service for twelve years, and three years for reserve, and they have been entertained in service on the basis of contracts which Government as well as these people had signed. I want to know from the hon. Minister whether their dismissal or discharge now is not in contravention of the provisions of the contracts.

It may be true that immediately only 462 persons are to be discharged. But I understand that there is proposal for the discharge of a larger number, i.e. about 4,000. Even in yesterday's paper, I read of a meeting of some of these defence employees at Meerut, where they had alleged that a larger number was going to be discharged in the near future.

Therefore, I would like to hear from the hon. Minister what he has to say about the contract, and why these men are to be discharged now, and why it is in the contemplation of Government to discharge about 4,000 men

Sardar Majithia: To begin with, I would not put much trust in the figures given out by the papers. As I said before, gratuity is only given when the people are released before the normal period of their service, and they get not the normal pension, but gratuity which means something enhanced to cover up the cutting short of their career.

Shri Damodara Menon: May I ask one more question?

Mr. Speaker: Nothing further now. I think the matter is clear enough for consideration.

Shrimati Renu Chakravarty (Basirhat): What about the contract? It is very important.

Mr. Speaker: I am not concerned with all the facts of these things just at present. But sufficient has been said, I think, to give an idea of the public importance of this question. I feel clear that whatever the importance of the question may be to the individuals concerned, the matter is not of that public importance which needs a debate on the question in this House. I do not think I could permit this.

TRAGEDY IN NEWTON CHIKHLI COLLIERY

Mr. Speaker: The next adjournment motion is that of Shri M. S. Guruswamy, and it relates to:

"The tragic loss of life of seventy-two miners in a colliery at Parasia in Madhya Pradesh on 11th December as a result of heavy flooding of water from an adjacent mine."

In respect of this, I have received a notice from the hon. Minister of Labour to make a statement. So, I would call upon him to make the statement first, for that would clarify somewhat the position as to facts.

The Minister of Labour (Shri Khandubhai Desai): The House must have been shocked to hear of the grave tragedy, involving the loss of as many as 65 persons, that occurred on the morning of 10th December 1954 in the Newton Chikhli Colliery in the Parasia Coalfield of Madhya Pradesh. The information that Government have so far been able to elicit shows that 112 miners were working in the mine at the time of the accident. A large mass of water from an adjacent abandoned mine seems suddenly to have burst the intervening strata of rock and gushed into the mine bringing with it a large quantity of asphyxiating gas. 47 miners managed to reach the surface, but the remaining 65 were trapped inside the mine. The Inspector of Mines, Parasia, rushed to the scene and made immediate arrangements for the requisitioning of pumps available in the neighbouring collieries and for the pumping out of the water. The District Magistrate and the District Superintendent of Police of Chhindwara also reached the scene as quickly as possible and took charge of the rescue operations. The Chief Inspector of Mines who also happened to be in Delhi on official visit left for the Mine by the night plane of the 11th December, 1954. I understand that two Ministers of the Madhya Pradesh Government, of whom the Labour Minister is one, accompanied by senior officers, have also proceeded to the spot and are personally directing all operations.

The Chief Inspector of Mines, who has already reached the mine and made a preliminary study of the accident, has reported that the mine is a fairly big one employing 2,500 workers, of whom 1600 work underground. It has been working for the last 33 years and has reached a depth of 200 feet. The present output is about 20,000 tons per month. The mine is worked under a qualified Manager who holds a first class certificate and has been working in his present post for the last 10 years. He is