

12.05½ hrs.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE
THIRTY-FIRST REPORT

Shri Barman (Cooch-Bihar-Reserved—Sch. Castes): Sir, I beg to present the Thirty-First Report of the Public Accounts Committee (1960-61) on the Appropriation Accounts (Posts & Telegraphs) 1958-59 and Audit Report 1960.

12.06 hrs.

CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER
OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

PREVALENCE OF SLAVERY IN N.E.F.A.

Shri Vajpayee (Balrampur): Sir, under Rule 197, I beg to call the attention of the Prime Minister to the following matter of urgent public importance and I request that he may make a statement thereon:—

"The reported prevalence of slavery in the North-East Frontier Agency."

The Deputy Minister of External Affairs (Shrimati Lakshmi Menon): Sir, it is a two-page statement. Would you like me to place it on the Table of the House?

Mr. Speaker: All right. The statement will be placed on the Table of the House. Hon. Members will look into it leisurely.

But I have always said that while placing a long statement on the Table of the House a small summary of it in a few lines may be given out orally or read out from the statement itself. Is there slavery at all?

Shrimati Lakshmi Menon: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Very well. There is slavery. The other details will be there in the statement.

Shri Braj Raj Singh (Firozabad): What steps do Government propose to

take now to abolish this sort of slavery?

Mr. Speaker: When it has been admitted that slavery is there, hon. Members will kindly read the statement before putting other questions.

Shri B. Das Gupta (Purulia): It may be circulated to Members. Sometimes, Sir, the statements placed on the Table are not circulated.

Mr. Speaker: Any hon. Member can get a copy in the Notice Office.

STATEMENT

Slavery in the NEFA is a heritage from the past when inter-village and inter-tribal feuds were very common. People became slaves for a number of reasons. They were captured in war; they were purchased; they were used to repay a debt. Many were born slaves. Sometimes a man became a slave because he had committed a serious offence against the community and could not afford the fine demanded.

2. The slaves are, however, by and large, treated as members of the household and are themselves quite often unwilling to leave the shelter and security of their masters to lead an independent life. In many homes, they come to be accepted as members of the family after a period of years. The owner provides them with food, clothing and shelter. He arranges their marriage. In some areas, a slave is allowed to keep a part of the earnings.

3. The Government of India is a contracting party to the Slavery Convention of 1926. Its provisions were applied to NEFA in 1938. It was agreed that positive steps should be taken as soon as possible to bring about progressively the disappearance of slavery in every form. Our Constitution does not permit slavery. Government have been exerting all efforts to eradicate this evil. Where