

LOK SABHA DEBATES

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LOK SABHA

Wednesday, April 17, 1974/Chaitra 27,
1898 (Saka)

*The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of the
Clock.*

[MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER in the Chair]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Dispute over Ownership of Border Villages between Assam and Maghalaya

*711 SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA:
Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS
be pleased to state:

(a) whether some border villages have become a matter of disputed ownership between the Governments of Meghalaya and Assam;

(b) whether some "volunteers" were recently sent from Meghalaya to occupy Garo-populated villages in the Goalpara and Darrang Districts of Assam; and

(c) the Government of India's efforts, if any, to normalise the situation?

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT): (a) The boundaries of the two States Assam and Meghalaya, have been determined by Parliament in the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971. While there has not been any dispute over ownership of border villages between the Governments of Meghalaya and Assam, demands have been made by Garos of Kamrup and Goalpara Districts of Assam and Garo National Zonal Council of Action, Assam for transfer of Garo-inhabited villages from Assam to Meghalaya.

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(b) Government do not have any information of "volunteers" being sent from Meghalaya to occupy such villages in Assam.

(c) Government of India are maintaining continuous contact with the State Governments of Assam and Meghalaya who are taking necessary measures for maintaining peace and order. The Chief Minister of Assam has also given an assurance for the protection of the rights of linguistic minorities in Assam.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: I am rather surprised at the reply given because the newspapers even today and yesterday carried headlines: "Border dispute: Meghalaya-Assam police face to face at Longpoh." I have no time to read out all the things which have appeared. It says the place I mentioned is a border village and it is evidently being disputed by both the State Governments in so far as both had sent their police forces to the same area. I should like to know this. May I know whether the Meghalaya Government directly or through the Garo National Council with the tacit connivance of the Meghalaya Government is demanding transfer from Assam to Meghalaya of an area comprising 762 sq. miles in which 316 villages are involved with a Garo population as claimed by them of 65,000 and odd. It is in the Goalpara-Kamrup districts of Assam. Is the hon. Minister aware that since January there have been a number of clashes in this area, demonstrations, arrests and even police firings, leading to deaths and so on? Is it also a fact that the immediate provocation for this is the introduction of Assamese as the medium of education in the schools in those areas which are inhabited by Garos and other tribal

people? If so, Sir, I would like to know, in view of the fact that I gather that Assam has got similar, what one might call, boundary disputes with Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh also, and in view of the sensitive nature of this area, whether the Central Government is going to take any initiative to see that a peaceful settlement is brought about through discussions between both the Governments under the auspices of the Centre?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT:

Sir, I am not in a position to say whether Meghalaya has instigated or encouraged any sections of the Garo people in Assam to agitate for a merger of certain areas. The number of villages mentioned by him is correct. But, as I said, this matter has been raised and the Garo National Zonal Council have taken a stand and they are pursuing this matter. But, Sir, I also agree with him that there is need for action and we should not allow this emotional situation to escalate by making it worse. The difficulty is, Sir, there is no such compact area contiguous to Meghalaya and this question has been considered more than once in depth and it was concluded on merits that such a transfer would create more complications than solve any problem. More linguistic minorities would be created by transfer, along with Assamese-speaking, Bengali-speaking, Hindi-speaking, Garo-speaking and other people. Therefore, it is not as if it is a simple legitimate demand which can straightway be accepted and that Government is being unnecessarily unreasonable about it. It is a complicated problem. Emotionally, it is correct to say that Garos are agitated and I think this matter does require special attention and I think we shall try and see what can be done about it to diffuse the situation.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: If it is really a question of agitation against the introduction of Assamese in these schools, I presume, Central Govern-

ment can see to it that the Assam Government gives certain assurances to the linguistic minorities. But, I want to draw his attention to another news-item, appearing in the 'Hindustan Times' of 31st March, where it is said: "The inherent contradiction implied in the concept of common Governor is responsible for complicating the problem". I would like to know from him, though what he has said is technically correct that boundaries have been fixed and settled, whether he is aware of the fact that the Governor, who is the same person, Governor of Assam and Governor of Meghalaya is making diametrically opposite and contradictory statements in his addresses to the two Assemblies, which is a strange thing. Inaugurating the Budget Session of the Assam Assembly, the Governor said:

"Although demands had been raised from time to time for inclusion in Meghalaya of some strips of area near the border of the Kamrup and Golpara districts and Blocks 1 and 2 of the Mikir Hills district, my Government consider that in the light of clear and unambiguous decision of competent authorities in the past, there is basically no scope for any transfer in that regard."

The same Governor, in his address to the Meghalaya Assembly, says:

"The border between Assam and Meghalaya and certain sectors has been a subject of controversy. The border in the Jaintia and Mikir Hills sector is the scene of continual tension over the years and a settlement regarding Blocks 1 and 2 of the Mikir Hills district is still to be arrived at".

I would like to know from him, whether the complications to which he referred, are not being aggravated by this kind of double game that the same personality, who is the Governor in both the cases, is playing? This area has strategic importance and the security of our country is also depen-

dent on it. We know that in this area, there are attempts by certain anti-Indian forces and separatist forces, who always try to foment discord, to bring about clashes between different communities. During the unfortunate language disturbances in Assam in fact some members of the ruling party had publicly stated that the hand of the CIA was behind it and all that kind of thing. I would like to know whether he is aware that an American organisation which is well known, MRA, Moral Re-armament, which is also supposed to be linked with CIA, has a very strong base in Meghalaya and one of the leading Ministers of the Meghalaya Government is a full-time member and organiser of the MRA. If so, is there not a ground for apprehending that there is a deliberate conspiracy going on to create trouble in this border area? May I also remind the hon. Minister in this connection with your permission that only a month or so ago there were complaints voiced on the floor of the Assam Assembly that a party of officials of the US Consulate in Calcutta, led by the famous or notorious Mr. Peter Burreleigh, visited Assam and the Assam Government had objected to this. It reminded the Centre that on a previous occasion they had told the Centre that such people should not be permitted to visit that area without informing the Assam Government in advance and yet they have not been informed in this case. In view of all this, may I know whether the Centre is specially alive to the danger of these activities in this area and, if so, what do they propose to do in order to check this?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: So far as the question of Assamese language in schools is concerned, the matter has been involved in some controversy. Various experiments have been made. Regarding the question of the language being taught, as suggested by the hon. Member, I shall go into the question shortly and see whether the present agitation is in

any way, directly or indirectly, connected with it, or has been aggravated by it.

Coming to the second question, it can hardly be denied that historically there has been a tendency on the part of some of the foreign powers to see that the border does not completely settle down or get stabilised. There have been forces at work. So, constant vigilance has been exercised to see that those forces do not get the upper hand. It is well-known that one of the members of the Government does belong to the MRA.

The other information which the hon. Member has given is also not denied that whenever a particular person belonging to the CIA visits some place, there are reports of certain incidents immediately after his visit. I am not willing to attribute to the person such extraordinary powers that a short visit by him would create or bring about such extraordinary results. So far as the need for vigilance, alertness for preventing any such activity creating more complications in the border areas is concerned, it is fully realised and every possible effort is being made to guard against such activities.

Regarding the question about the common Governor, although the Governor was the same, he was not acting in his own personal capacity. Nor was he discharging his special responsibility. In one case he acted on the advice of the Chief Minister of Assam and in the other case he acted on the advice of the Chief Minister of Meghalaya.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Is this a desirable role to be played by the Governor in the same area?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: I cannot express an opinion before going into the matter in detail.

SHRI SHYAMNANDAN MISHRA: The Governors are also the agents of the President. What was the directive given by the Central Government to the Governor in this matter?

SHRI DINESH CHANDRA GOSWAMI: I come from an area which is involved in this. I am deeply distressed about it and I want that the situation should be normalised. Taking the last point made by the hon. Home Minister, I want to draw his attention to the fact that the position of the Governor has come into complete discredit in the entire region because of his contradictory statements, because a lay man is not supposed to know the constitutional provision by which a Governor may make a completely contradictory statement in different Assemblies. Then, I want to know from the hon. Minister, firstly, in view of the fact that if this type of disputes are allowed to continue, not only would it open a Pandora's box, but it would also give a handle to the external and internal forces of disruption, what steps do the Government propose to take to settle this problem.

Then, I have come to know that the Government of India have sent some reply to the Garo National Council regarding their demand. Will he kindly tell us the essence or contents of that reply?

Then, one of the grievances of the Garo people is that while in Meghalaya they are treated as Scheduled Tribes under the constitutional provision, in Assam they are treated as "other backward classes" even though the Assam Government have conferred all the benefits of the Scheduled Tribes to them. Do the Government propose to make suitable legislative changes and amendments in the Constitution to confer the benefits of the Scheduled Tribes to these people in Assam to remove the constitutional anomalies?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: I am not aware of the text of the reply which the hon. Member says was issued. So far as the information available to me at the moment goes, there is no such mention. As far as the need for action to stabilise the situation is concerned. I am entirely in agreement with the hon. Member,

and if he can suggest any special measures, we shall consider those measures also. At present our position is that we do not want to encourage such fissiparous tendencies. We want to help both the State Governments not to take measures which would create further antagonism, either on linguistic or other grounds. My own belief is that the present agitation is due to some measure of discontent over the treatment that the Garo people might be receiving in some area or the other. If these grounds of discontent are removed, I personally believe that such agitation need not continue.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: The question was whether you are not aware of any reply being sent or no reply has been sent?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: I am not aware of it.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: If you are not aware, would you kindly look into this?

SHRI DINESH CHANDRA GOSWAMI: Is he proposing to bring about changes in the Constitution to confer the benefits of the Scheduled Tribes on the Garo people of Assam?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: We have not taken any decision on it but we will consider.

SHRI SHYAMNANDAN MISHRA: How are we to take the statement of the hon. Minister seriously that the Government does not want the situation to escalate when a memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister in December 1972 was shoved under the carpet and remains unattended to so far? Was it due to the fact that the Central Government thought that the Government of Meghalaya was trying through various devices to divert attention of the people from its mismanagement and misrule. However, why is it that the Government of India has not attended to that memorandum so long? I am not going into the question whether that memorandum or that impression is right or wrong. In any case is it not the duty cast on

the Government of India to take expeditious steps so that such situations do not develop into something serious? Do they contemplate having a machinery for the settlement of inter-State disputes which will go into action immediately after the eruption of any trouble?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: When the decision is taken, all the relevant considerations are taken into account. The main stand of the Government of India is that it does not propose to make any changes, so far as the question which has been raised by the other hon. Member is concerned.

SHRI SHYAMNANDAN MISHRA: Why did you not take any action on the memorandum?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: If it is not intended to change that policy, no action can be taken except to stick to the policy already undertaken.

SHRI SHYAMNANDAN MISHRA: My other question remains unanswered.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: The main question of Shri Mishra is whether you have made any assessment, or you are going to make any assessment, that all these developments are the result of the efforts of the Government of Meghalaya to divert attention from its own mismanagement of the affairs of the State.

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: That is an expression of opinion on the action of the Government of Meghalaya.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Will he kindly make an assessment of that?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: I am unable to express an opinion on their intention.

SHRI VASANT SATHE: Today morning there was a report in the 'Patriot' saying that the Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police of Kamrup District has denied the report that any police force from

Assam was sent or was face to face with the police force of Meghalaya, as reported yesterday. So, this contradicts the earlier report. Sometime back there was a report of a demonstration by some so-called 'volunteers', about 1,500 Garo tribes from the border areas of Assam. According to the Meghalaya Government report, these people had evacuated from the Garo Hills to Meghalaya. In that demonstration there was firing and one person was killed. The dead body of that person was not claimed by anybody. If the demonstration was an uprising of the Garo people living in Assam, obviously the dead body would have been claimed by the people living in Assam. I want to know whether it is not a fact that this dead body was not claimed? This gives suspicion that he was from outside. I want to know to what extent is there encouragement, may be as a diversionary tactics, from the Meghalaya side?

Coming to the Governor, why should the Governor not play a conciliatory role and bring about a settlement, instead of making contradictory statements in his so-called constitutional capacity of being two persons in one body? Why should he not do it? Why should he not settle it? Why should he not allow things to settle themselves? Were the Government of India informed of these developments? What step were taken earlier to prevent the eruption of this trouble?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: In the information and reports that are sent by the Governor from time to time the developments regarding the Garo People's demands have been communicated to the Government. The hon. Member said that he is surprised that the Governor is not able to settle the matter. It is not quite so easy a matter that the Governor has merely to take a decision and solve it. It is a complicated matter where emotions are involved. So far as the factual information which the hon. Member has asked for is concerned, I require notice.

SHRI SAMAR GUHA: Before the situation takes an ugly turn to the extent that the Indian people belonging to two States fight each other and the armed constabulary of the two states are being engaged in such conflicts, will the Government immediately set up a high-power tribunal and say that the decision of that high-power tribunal will be final in respect of such disputed areas?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: It is not proposed to appoint any Tribunal as suggested by the hon. member, but the Government of India will go into this question seriously and see to it that the situation is not allowed to deteriorate.

SHRI SAMAR GUHA: If you can make both the States agree to the decision of an impartial tribunal, then the matter can be settled. Why do you not agree to setting up a tribunal?

SHRI B. K. DASCHOWDHURY: It has become very much clear that the border dispute between the boundaries of Assam and Meghalaya has been escalated to such an extent that it needs the Government of India's urgent and immediate attention, and the hon. Minister has also said it. I would like to know from him whether he has any information that relief camps in the name of ousted Garo people of the Assam border have already been started within the Meghalaya Garo Hills, whether he has also this information that, to finance those relief camps, the people inside Meghalaya and others also have been pressurized to donate liberally by the Meghalaya Government, whether he has also this information that, in the name of disturbances, political and otherwise, and also language disturbances, within the border region of Assam, Meghalaya Government has instigated some of the people to come over, knowing full well that these matters should be dealt with by the Government of Assam. In view of all these, may I know whether the hon. Minister will set up a committee of inquiry to go into all the details, whether the claims made by the Meghalaya Government

for several areas are justified or these are simply to cover up the defects and defaults of the Government of Meghalaya, whether in league with CIA or MRA. I want to know whether a committee of inquiry will be set up and asked to submit its report as early as possible.

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: Not a Committee, but we would like to hold an inquiry to find out the facts to enable us to take suitable action.

SHRI B. K. DASCHOWDHURY: What about relief camps started by the Garo National Council?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: I am not aware of it.

SHRI BIREN DUTTA: May I know what prevents the Government of India from including the Garo people in the list of Scheduled Tribes?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: It has to be considered. We have not gone into that.

SHRI BIREN DUTTA: May I know from the hon. Minister whether the Meghalaya Government has brought to the notice of the Central Government the existence of any border dispute, and if so, what are the areas of dispute; and also whether the contradictory role that has been played by the Government, instead of creating a congenial atmosphere for settling the matter between the two Governments has created more complications; and in view of Central Government being informed of the day-to-day developments by the Governor, what advice has been given by the Central Government to the Governor about the role to be played in settling the matter?

SHRI UMA SHANKAR DIKSHIT: I have already stated that the two Governments have not taken up this matter with us. No demand or counter-demand has been made. As I have stated, the Garo National Zonal Council has raised this issue and a certain agitation has come up. I have already made the position of the

Government of India clear in this matter.

SHRI TARUN GOGOI: What advice has the Central Government given to the Governor about the role to be played in settling the matter?

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: We have taken half an hour for this question. We should not take more than this. Members have asked many pointed, relevant and legitimate questions and the Minister has stated many times that he would require notice. He also said—it is on record—that he would hold an inquiry into all these matters. I hope the inquiry he will hold will go into all the questions the Members have asked and it is advisable that the report comes before the House after that inquiry.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: It should come before the end of the session.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: As quickly as possible, because things are building up in that area. These may be straws before the tornado. We should not take them lightly.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: In that case, the Governor should be changed in the meantime.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Everything that has been raised will be inquired into.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: He is adding fuel to the fire.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Shri Burman.

SHRI B. K. DASCHOWDHURY rose.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: I have called the next question.

Shri Burman—absent.

Shrimati Savitri Shyam.

Telecommunication training centres in the Country

*713. **SHRIMATI SAVITRI SHYAM:**

SHRI ARVIND M. PATEL:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have set up Telecommunication Training Centres in the country;

(b) if so, the number of the persons authorised to receive training at the Centres; and

(c) whether such a Centre would be set up in Uttar Pradesh?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (PROF. SHER SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) 38 centres with a maximum capacity to train about 13,000 persons per annum.

(c) A Circle Telecom. Training Centre at Lucknow, a District Training Centre at Kanpur and a Regional Telecom. Training Centre at Meerut are already functioning.

श्रीमती सावित्री श्याम : उपाध्यक्ष महोदय, राष्ट्रीय और अन्तर्राष्ट्रीय जितनी गतिविधियाँ बढ़ी हैं, उतनी तेजी से हमारे देश में टेली-कॉम्युनिकेशन्स का प्रसार नहीं हुआ है और न ही उस के अन्दर मोडर्निटी आई है और न एकीशियेन्सी बढ़ी है। इतने बड़े देश के अन्दर कुल 38 सेंटर्स काम कर रहे हैं, जिन में 13,000 लोगों को ट्रेनिंग देने की व्यवस्था है। मैं माननीय मंत्री जी से जानना चाहती हूँ कि इन पांच वर्षों के अन्दर इन सेंटर्स में केडर-वाइज किलने परसोनेल को ट्रेन्ड किया गया है और एलाबोरेटली जहाँ पर ये ट्रेनिंग सेंटर्स हैं, ये पूरी तरह से उस आवश्यकता को पूरा करते हैं या नहीं जिस के लिए ट्रेनिंग की आवश्यकता है ?

इस के साथ-साथ तीसरी बात मैं यह जानना चाहती हूँ कि जिन ट्रेनीज को ट्रेनिंग दी जाती है, उन के रहने की व्यवस्था होस्टल्स में और खाने की व्यवस्था ठीक है या नहीं ?

प्रो० शेर सिंह : उपाध्यक्ष महोदय, विस्तार तो बहुत हुआ है टेली-कॉम्युनिकेशन्स का क्योंकि जिस समय देश आजाद हुआ उस समय कुल 15 हजार टेलीफोन