

SHRI SOMNATH RATH : Congress will come with a massive majority in Orissa. We will get all the seats as far as Lok Sabha is concerned. Please have patience. We will see the results. We will meet you once again.

SHRI BIPIN PAL DAS (Tezpur) : How can you meet them here ? They will not be here.

SHRI SOMNATH RATH : That is correct. But I do wish that he will be here. Anyway, let us wait and see. It is rather premature to speak now about the elections when we are discussing the Defamation Bill.

Also, I would like to submit that there is a provision for trial in camera. This is a very good provision. In some cases, an open trial may reflect adversely on the minds of people, especially the younger generation. So, when the Judge feels that certain matters require to be tried in camera, I say wrong is nothing wrong in it. All these safeguards are provided in this Bill. It has also been rightly stated in the Statement of Objects and Reasons as to why this Bill has been brought forward. This Bill has been brought before this House to make provisions to deal with of defamation effectively as is given in the proposed Section 292A in the lapsed Indian Penal Code (Amendment) Bill, 1978, i.e. during the Janata Rule and also offences listed in Sections 499 and 500 onwards of the Indian Penal Code. All the provisions which exist in the Indian Penal Code are practically same here also. One sentence in the Statement of Objects and Reasons makes it very clear why this Bill has been brought forward. I quote : It is considered necessary to check this tendency so that freedom of speech, which is the very essence of democracy, does not degenerate into mere licence. In view of the above, it is considered advisable to have a self-contained law on defamation covering both substantive and procedural aspects." These are the only points. There is nothing to dispute.

So Sir, I hope that there will be no opposition to this Bill. Let us not impute

political motives on the Bill. I hope the Opposition will agree to pass this Bill.

17.05 hrs.

[MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

STATEMENT RE : FLOOD SITUATION
IN ASSAM AND WEST BENGAL

[*English*]

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI BHAJAN LAL) : Assam has experienced successive waves of floods during the months of May, June and July. The latest wave of floods has started since 20th August, 1988. The rainfall in the catchment areas of Brahmaputra has been very heavy from 22nd August onwards. During the five days from 22nd to 26th August, 1988, Pasighat recorded 1168 MMs, Teju recorded 625 MMs and Dola recorded 312 MMs. Consequently, the river Brahmaputra received very huge inflows and has been rising very rapidly. On 26th August, 1988 at 6.00 P.M. the river touched a level of 106.31 Metres at Dibrugarh as against the highest flood level of 105.97 Metres recorded during last year. This was 2.11 Metres above the danger level of 104.20 Metres. However with the decrease in rainfall in the catchment area, inflow is getting reduced and the water level has started receding. The level recorded at Dibrugarh today morning was 105.72 Metres.

The entire mass of water is moving from Upper Assam to the Western parts of the State causing damages all along the river course. Parts of Guwahati town on western side have also been inundated. The places further downstream Guwahati along the river course, will also experience the effects of these floods as the water flows further down.

Serious damage was apprehended in Dibrugarh on account of rising floods waters since the town is situated nearly half a metre below the danger level (104.20 metre) of the river at this point. The vast sheet of water was held back by a system of dykes and embankments. Arrangements for evacuation of people in the low lying

areas were made by the State Government and round the clock vigil over the flooded banks has been mounted. The Army is also assisting the civic authorities in maintaining the dyke and other rescue and relief operations. Wherever seepage of water was noticed the bunds have been strengthened by sandbags and spurs. People have also been evacuated from low lying areas and transported to relief camps.

Road links between Guwahati and Upper Assam on the one side and West Bengal on the other have been disrupted as several places. The National Highway 37 linking Guwahati and Upper Assam breached at Burapahar. NH 52 connecting Assam and Arunachal Pradesh is also disrupted at Gohpur and Dhemaji. NH 31 connecting West Bengal to North East is disrupted near Dhubri at Bilashipara and also Kashikotra near Bongaigaon. The road bridge near Raiganj on NH 34 has suffered breaches due to sinking of its two piers. The Guwahati-Lumding metre gauge railway line has been affected. Information regarding further damages is likely to be received as the floods recedes and communication are restored.

The production and movement of petroleum products has also been affected. The crude oil production has been affected. The UHF station at Dubri was also switched off as a result of flooding of Dubri.

At the instance of the Prime Minister, I had made an extensive aerial survey yesterday covering the affected areas on both the banks of river Brahmaputra from Guwahati upto Dibrugarh and inspected the dyke at the outskirts of Dibrugarh town. I visited some of the relief camps where people who have been moved to safety are being housed and are being taken care of. A large number of habitations along the river course have been inundated and Guwahati town has also been water-logged in certain parts like Shantipur, Fancy Bazar, etc.

I had detailed discussions with the Chief Minister of Assam and others concerned regarding the flood situation and relief operations.

According to the assessment made by the State Government, 8770 villages, covering an area of 42.23 lakhs ha., have been affected. The population affected by these floods is 56.72 lakhs. Crops have been affected over an area of 11.26 lakhs ha. Eighteen lives have been lost and 2700 animals have died. The State Government have opened 500 relief camps and are taking care of 2.24 lakh people in these camps.

The Government of West Bengal has reported that 785 villages covering an area of 1.5 lakh ha., were affected as on 25th August, 1988. Crops have been affected over an area of 55,000 ha.. The population affected is 1.75 lakhs. One person and 8 cattle heads are reported to have died. Twentysix relief camps with 1503 people are in existence. I propose to undertake an aerial survey of the affected areas of West Bengal tomorrow because I could not visit these areas yesterday due to bad weather.

The State Governments of Assam and West Bengal have a margin money of Rs. 7.25 crores and Rs. 23.75 crores respectively for undertaking immediate relief measures. The Government of Assam had asked for additional allotment of food-grains for taking up relief measures. 5,000 metric tonnes of rice has been allocated for this purpose immediately.

The Government of Assam have asked for additional financial assistance. They have been requested to indicate the details regarding utilisation of the Margin money and also present a memorandum giving the details of the damages to enable the Government of India to depute a Central team for assessing the financial assistance required.

The present flood situation in Assam and West Bengal is certainly causing concern and I would like to assure the House that all assistance will be extended to the State administration and the people of the area most expeditiously.