

[श्री मोहम्मद इस्माइल]

जा सकता है और बाहर से भी लिया जा सकता है। मंत्री महोदय के सामने मैंने यह बात रखी है, मुझे आशा है कि आप जवाब देते वक्त इसका भी जिक्र करेंगे। बहुत सी बातें मैंने ऐसी कहीं हैं, जिनके लिये शायद आप कहेंगे कि यह हमारी मिनिस्ट्री से बाहर की बात है। अगर ऐसा है तो आप उनको बाहर भेज दीजिये ताकि किसी दूसरे अवसर पर उनका जवाब मिल सके। टैक्स के सिनसिले में मैंने बातें कही हैं, मैं उनका जवाब चाहता हूँ। इन अल्फ'ज के साथ मैं इस बिल का विरोध करता हूँ।

MR. SPEAKER : We will continue this debate tomorrow. But before we take up the next item, Shrimati Nandini Satpathy will make a statement. I wanted to make it clear that on this matter of stopping of publication by certain newspapers in Calcutta, I had allowed a Call Attention Motion already, but the justification for the statement as given to me and explained to me is such that it needs being made today. I hope you will believe me when I say that they think that if we issue an appeal today the newspapers might resume publication by tomorrow, that is why I wanted to convey it to you so that there may be no misunderstanding tomorrow. I have already conveyed to the Members who gave the call attention notice that—they are free to ask questions if they like, here and now.... (*Interruptions*).

SHRI DINEN BHATTACHARYYA (Serampore) : It is better we put questions today.

MR. SPEAKER : In that case we shall not have call attention motion tomorrow because the significance will be gone. So she will make a statement now and you can ask questions.

17.31 hrs.

STATEMENT Re. INCREASE IN PRICES OF NEWSPAPERS

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY) : With the imposition of the

Excise Duty on newspapers which came into effect on the 15th November, a number of newspapers in the country have increased their prices well in excess of the Excise Duty. The price increases have not been uniform, but have varied from 2 paise which is the Excise Duty now payable by newspapers whose circulation is above 15,000 right up to 8 paise.

Newspapers managements have justified increase in prices in excess of the Excise Duty as being due to the increase in cost of various items. While there may have been some increases in cost, Government are of opinion that the increases in prices, which have followed no uniform pattern cannot be justified on this ground. This is obvious from the fact that while cost increases must have affected all newspapers uniformly, the price increases have varied from one paper to another. Government feel that such price increases, specially now when the country is passing through a difficult period, should have been avoided.

In this respect the situation in the Eastern Sector of the country is specially serious. Hawkers in Calcutta claimed their proportionate share of the price increase on account of Excise Duty and since newspapers managements declined to pay them additional commission the distribution of newspapers in the city has practically come to a standstill. This is unfortunate, especially because people are anxious to have the latest and most authentic news of developments on our border. In these circumstances the absence of newspapers affects public morale, encourages unfounded rumours and tends to create panic.

The Government of West Bengal and the Government of India have tried to intervene in this situation. As a result, the Paschim Banga Sangbad Patra Bikreta Samity, an Association representing newspaper hawkers in the city have agreed not to claim any additional commission so long as the increase in the price of the newspaper is restricted to the amount of the Excise Duty. Government appreciate this gesture of the Samity and appeal newspaper managements and hawkers all over the country to respond to the situation in the same spirit which this Samity has shown. Government requests newspaper managements to restrict the price increase for the present to the amount of the Excise Duty and defer the question of any further increase for decision

after a careful and detailed study of the cost of newspaper production and other factors.

Government sincerely hope that newspapers managements will heed this appeal and will publish their newspapers with immediate effect at the old prices plus two paise to cover the Excise Duty. As I have stated earlier, Government attach considerable importance to the normal publication of newspapers and, will therefore, naturally watch the situation with anxiety. I assure the House, that should this appeal fail, Government will take appropriate steps in the matter.

SHRI DINEN BHATTACHARYYA (Serampore) : So far as the price of newspapers is concerned, it is really a scandal at least in West Bengal. I do not know whether it is known to the Minister that in 1966 the cost of newspapers was increased from 16 to 18 paise. In 1970 in February this 18 paise was increased to 20 paise. In 1971 February, this 20 paise was made 22 paise, that is before the imposition of this levy. Then again they are increasing this 22 paise to 26 and in some cases 28 paise. All these are big newspapers controlled by the monopolists. These newspapers while increasing the cost of the paper are not ready to share the increase with the hawkers who daily sell their papers. But at the same time these newspapers are demanding from the hawkers who advance security money for the papers they sell. That is one of the problems.

It is not a fact that the hawkers refused to distribute the papers asking for a portion of the increase. Now they have come forward with an assurance that they will not demand anything if only 2 paise extra for the levy is charged on the papers. But these clever sharks, big monopolists, take every plea to increase the price of the paper. Some big Congressmen are the proprietors of the papers like the Ananda Bazar Patrika and the Jugantar. Shri Sidhartha Shankar Ray can use his influence on them not to create this trouble. Only three days ago there was an air-raid practice, but the unfortunate part is this that nobody could get the information because there was no newspaper.

It is good that the Minister has assured the House that if the newspaper owners do not agree to the suggestion made by the Government, the Government will take further steps. Tomorrow morning we will know whe-

ther newspaper owners agree to the suggestion or not. If they do not agree I want to know if the steps that are proposed will be taken by tomorrow evening. I want a categorical answer to this.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : I have made it absolutely clear in my statement that Government are fully seized of the problem and are trying to do whatever is necessary in this matter. If they do not heed the appeal, I do not want to say exactly at what time we are going to take steps, but we are keenly watching the developments, and if nothing happens, naturally the Government has to take some measures.

SHRI B. K. DASCHOWDHURY (Cooch-Bhar) : In view of the acute problem created in the entire sector by the closure of the publication of the newspapers, I would like to know whether there is any policy known as the price-page schedule and what should be the prices of the newspapers according to that policy : Secondly, may I know whether it is also a fact that the newspaper-owners are giving only 25 per cent commission to the vendors of papers published from Calcutta, while in other parts of India, the local vendors get 31½ per cent, and whether this was also a point referred to Government by the Paschim Banga Patra Vikreta Samiti ?

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : I think the hon. member is quite aware of the fact that the price-page scheduled has been struck down by the Supreme Court and it is not there now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS rose—

MR. SPEAKER : The Minister has to make the same statement before the Rajya Sabha before it adjourns today at 6 O'clock. So, she wants to be free at about five minutes to 6. I will first call the names of those Members who have given notice of the call attention. Mr. Naval Kishore Sharma. Mr. Sarar Guha, Mr. Das Munsai, Mr. Sashi Bhushan, Mr. Daga, None of them is here, Mr. Vajpayee.

श्री अदल बिहारी बाजपेयी (स्वालयर) :
अध्यक्ष महोदय, क्या यह सच है कि एक समाचार-पत्र ने जो कलकत्ता और दिल्ली से

[श्री अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी]

एक साथ प्रकाशित होता है, कलकत्ते में कीमत बढ़ा दी है, लेकिन दिल्ली में नहीं बढ़ाई है ? क्या इसका अर्थ यह है कि अखबार को निकालने का जो खर्च बढ़ा है वह केवल कलकत्ते में बढ़ा है, दिल्ली में नहीं बढ़ा है ? इससे स्पष्ट है कि खर्च बढ़ गया है, यह बहाना लेकर कलकत्ते में दाम बढ़ाये गये ।

मैं इस अपील का स्वागत करता हूँ, समर्थन करता हूँ । सारा सदन इस अपील के पीछे खड़ा है और मुझे विश्वास है कि यह अपील अपना काम करेगी । लेकिन मैं जानना चाहता हूँ कि अगर इस अपील ने अपना असर नहीं दिखाया तो क्या सूचना और प्रसारण मंत्रालय इन समाचार-पत्रों को राह पर लाने के लिये उनको सरकारी विज्ञापन बन्द करने के सवाल पर विचार करेगा ?

अध्यक्ष महोदय : पहले अपील को देख लें, फिर यह सवाल करें ।

श्री अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी : यह साथ ही होना चाहिये ।

अध्यक्ष महोदय : पहले अपील होने दीजिये ।

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : I thank the hon. member for his support. It is a fact that in the case of a paper which comes out from Delhi as well as Calcutta simultaneously, they have raised the price of their Calcutta edition but not the price of the Delhi edition. As I have already stated in my statement, whatever steps are necessary will be taken if they do not heed this appeal. I hope the hon. member will have the patience to wait for some time and see how it works.

SHRI S. M. BANERJEE (Kanpur) : When we opposed the introduction of this particular Bill which we are going to discuss, we have made it very clear that the prices of newspapers, particularly in West Bengal like Ananda Basar Patrika and Jugantar, were increased by six to seven paise. The original

price was 20 paise. Now it has been raised to 25 or 26 paise on the ground that, apart from the additional excise duty, the price of newsprint has gone up. Will the government ensure that the newspapers do not increase their prices on the ground of increase in the price of newsprint ? I know how the newspapers use their newsprint. Without imputing any motives on any newspaper, I can say that it is a reality that almost every big newspaper sells a part of the newsprint in the blackmarket. So, I would like to know whether care will be taken to see that they do not increase the price on the plea of increase in the price of newsprint ?

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : I have already mentioned in my statement that this is not the time to raise the price of newspaper on the ground that the price of newsprint has gone up. It is a fact that the price of newsprint has increased, but it should not be made that plea at this moment for raising the price. Further, as I said earlier, the increase in the price of newsprint cannot vary from place to place or newspaper to newspaper. But, as Shri Vajpayee has pointed out, one newspaper has raised the price of the Calcutta edition but not the Delhi edition. There is no uniformity. We are looking into the matter and we will see to it that they do not increase the prices.

SHRI TRIDIB CHAUDHURI (Berhampur) : The price increase has not been only in the case of the Calcutta newspapers. The only thing is that in Calcutta public notice has been drawn to it because the newspapers have ceased publication. Naturally, government are worried about it. I do not know if somebody with authority, particularly this government, which has a massive majority behind it, had drawn the attention of the newspapers to the existence of a legislation called the Maintenance of Internal Security Act and these days we are passing through a national crisis although emergency has not been formally declared ? The newspapers must be told that their action is nothing sort of anti-national action and it militates against the security of the country.

That apart, there is another aspect. While the Bombay edition of the Times of India has increased its price by seven paise, the Delhi edition has increased it only by two paise. There is similar difference between the Calcutta and Delhi edition of another

newspaper. So, any action that would be taken should be on an all-India level. Parliament will be behind the government. Government should put their foot down firmly and say that this will not be allowed at this time of national crisis.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : I have made it very clear in my statement that this policy will be applicable not only to the Calcutta newspapers but to all newspapers in the country. There is no question of doing something only in Calcutta. It will apply to all those newspapers which have raised their prices.

SHRI SEZHIYAN (Kumbakonam) : Just now the hon. Minister has said that first a request will be made to the newspapers, to be followed by legislative measures if necessary. In the case of newspapers which raised their prices beyond 2 paise, I would like to know whether the excess so collected will be taken over by the Government because that is an anti-social and anti-national action on the part of the papers? Has the Government any proposal under consideration from this point of view? Secondly, will Government consider giving exemption to monthlies and fortnightlies and newspapers which have a circulation of below 20,000?

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : The suggestions made by the hon. Member will definitely be taken into consideration while talking some measures in the matter.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU (Diamond Harbour) : I want to ask the hon. Minister if she is aware of the fact that in the eastern region, that is, Calcutta, the price of newspaper is one of the highest in the country. Are you aware of the fact that the readership figure per thousand is the second lowest? What are you going to do with regard to that? Is it also a fact that in the Audit Bureau of Circulation most of the newspapers have been showing highly inflated circulation figures? They are handling newsprint very efficiently for their own gains. The excise duty was to be calculated at that rate. That is what has really put them into difficulty.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : It is not possible for me to say whether that is a hot or not. Naturally, when these things are

coming into the open, many things which probably hon. Members think right will definitely come in front of the public.

SHRI SHYAM SUNDER MOHAPATRA (Balasore) : The hon. Minister has stated that the hawkers have demanded commission on the increase in the price. While coming to Delhi I saw in the train one daily paper published by the C. P. I. (M) I saw a statement issued by the General Secretary of the *Paschim Banga Sambadpatra Bikreta Samiti* where he has categorically stated. "It is a blatant lie that we are demanding commission. Our agitation is only on the increase because these newspaper owners have increased the price which our people in the country cannot pay. So, those who are saying that we are demanding commission are saying a blatant lie."

She should kindly enquire into it. Otherwise, it will be a reflection on the Samiti.

SHRIMATI NANDINI SATPATHY : I am sorry to say that my hon. friend is wrongly informed. It is a fact that they have actually asked for commission over the increase in price and the excise duty. As I have already said in my statement, the Government intervened into it and steps were taken. I have got a letter from the General Secretary, *Paschim Banga Sambadpatra Bikreta Samiti* where they have said that, if they do not increase the Price beyond the excise duty, they will not demand commission which they are demanding now. With whom he has talked I do not know.

MR. SPEAKER : She has to go to the *Rajya Sabha* to make a statement there. We now take up the next item.

17.53 hrs.

HALF-AN-HOUR DISCUSSION RE : POWER CRISIS IN WEST BENGAL

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BOSU (Diamond Harbour) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is an acute shortage of power in West Bengal at a time when it is retarding the industrial growth in that part of the country. It is at a time when it needs to be accelerated for defence production, increase in G. N. P. and creation of employment opportunities.