

PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

LOK SABHA

6.19

COMMUNAL DISTURBANCES IN WEST BENGAL
SHRI G.L. NANDA'S STATEMENT IN PARLIAMENT

New Delhi, ~~March 22, 1964.~~
February 11, 1964.

Shri Gulzari Lal Nanda, Union Home Minister, made the following statement in the Lok Sabha today. A similar statement was made by him in the Rajya Sabha later.

"Events in East Pakistan and parts of West Bengal during recent weeks have been a source of acute anxiety and distress for the whole country. The salient facts relating to these occurrences have been given in a Statement which I am laying on the Table of the House. I shall refer briefly here to some important aspects of these developments. There were violent manifestations of communal hatred in Khulna and Jessore districts in East Pakistan commencing from the 3rd of January, 1964. This led to repercussions in Calcutta and the Districts of 24-Parganas, and Nadia in West Bengal. While the disturbances in West Bengal were checked and the situation speedily brought under control the ravages of communal rioting continued and spread in East Pakistan.

2. The theft of the holy relic in Hazratbal Shrine in Jammu and Kashmir on 27th December provided the background for this agonising series of outbursts in East Pakistan. The loss of the holy relic deeply affected the religious sentiments of the Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir and was strongly deplored and condemned by members of all the communities in the State and the rest of India. The holy relic was recovered on 4th January, 1964 and has now been identified as genuine and accepted ...

accepted as such by the people of the State. Throughout this period there was complete communal harmony and accord among all the communities in Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan, however, gave a communal twist to the incident and the leadership and the Press went all out to exploit it for anti-Indian propaganda. The communal disorders in Khulna and Jessore may be traced directly to this extremely inflammatory campaign. There was extensive looting and arson of shops and houses belonging to the minority community in Khulna, Daulatpur and Khalispur. The trouble quickly spread to adjacent areas of Khulna town and became so serious as to require the calling in of the army. Disturbances broke out in the district of Jessore also and Rampal Bazar was completely burnt down. According to the press release of the East Pakistan Government 29 persons were killed in these disturbances, whereas the figures were put as high as 200 by non-official sources. As a sequel, the first incidents occurred in West Bengal on January 6, 1964 in the suburbs of Calcutta. Cases of stabbing, arson, looting and other forms of lawlessness were reported both from the city of Calcutta and in the districts of 24-Parganas, Nadia, Howrah, Hoogly and Burdwan. The Government of West Bengal promptly took firm and effective steps to put an end to the lawlessness and troops were called in during the early stages to assist the civil power.

3. All help and assistance required by the West Bengal Government was given by the Central Government and armed police forces were rushed to Calcutta and other affected areas. Consultations were held between the State and Central Government regarding the further steps that had to be taken. With a view to enabling displaced persons to go back to their homes, the West Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Ordinance was immediately promulgated. Round-

the-clock

the-clock curfew was imposed, a large number of hoodlums were taken into custody and police pickets were posted in areas where violence was apprehended. Mobile patrol by the police was also intensified. A large number of goondas were taken into custody; nearly 15,000 persons have been arrested all over West Bengal and specific cases have been started against 7,400 of these. Citizens' Committees were set up in the city of Calcutta in consultation with voluntary organisations with a view to securing active public participation in the maintenance of good communal relations. An encouraging feature noticeable in West Bengal was the protection and help given by Hindus to Muslims in distress even at serious personal risk to themselves. Similar instances have come to notice in East Pakistan where Muslims came to the help of Hindus. Safer element in Pakistan including some newspapers also adopted a line of protest against communal violence and the inactivity of the Government of East Pakistan.

4. As a result of the prompt measures taken by the Government of West Bengal, the number of incidents registered a steep fall on January 13 and by January 15, normal conditions were restored. By January 29, the area under army control had been gradually returned to the police the curfew was also completely lifted in the city. In the disturbances, 208 persons of both communities lost their lives; 56 more were killed as a result of police action. It is estimated that in the city of Calcutta about 62,000 of both communities were people whose homes were destroyed or who left their homes out of a sense of insecurity. Of these more than 59,000 have since returned to their homes. In the districts, mostly in 24-Parganas and Nadia roughly 84,098 persons are estimated to have been displaced of whom 90% have returned to their homes. Measures have been taken in hand to provide prompt

relief . . .

relief and succour to these people and on behalf of the Government I can give the assurance that neither funds nor facilities would be stinted for the purpose. The number of persons who have crossed over to East Pakistan because of these disturbances is estimated to be slightly more than 5,000.

5. Simultaneously with these measures for dealing with the specific situation in West Bengal, the Government of India addressed the State Governments concerned suggesting "utmost vigilance and strongest possible action including preventive measures at any sign of trouble to keep under check communal and anti-social elements". I am sure Members will wish me to pay a tribute to the calm and restrained manner in which the people in other States conducted themselves during this delicate period.

6. In contrast to these determined and successful efforts on our part to restore normal conditions the Government of Pakistan failed to take its responsibilities seriously. On the other hand, it made efforts to shift the entire blame for the riots on to us. It is also unfortunate that the Press in Pakistan should have adopted a similar attitude and come out with extremely exaggerated, false and inflammatory accounts of incidents in West Bengal. Largely as a result of the incitement thus provided violent disturbances started in Dacca and Narayanganj. Extensive attacks on the life and property of the minority community in this area and several surrounding villages continued unchecked for nearly a week. There were reports of whole villages like Kayer Bazar and Baidyer Bazar inhabited by the minority community being completely wiped out. The exact number of casualties is not known on account of strict censorship imposed by the authorities. Pakistan official hand-outs claim that not more than 150 have been killed (including deaths due

to police firings). Unofficial estimates put it at well over a thousand. The number of refugees in Dacca and Narayanganj reached nearly a lakh and there are reports that the Government was unable to cope with the needs of the refugees camps where, due to unsatisfactory arrangements and hunger and exposure, many deaths occurred.

7. The Government of India communicated to the Pakistan Government their deep concern at the loss of life and property of the minority community resulting from the recrudescence of communal riots in Dacca and neighbouring areas. The President, in his reply to Pakistan President's message on the West Bengal disturbances, proposed a joint statement appealing for communal peace and avoidance of incitement and provocation to communal passions and expressing the determination of the two Governments to assure to the respective minorities a sense of security and well-being. The Government of India also made a further suggestion that in view of the situation in Dacca and Jessore, the Home ministers of India and Pakistan accompanied by the Chief Minister of West Bengal and the Governor of East Pakistan should meet urgently in Dacca or Calcutta to impress upon the people of both countries the earnest desire of the Governments of India and Pakistan to establish harmony and peace amongst all communities in their respective territories and to take all measures necessary to that end. The Government of Pakistan rejected this basically human approach with its usual cynicism and apathy. In the meantime, a large number of refugees affected by this wave of communal violence in East Pakistan began crossing over to Assam, Tripura and West Bengal. The total of such refugees is estimated to be over 25,000; more are coming in.

8. The large scale exodus from the East Pakistan is the inevitable consequence of Pakistan's irresponsible attitude and

and its disinclination to accept its minimum responsibility to create conditions to help restore the confidence of the minority community. Nevertheless, the policy of the Government of India is to treat the rehabilitation of the new migrants from Pakistan as a national problem.

Instructions have already been issued to ease the conditions for the grant of migration certificates to intending Hindu migrants from East Pakistan to this country. In addition to the already existing normal categories qualifying for the issue of Migration Certificates, it has been decided to include the following categories also to meet the realities of the present situation:-

- (i) Girls of marriageable age; unattached women and orphans who may have no sponsors in India, as well as girls approaching marriageable age;
- (ii) Families seriously affected due to arson, looting and killing;
- (iii) Petty traders who have lost their wherewithal as well as industrial labour, skilled or unskilled who have been badly affected;
- (iv) Cases for Deputy High Commissioner's discretion. This would also take care of borderline cases.

In view of the very large number of applicants, the procedure for the issue of the certificates has also been simplified. As far as possible, it is the Government's intention to reduce to the minimum the period of uncertainty and hardship for the migrants coming in and, for that purpose, to draw up suitable plans and schemes for their resettlement. To consider certain practical questions arising out of this and to explore possibilities of obtaining lands for the migrants, a meeting of the Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and West Bengal was held on February 8, 1964. The State Governments concerned have assured us that they would take immediate steps to make available nearly two lakh acres of land for the re-settlement of migrant families, both agriculturists and non-agriculturists. Members will appreciate that the

various ...

various processes connected with the development of the land thus made available are bound to take time; however, efforts will be made to make the land ready for settlement as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, pressure would be maintained on Pakistan Government to see reason and to follow internationally recognised canons of behaviour in respect of their duty towards the minorities."

UCT:KBS:POOL.

252/7