

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru

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In the Rajya Sabha: Indian Traders in Tibet¹

Shri Nawab Singh Chauhan: Will the Prime Minister be pleased to refer to the answer given to Unstarred Question No. 21 in the Rajya Sabha on the 23rd April, 1959² and state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that the Tibetan Government have imposed restrictions on the movement etc. of the Indian traders in Yatung, Phari and Gyantse and that they are being compelled to come back to India; and
- (b) the number of Indian traders in Yatung, Phari and Gyantse and their number in the whole of Tibet?

The Deputy Minister of External Affairs (Shrimati Lakshmi Menon):

(a) Since the recent disturbances in Tibet, movement from one trade centre to another is being controlled through the Chinese Military control authorities and the Preparatory Committee. Although no open orders regarding restrictions on movements of Indian traders of Yatung, Phari and Gyantse have come to our notice, it is a fact that travel permits are not being given freely.

Indian traders are encountering various difficulties but it cannot be stated that they are being compelled to return to India.

¹ 13 August 1959. Rajya Sabha Debates, Vol. XXVI, Nos. 1-13, cols 451-457

² See SWJN/SS/48/pp.475-477

(b) The total number of Indian traders keeps fluctuating at different times. At present there are 97 traders in Yatung, Phari and Gyantse. The total number of traders in the whole of Tibet at present is near about 2,117.

[Translation begins:

Shri Nawab Singh Chauhan: Is it true that many traders who have been living there for generations wish to come to India. but they are not considered Indians and permission is not granted to them?

Translation ends]

Shrimati Lakshmi Menon: It is true and a statement on the subject was made yesterday or the day before in the other House and it has appeared in all the papers about the difficulties experienced by people of Indian origin, by Kashmiri Muslims and Ladakhis, who are in Tibet.³

[Translation begins:

Shri Nawab Singh Chauhan: Is it true that the Indian Trade Agency there cannot function properly because many things are being done which are opposed to the Trade Agreement between India and China?

Translation ends]

³ Lakshmi Menon informed the Lok Sabha on 11 August that a large number of persons of Indian origin who wanted to register themselves as Indian nationals faced many difficulties; that the Chinese Government's note of 17 July claimed that those who had been living in Tibet for long were in effect Chinese nationals; and that India had urged China to permit persons of Indian origin to seek the protection of the Indian Consul-General in Lhasa or to return to India. She said there were 97 registered Indian traders in Yatung, Phari and Gyantse and nearly 2,000 seasonal traders currently visiting Western Tibet; that, as far as GOI could ascertain, there were 124 families of Kashmiri Muslims with a total number of 583 persons in the Lhasa-Shigatse area; that before the disturbances nearly 400 Lama students from Ladakh were studying in various monasteries in Tibet, and approximately 40 Ladakhi Lamas were among the refugees who had come to India from Tibet. Lok Sabha Debates, Vol. XXXII, cols 1724-1727.

Shrimati Lakshmi Menon: Yes, Sir. The answer was given that many restrictions are imposed on traders and these make it very difficult for our traders to carry on their trade.

Shri B.K.P. Sinha: Under international law, a man's nationality is determined not only by his residence but also by volition, his desire to accept the nationality of the country. May I know, Sir, whether the Chinese Government or the Communist system accepts this principle of nationality or do they have some other principle of nationality?

Shrimati Lakshmi Menon: I do not know what the Communists accept, but as far as Tibet is concerned, I have already told him.

Shri N.M. Lingam: Since this is a serious violation of the 1954 agreement between India and China in regard to Tibet and Indian traders therein, will the hon. Deputy Minister please tell us what steps Government have taken to bring this to the notice of the Chinese Government?

Shrimati Lakshmi Menon: From time to time these difficulties are brought to the notice of the Chinese Government through our Ambassador in Peking.

Shri M.H. Samuel: May I know, Sir, if Government have any information on the subject, as to whether there is a large concentration of Chinese troops on the Sikkim and Bhutan borders and that China has claimed these territories also as part of her territory?

Mr. Chairman: That is another question.

Shrimati Lakshrni Menon: That does not arise out of this question.

Shri Jaswant Singh: I would like to know whether the Deputy Minister has accepted that Indian traders are facing difficulties in Tibet - both those who are residents there as well as the seasonal traders who go there and join in the summer. I would like to know what steps Government are taking to see that these Indian traders are given due relief and help.

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: The normal step, Sir, is to approach the Chinese Government both in Tibet and in Peking. And we have approached them and sent them full details of this repeatedly - and in some detail I pointed this out and reminded them about this.

Shri Jaswant Singh: But then I would like to know what the Chinese say in regard to the difficulties that the Indian traders are facing; whether they are prepared to help them or they have not given any reply to our representations.

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: We have not had any answer to our latest memorandum from Peking, but the local people in Tibet, the local Chinese Authorities in Tibet, give various answers to various things, which according to our opinion are not always relevant.

Shri N.M. Lingam: Since this development is a sequel to the Tibetan upheaval and since generally the attitude of China is becoming more and more hostile to India, has Government considered the question of taking up the whole question of Indo-Chinese relations, after the happenings in Tibet?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: I do not know what the hon. Member means by the 'whole question'. As questions arise, they are taken up, sometimes more than one question. There are several matters like this which we have taken up with the Chinese Government and have addressed them on the subject. Some replies came sometime ago. We have addressed them again. As for the first part of his question, it is rather difficult to say what the reason is for this kind of thing. To some extent there has been pressure on the Indian traders even before these Tibetan developments. I know that when I passed through a little comer of Tibet last year, at Yatung,⁴ the Indian traders came to me and complained of various disabilities from which they suffered.⁵ A year or two before they were in a much more prosperous condition, but now disabilities are gradually coming in. I had taken up the matter then. But it is true that all this has increased considerably in the last two or three months or so.

Shri Rajendra Pratap Sinha:⁶ We would like to know from the Prime Minister about the welfare particularly of our Indian nationals there. We know that they are in difficulties with regard to trade and other things as the Prime Minister has said. But do our missions there keep themselves properly informed about the welfare of our people and that they are not being harassed for one reason or the other? We are very anxious about that aspect of the question.

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: Apart from the traders there and apart from the people in our missions, there are two main groups, both of these groups

⁴ Nehru was in Yatung on 18 September 1958 on his way to Bhutan; on his return journey from Bhutan, he reached Yatung at noon on 29 September and left for Sikkim on the morning of 30 September

⁵ See SWJN/SS/48/item 133; also SWJN/SS/44/p. 20

⁶ Independent, Rajya Sabha MP from Bihar

coming from Ladakh. One is a group of Ladakhi Muslims and the other a group of Ladakhi Buddhists. The Buddhist lamas, etc. go there to study, live in monasteries, and the Muslims go there for various purposes and remain there for quite a considerable time. Now, with regard to these latter groups, there is an argument going on between the Chinese government and ourselves as to whether they are to be considered Indian nationals or not. I do not want to take up in answer to the question the story of this argument. We think they are Indian nationals; they claim to be Indian Nationals; they want to be Indian Nationals. But the Chinese Authorities in Tibet have not accepted this claim and pointed out that they have been there for a long time and they have not got their requisite papers, etc. which they did not have in the normal course previously. They were not called upon to do so. So, in so far as these people, that is, the Ladakhi Muslims, are concerned, our information is that considerable pressure has been brought to bear upon them, and they have not been easily accessible to our missions there. But for the other Indians, there are real economic troubles.

Shri Rajendra Pratap Sinha: Is there any restriction on other Indians visiting our missions or is there none? The other Indians, these Ladakhis, can they go freely to our Indian mission or not?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: I do not think there are any rules prohibiting them from coming. But the fact of the matter is that it is difficult to travel without all kinds of permits. There is no conveyance available, no vehicle available. The road may be not open to traffic. So, it is not strictly speaking, easy for people to go from one town to another.

Shri B.K.P. Sinha: May I know what practical consequences will follow out of the denial of Indian nationality to these traders or other citizens of India?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: One practical consequence will be that they will not be followed to leave Tibet. Otherwise, they are entitled to leave Tibet and go back to what they consider their original homes in Ladakh.

Shrimati Yashoda Reddy:⁷ The Prime Minister was pleased to say that they have submitted a memorandum to the Chinese Government and that they have been waiting for a reply. May I know when this memorandum was sent and whether the Government of India will think of approaching them again if they do not get an answer?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: So many memoranda have been sent to the Chinese Government, formally and informally - not one, they are quite a number. I should think that one of our principal memoranda was sent about, maybe, three weeks ago.⁸ But since then, other matters have been brought to the notice of the Chinese Government.

Shri Rajendra Pratap Sinha: I would like to know from the Prime Minister whether our mission people visit our Indian nationals there. There may be practical difficulties for them to go to the mission, but what about our mission people going and keeping in touch with our nationals?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: It is not difficult within the same town, say, Yatung, where people can visit each other more or less. But it is difficult for them to go for instance, to Gyantse because of transport difficulties.

⁷ Congress, Rajya Sabha MP from Andhra Pradesh

⁸ . See item 174, fn 54