

Lok Sabha

22 April 1959

Oral Answers to Questions

INDIAN CONSUL-GENERAL IN LHASA S.N.Q. No. 28 —

Shri S. A. Mehdi:

Shri Nath Pai: Will the Prime Minister be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that our Consul General in Lhasa was subjected to restrictions regarding his movements since the current unrest in Tibet;
- (b) if so, nature of these restrictions; and
- (c) whether these restrictions are still in operation?

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

(a) to (c) For some days after fighting broke out in Lhasa on the 20th March it was impossible for the Consul-General and his staff to go out of the premises of the Consulate General.

The Vice-Director of the Foreign Bureau told the Consul-General that in their own interest, except for every essential work the personnel of the Consulate General should not leave their premises. Chinese troops who were posted just outside the premises did not allow any person to go out of the premises or come in. When the Consul-General wished to go out on the 20th March to see the Indian nationals and send some members of his staff to the market, the Chinese guards informed him that they had to take up the matter with the Foreign Bureau. The Consul-General found it difficult even to send a letter to the Foreign Bureau. Two or three days later, he was told by the guard that persons who were in possession of identity cards with

photographs endorsed by the Foreign Bureau would be allowed to leave the premises. On or about the 8th April the Chinese Foreign Bureau returned the identity cards sent to them for endorsement and thereafter difficulties about the movement of the staff disappeared. The Consul-General was informed by the Foreign Bureau on April 11 that only cars with special permits of the Military Control Commission could be used. He would be provided with a car by the Control Commission whenever he required one. On the 17th the Foreign Bureau informed the Consul-General that he could use the Consulate car without any special permit and that the staff of the Consulate-General also could leave the premises without showing their identity cards or passports to the guards. Since then all restrictions appear to have been removed.

Shri S. A. Mehdi: Is it a fact that even wireless connection was cut off some time after that?

Shrimati Lakshmi Menon: No, Sir.

Shri Vajpayee: Are we to understand that our Mission in Lhasa was virtually under house arrest in those days?

The Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs (Shri Jawaharlal Nehru): No, Sir; that would not be correct. The facts indicate that conditions were such in Lhasa, if I may say so, that for some time it was not completely under the control of the Chinese authorities.

As soon as they came more or less under their control, they permitted the staff of the Consulate to go out; but, not during the period when presumably the conditions were not wholly under their control.

Raja Mahendra Pratap: I just want to say.....

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member may ask and not say.

Raja Mahendra Pratap: I ask a question. I say we have enemies on the West; we have enemies on the East. Is it proper to create more enemies in the North? We are friendly to Tibet; but we should not say things that annoy China. That is what I say. Is it proper?

27 April 1959

Answers to Questions

STATEMENT RE: SITUATION IN TIBET

The Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs (Shri Jawaharlal Nehru):
Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have made several statements in the House in regard to the developments in Tibet. The last statement was made on April 3, in which I informed the House that the Dalai Lama had entered the territory of the Indian Union with a large entourage. I should like to bring this information up-to-date and to place such additional facts as we have before the House. A few days ago, the Dalai Lama and his party reached Mussoorie, where Government had made arrangements for their stay. I have had occasion to visit Mussoorie since then and have had a long talk with the Dalai Lama. In the course of the last few days, reports have reached us that considerable numbers of Tibetans, numbering some thousands, have recently crossed into the Kameng Frontier Division of the North-East Frontier Agency and some hundreds have also entered the territory of Bhutan. They sought asylum, and we have agreed to this. Some of them who carried arms were disarmed. We do not know the exact number yet. Temporary arrangements are being made in a camp for their maintenance until they can be dispersed in accordance with their wishes and the necessities governing such cases. We could not leave these refugees to their own resources. Apart from the humanitarian considerations involved, there was also the law and order problem to be considered.

We are grateful to the Government of Assam for their help and co-operation in this matter.

So far as the Dalai Lama and his party are concerned, we had to take adequate measures on grounds of security and also to protect them from large numbers of newspaper correspondents, both Indian and foreign, who, in their anxiety to obtain first hand information in regard to a matter of world importance, were likely to harass and almost overwhelm the Dalai Lama and his party.

While we were anxious to give protection to the Dalai Lama and his party, we were agreeable to giving these newspapermen suitable opportunities to see him. I had received an appeal from nearly 75 representatives of news agencies and newspaper from Tezpur requesting me to give them such an opportunities. A senior officer of the External Affairs Ministry was, therefore, deputed to proceed to Tezpur in advance to deal with the press representatives and photographers who had assembled in that small town of Assam. This officer made the necessary administrative arrangements to meet, as far as possible, the wishes of the newspapermen to see the Dalai Lama and to photograph him. Soon after entering India, the Dalai Lama indicated his wish to make a statement. We were later informed that this statement would be released at Tezpur. Our officer made arrangements for the distribution of a translation of the statement to the newspaper correspondents.

In view of certain irresponsible charges made, I should like to make it clear that the Dalai Lama was entirely responsible for this statement as well as for a subsequent briefer statement that was made by him from Mussoorie. Our officers had nothing to do with the drafting or preparation of these statements.

I need not tell the House that the Dalai Lama entered India entirely of his own volition. At no time had we suggested that he should come to India. We

had naturally given thought to the possibility of his seeking asylum in India and when such request came, we readily granted it. His entry with a large party in a remote corner of our country created special problems of transport, organization and security.

We deputed an officer to meet the Dalai Lama and his party at Bomdila and to escort them to Mussoorie.

The particular officer was selected because he had served as Consul-General in Lhasa and therefore was to some extent known to the Dalai Lama and his officials. The selection of Mussoorie for the Dalai Lama's stay was not finalized till his own wishes were ascertained in the matter and he agreed to it.

There was no desire on our part to put any undue restrictions on him, but in the special circumstances, certain arrangements had necessarily to be made to prevent any mishap. It should be remembered that the various events in Tibet, culminating in the Dalai Lama's departure from Lhasa and entry into India had created tremendous interest among the people of India and in the world press. After his arrival in Mussoorie, steps were taken to prevent the Dalai Lama from being harassed by crowds of people trying to see him as well as by newspapermen. Apart from this, no restrictions about his movement were placed on him. He has been told that he and his party can move about Mussoorie according to their wishes. It should be remembered that the Dalai Lama has recently not only had a long strenuous and dangerous journey, but has also had harrowing experiences which must affect the nerves of even a hardened person. He is only just 24 years of age. These are some bare facts, but behind these facts lie serious developments which may have far reaching consequences. Tragedy has been and is being enacted in Tibet, passions have been let loose, charges made and language used which cannot but worsen the situation and our relations with our northern neighbour. I am sure that the House will agree with me that in

considering matters of such high importance, we should exercise restraint and wisdom and use language which is moderate and precise. In these days of cold war, there has been a tendency to use unrestrained language and often to make wild charges without any justification. We have fortunately kept out of the cold war and I hope that on this, as on any other occasion, we shall not use the language of cold war.

The matter is too serious to be dealt with in a trivial or excited way. I would, therefore, appeal to the press and the public to exercise restraint in the language. I regret that occasionally there have been lapses from this on our side. In particular, I regret that grave discourtesy was shown some days ago to a picture of the head of the Chinese State, Chairman Mao Tse-tung. This was done by a small group of irresponsible people in Bombay. In the excitement of the moment, we cannot allow ourselves to be swept away into wrong courses.

It is not for me to make any similar appeal to the leaders, the press and the people of China. All I can say is that I have been greatly distressed at the tone of the comments and the charges made against India by responsible people in China. They have used the language of cold war regardless of truth and propriety.

This is peculiarly distressing in a great nation with thousands of years of culture behind it, noted for its restrained and polite behaviour.

The charges made against India are so fantastic that I find it difficult to deal with them.

There is the charge of our keeping the Dalai Lama under duress. The Chinese authorities should surely know how we function in this country and what our laws and constitution are. Even if we were so inclined, we could not keep the Dalai Lama under some kind of detention against his will, and there can be no question of our wishing to do so. We can gain nothing by it except the burden of difficult problems. In any event, this matter can be easily

cleared. It is open to the Dalai Lama at any time to go back to Tibet or wherever he wants to. As the Panchen Lama has made himself responsible specially for some strange statements, I have stated that we would welcome him to come to India and meet the Dalai Lama himself. Should he choose to do so, every courtesy will be extended to him. I have further said that the Chinese Ambassador or any other emissary of the Chinese Government can come to India for this purpose and meet the Dalai Lama.

There is no barrier for anyone to come peacefully to India, and whether we agree with him or not, we shall treat him with the courtesy due to a guest. Another and an even stranger allegation has been made about "Indian expansionists" who, it is alleged, are inheritors of the British tradition of imperialism and expansion. It is perfectly true that British policy was one of expansion into Tibet and that they carried this out by force of arms early in this century. That was, in our opinion, an unjustified and cruel adventure which brought much harm to the Tibetans. As a result of that, the then British Government in India established certain extra territorial rights in Tibet.

When India became independent, we inherited some of these rights. Being entirely opposed to any such extra territorial rights in another country, we did not wish to retain them. But in the early days after Independence and partition, our hands were full, as this House well knows, and we had to face very difficult situations in our own country. We ignored, if I may say so, Tibet. Not being able to find a suitable person to act as our representative at Lhasa, we allowed for some time the existing British representative to continue at Lhasa. Later an Indian took his place. Soon after the Chinese armies entered Tibet, the question of these extra territorial rights was raised and we readily agreed to give them up.

We would have given them up anyhow, whatever developments might have taken place in Tibet.

We withdrew our army detachments from some places in Tibet and handed over Indian postal and telegraph installations and rest houses. We laid down the Five Principles of the Panchsheel and placed our relationship with the Tibet region on a new footing. What we were anxious about was to preserve the traditional connections between India and Tibet in regard to pilgrim traffic and trade. Our action in this matter and whatever we have done subsequently in regard to Tibet is proof enough of our policy and that India had no political or ulterior ambitions in Tibet. Indeed, even from the narrowest practical point of view, any other policy would have been wrong and futile. Ever since then we have endeavoured not only to act up to the agreement we made, but to cultivate the friendship with the Chinese State and people.

It is therefore a matter of the deepest regret and surprise to us that charges should be made which are both unbecoming and entirely void of substance. We have conveyed this deep feeling of regret to the Chinese Government, more especially at the speeches delivered recently in the current session of the National People's Congress in Peking.

I stated some time ago that our broad policy was governed by three factors: (1) the preservation of the security and integrity of India; (2) our desire to maintain friendly relations with China; and (3) our deep sympathy for the people of Tibet. We shall continue to follow that policy because we think that is a correct policy not only for the present but even more so for the future. It would be a tragedy if the two great countries of Asia- India and China- which have been peaceful neighbours for ages past, should develop feelings of hostility against each other.

We for our part will follow this policy, but we hope that China also will do likewise and that nothing will be said or done which endangers the friendly relations of the two countries which are so important from the wider point of view of the peace of Asia and the world. The Five Principles have laid down,

inter alia mutual respect for each other. Such mutual respect is gravely impaired if unfounded charges are made and the language of the cold war used.

I have already made it clear previously that the charge that Kalimpong was the centre of the Tibetan rebellion is wholly unjustified.

We have large number of people of Tibetan stock living in India as Indian nationals.

We have also some Tibetan émigrés in India. All of these deeply respect the Dalai Lama. Some of these have been exceedingly unhappy at developments in Tibet; some, no doubt, have anti-Chinese sentiments.

We have made it clear to them that they will not be permitted to carry on any subversive activities from India, and I should like to say that by and large they have acted in accordance with the directions of the Government of India. I cannot obviously say that someone has not done something secretly, but to imagine or say that a small group of persons sitting in Kalimpong organised a major upheaval in Tibet seems to me to make a large draft on imagination and to slur over obvious facts.

The Khampa revolt started in an area of China proper adjoining Tibet, more than three years ago. Is Kalimpong supposed to be responsible for that? This revolt gradually spread and, no doubt, created a powerful impression on the minds of large numbers of Tibetans who had kept away from the revolt. Fears and apprehensions about their future gripped their minds and the nationalist upsurge swayed their feelings. Their fears may have been unjustified, but surely they cannot be denied. Such feelings can only be dealt with adequately by gentler methods than warfare.

When Premier Chou En-lai came here two or three year ago, he was good enough to discuss Tibet with me at considerable length.

We had a frank and full talk. He told me that while Tibet had long been a part of the Chinese State, they did not consider Tibet as a province of China.

The Tibetan people were different from the people of China proper, just as in other autonomous regions of the Chinese State, the people were different even though they formed part of that State.

Therefore, they consider Tibet an autonomous region which would enjoy autonomy. He told me further that it was absurd for anyone to imagine that China was going to force communism on Tibet. Communism could not be enforced in this way on a very backward country and they had no wish to do so even though they would like reforms to come in progressively. Even these reforms they proposed to postpone for a considerable time.

About that time, the Dalai Lama was also here and I had long talks with him then, I told him of Premier Chou En-lai's friendly approach and of his assurance that he would respect the autonomy of Tibet. I suggested to him that he should accept these assurances in good faith and co-operate in maintaining that autonomy and bringing about certain reforms in Tibet. The Dalai Lama agreed that his country, though, according to him, advanced spiritually, was very backward socially and economically and reforms were needed.

It is not for us to say how far these friendly intentions and approaches materialize. The circumstances were undoubtedly difficult. On the one side there was a dynamic, rapidly moving society; on the other, a static, unchanging society fearful of what might be done to it in the name of reform. The distance between the two was great and there appeared to be hardly any meeting point. Meanwhile, change in some forms inevitably came to Tibet. Communications developed rapidly and the long isolation of Tibet was partly broken through.

Though physical barriers were progressively removed, mental and emotional barriers increased. Apparently, the attempt to cross these mental and emotional barriers was either not made or did not succeed.

To say that a number of 'upper strata reactionaries' in Tibet were solely responsible for this appears to be an extraordinary simplification of a complicated situation. Even according to the accounts received through Chinese sources, the revolt in Tibet was of considerable magnitude and the basis of it must have been a strong feeling of nationalism which affects not only upper class people but others also. No doubt, vested interests joined it and sought to profit by it. The attempt to explain a situation by the use of rather wornout words, phrases and slogans, is seldom helpful.

When the news of these unhappy developments came to India, there was immediately a strong and widespread reaction.

The Government did not bring about this reaction. Nor was this reaction essentially political. It was largely one of sympathy based on sentiment and humanitarian reasons and also a certain feeling of kinship with the Tibetan people derived from long-established religious and cultural contacts. It was an instinctive reaction. It is true that some people in India sought to profit by it by turning it in an undesirable direction. But the fact that reaction of the Indian people was there if that was the reaction here, one may well imagine the reaction among the Tibetans themselves. Probably this reaction is shared in the other Buddhist countries of Asia.

When there are such strong feelings, which are essentially not political, they cannot be dealt with by political methods alone, much less by military methods. We have no desire whatever to interfere in Tibet; we have every desire to maintain the friendship between India and China, but at the same time, we have every sympathy for the people of Tibet, and we are greatly distressed at their hapless plight.

We hope still that the authorities of China, in their wisdom, will not use their great strength against the Tibetan but will win them through friendly co-operation in accordance with the assurance they have themselves given

about the autonomy of the Tibet region. Above all, we hope that the present fighting and killing will cease.

As I have said above, I had a long talk with the Dalai Lama three days ago at Mussoorie. He told me of the difficulties he had to face, of the growing resentment of his people at the conditions existing there and how he sought to restrain them, of his feelings that the religion of the Buddha, which was more to him than life itself, was being endangered. He said that up to the last moment he did not wish to leave Lhasa. It was only on the afternoon of the 17th March, when, according to him, some shells were fired at his palace and fell in a pond nearby, that the sudden decision was taken to leave Lhasa. Within a few hours the same day he and his party left Lhasa and took the perilous journey to the Indian frontier. The departure was so hurried that even an adequate supply of clothes etc. could not be brought. When I met the Dalai Lama, no member of his entourage was present. Even the interpreter was our own. The Dalai Lama told me that the two statements which had been issued were entirely his own and there was no question of anybody coercing him to make them. Even though he is young, I could not easily imagine that he could be coerced into doing something he did not wish.

All my sympathy goes out to this young man who at an early age has had to shoulder heavy burdens and to face tremendous responsibilities. During the last few weeks, he has suffered great physical and mental strain. I advised him to rest for a while and not to take any hurried decisions. He felt very unhappy at conditions in Tibet and was especially anxious that fighting should stop.

Shri Khadilkar (Ahmednagar): Of course, I know there is no opportunity for discussion; I do not want to press it, but I would like to have a little clarification...

Mr. Speaker: I shall get copies of this circulated to all hon. Members. Let them read it.

Shri Khadilkar: Some clarification is called for.

Mr. Speaker: Not now. Hon. Members will read the statement leisurely and then let us see.

Shri Khadilkar: Will you give some time for discussion?

Mr. Speaker: I cannot make any promise. Can I go on making promises to other hon. Members also? Let any proper motion come in proper time. Let hon. Members take time to study all this and make up their mind as to whether there is anything more that has to be clarified. All this I have to consider.

Speaker: Shri Hem Barua: I want a little clarification.

Mr. Speaker: Not now. Hon. Members will kindly read the statement, and then if really there is some veryimportant matter, we shall see.