

# Privy Purse Bill in Lok Sabha: P.M.'s Call to Former Rulers

NEW DELHI, Sept. 1.

The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, expressed her sincere hope in the Lok Sabha today that wiser counsels would prevail among the former rulers and they would co-operate with Government in abolishing privy purses and princely privileges in a democratic manner.

Moving a Bill to delete the constitutional provision guaranteeing the privy purses and princely privileges, Mrs. Gandhi said the course of history was irreversible. Either one brought about changes peacefully and with consent or changes would come in a manner which neither Parliament nor the country would like.

Earlier, the Speaker overruled objections to consideration of the Bill from the Jan Sangh and Swatantra members.

Describing the Bill as a historic one, she said it was an important step in further democratisation of Indian society. It represented the momentum of social change in the country.

She would assure the princes that there was no animus against any individual. The manner in which Government proposed to bring about this "important change" was in keeping with the democratic tradition — changes through consultations and parliamentary approval.

Mrs. Gandhi said the initiative for the territorial integration of the country had come from the leaders of the people and the heroic struggle of the States' people.

In saying this, she said, she did not minimise the co-operation of the rulers and their constructive role soon after independence. Many of them had contributed to the social, political and cultural life of the community.

Many former rulers were held in high esteem by the people of the area they once ruled. Some of them had been elected to Parliament. This public regard and confidence in them would not diminish in any manner. It would be considerably enhanced if they co-operated with Government in securing equality and social justice.

## OBJECTIVES OF FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Recalling the days of the freedom struggle, Mrs. Gandhi said one objective of this struggle was

to free the country from foreign domination. The other, no less important, was to bring about an egalitarian society free from social divisions and disparities. A special characteristic of the Freedom movement was that it recognised no class distinctions or privileges. Some of the leaders of the movement were intellectuals, but all worked as political equals.

She reiterated that it was the intention of Government to discontinue privy purses and abolish or restrict privileges and abolish the concept of rulership.

In her letter to the rulers she had categorically stated that the Bill would come up for consideration and passage in the current session. But then there was no intention to cause the rulers any hardship or injure their self-respect. Government would make some transitional arrangements. Although the details had not yet been worked out, Government's broad approach had been indicated.

## PAYMENT OF COMPENSATION

Payments would be based on multiples higher than lower purses and lower than the higher ones. The total payment would be such as to help the rulers adjust themselves to the changed circumstances.

Government was ready to discuss details of the scheme with them. Government's approach to the question had been made clear in the President's address. She hoped without prejudice to Government's stand to abolish privy purses and privileges it would be possible to reach some agreement with them.

"It is a matter of regret," she said, "this attempt on our part appears to have been misinterpreted. I sincerely hope wiser counsels will prevail."

Referring to the reported view of some princes that the Bill was repugnant to morality, Mrs. Gandhi said: "It would be unthinkable to me to come before this House and ask them to enact something which is not in conformity with the precepts of morality."

History was replete with instances where what was considered sacrosanct in one age was considered inhuman in the next. Customs and practices once justified were now considered unjust and perpetuating inequality.

There could be no immorality involved where there was such poverty and inequality as in India. Customary rights and special privileges to some without any related functions and responsibilities were incompatible with the country's democratic Constitution or the spirit of the times and demand for change.

She spoke of the steps taken by Government to do away with many privileges, hereditary and customary rights and also to end concentration of rural and urban economic power. All these had been done through open discussion and parliamentary debate.

Changes were inevitable. Historical forces were irreversible, she said and appealed to members of the House to have a sense of history regardless of their party affiliations and vote in favour of equality and social justice and abolition of the princely order and attendant rights and privileges.

## VAJPAYEE'S OBJECTION

As soon as the Prime Minister rose to speak, the Jan Sangh leader, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee objected to the discussion on the ground that under the recommendation of the President circulated among members during the lunch-break the Bill was sought to be given the character of a money Bill without the necessary financial memorandum accompanying it. Since the recommendation was not available at the time of introduction, it should be withdrawn.

Supporting Mr. Vajpayee's contention, Mr. Masani said by giving the Bill the character of a money Bill, Government sought to deprive the Rajya Sabha of its right to vote on a Constitution amending measure.

Mr. K. Anandan Nambiar (C.P.M.) and Mr. Shiva Chandra Jha (S.S.P.) said the objections of Mr. Vajpayee could have been valid only at the introduction stage and now that the Bill was in the consideration stage the question did not arise.

The Minister of State for Law, Mr. Jagannath Rao, said no recommendation of the President was necessary. Yet in view of certain amendments Government proposed in the Bill, the recommendation had been obtained as a measure of abundant precaution.

The Speaker upheld Government's contention and overruled the objections.

Mr. Amrit Nahata (Cong-R) supporting the Bill joined issue with Mr. Desai for his remark that the former rulers had shown a high sense of patriotism.

Mr. Nahata charged the rulers with having tried to perpetuate British imperialism in India. He said they were known as the "backbone" and "watchdogs" of British imperialism.

Mr. Nahata said that if the British Government could stay in India for such a long time, it was due to the loyalty received by them from the rulers.

Mr. Nahata at one stage clashed with Jan Sangh members when he dwelt on the ways in which former rulers had tried to please the Moghul kings.

There were heated exchanges between Mr. H. C. Kachwai (J.S.) and Mr. Mulahu Prasad (S.S.P.) who supported Mr. Nahata.

Dr. (Mrs.) Maitreyee Bose (Ind.): "I will vote for the Bill but such remarks as were made by Mr

Mr. Dange said that Sardar Patel had taken the road of solving the problem of princes after Independence not in a revolutionary way, but in the way of the Congress at the time. Just as compensation was paid for zamindaris acquired the princes were given privy purses by "capitalising the revenues they were making."

Mr. Dange referred to the origin of the princes and their previous record and said that for 22 years after independence, "these gentlemen whose services we had hired" were not going in the right way.

Some of the princes took pride in the fact that they were maintaining horses, playing golf or keeping dog kennels. Was it for these services that they should be paid compensation? he asked.

There was laughter when Mr. Dange remarked that Sardar Patel had "clearly hired the services of these people. According to trade union principles and the principles of capitalism a person who is hired can be fired. Their privileges and vested interests have to be extinguished."

Mr. Chandraseet Yadav (Cong-R) said the mood of the nation was such that continuance of privileges to any particular class would no longer be tolerated. This could be judged, for instance, from the adverse reaction in Parliament to the Tamil Nadu proposal for a separate personal standard for Ministers there.

He said the abolition of privy purses and princely privileges was a principle to which Mr. Morarji Desai and his party was also committed. There should be no going back on this and the historic Bill

to end disparities should receive support from all sections of the House, he pleaded.

Mr. Era Sezhiyan (DMK), quoting Congress (O) leaders demanding implementation of the ten-point economic programme without delay, said it was strange that when the Government tried to implement it, Congress (O) opposed it vehemently.

The Congress (O) leaders' hatred for Mrs. Gandhi was well known now. Their attitude towards the Bill was only born out of that.

Mr. Sezhiyan said the Constitution did not envisage payment of privy purses till eternity. The purses were the result of a political agreement and it could be changed in the new political situation.

## A SMALL SACRIFICE

The princes had talked so much about their sacrifices in the recent days. He did not understand why they should hesitate to make such a small sacrifice which cost only about Rs. four crores and privileges, like free driving licence, free radio licence, free water and electricity.

The former rulers, Mr. Sezhiyan said, had been given 20 years to adjust themselves to the new order. It was a long enough period. They should be more realistic.

Some of the Jan Sangh leaders had been vociferously demanding "Indianisation" of a section of the community. It was far better for them to attempt "Indianisation" of the former rulers, he said.

## PREROGATIVE OF GOVT.

Mr. J. B. Kripalani (Ind.) who was a member of the Constituent Assembly, took the line that the

abrogation of the treaty with the princes was a prerogative of the Government and Parliament did not come into the picture at all in the matter.

The treaty, he said, was made by the Government of India with persons who were, at that time, not the citizens of India. The lapse of paramountcy had left them completely free to do whatever they liked. They could not have been forced into merging with India.

The treaty with them was something to which only international law would be relevant. It was concluded before the Constitution was framed. The Constitution merely recognised the treaty.

He accused the Government of bringing the matter before Parliament, because it (Government) did not have the courage to exercise its unquestionable right to abrogate a treaty.

Pointing to the treasury benches, he said: "Even now, you are

making payments to the descendants of the Nawabs of Lucknow. You are carrying on the traditions of the British. You are keeping up this farce. You have no objection to it."

Yet, the Government was abolishing the purses, he added, and at the same time preventing the rights of the princes to go to court. There ought to be such a thing as "political morality."

He said the persons on the Treasury Benches had hardly the right to talk of socialism and democracy. There was neither socialism nor democracy here. It was within his knowledge that Minister after Minister kept consulting astrologers, and even the colours of the clothes to be worn were decided by astrologers. But they kept talking of socialism and democracy. It was a case of "small minds, big words."

The debate will be resumed tomorrow.—PTI

Nahata should not be made."

Mr. Nahata later withdrew his remarks.

Dr. Karni Singh (Ind.): "This member has been talking of marriages between two religions. We can also say that Mrs. Gandhi married a Parsi. What has that got to do with this Bill?"

The Deputy Speaker, Mr. G. G. Swell, appealed to all sections of the House to maintain decorum.

Mr. Nahata said that the former rulers had "perpetuated atrocities" on freedom fighters and those who had agitated for responsible government. When freedom came some of the rulers had wanted to remain aloof from the national stream.

The Nizam and Travancore rulers wanted to remain independent while the Jodhpur ruler wanted to accede to Pakistan.

The princes raised the banner of revolt against the Government of free India and it was Sardar Patel who brought them to the Indian fold "by taking advantage of the historical weaknesses of the rulers."

Mr. Nahata characterised the provisions in the Constitution regarding privy purses and privilege as "unconstitutional" and said they should go.

Mr. R. D. Bhandare (Cong-R-Mah.) said the Prime Minister was prepared to discuss the question of compensation with the princes. He would appeal to the princes not to close the door for discussion.

He disputed the statement of Mr. Morarji Desai that there would have been no integration of the country but for the co-operation of the princes. Political and social compulsions were there in which the princes had to join the Union, he said.

The question was whether they should not have according to the changing times.

Mr. S. A. Dange, leader of the C.P.I. group, said privy purses and princely privileges should be abolished without payment of compensation.

The Constitution which India adopted after Independence represented a "momentum of social revolution" and stood for the abolition of all kinds of privileges and vested interests, he said.