

## LOK SABHA DEBATES

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LOK SABHA

Saturday, April 30, 1966/Vaisakha 10,  
1888 (Saka).

The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of the  
Clock.

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

SHORT NOTICE QUESTION

Explosions in Tambaram Area

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S.N.Q. 24. Shri Balakrishnan:

Shri Muthiah:

Will the Minister of Defence be  
pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that explosions took place several times in Tambaram area recently due to the activities of the Air Force;

(b) whether explosions are taking place to demolish big buildings in the airfield area;

(c) whether the explosions have been caused by earth tremors; and

(d) whether any investigation has been conducted to find out their cause and if so, the result thereof?

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Defence (Shri A. M. Thomas):

(a) and (b). No explosions have been caused in Tambaram area either by the activities of the Air Force or by the demolition of big buildings in the airfield area.

(c) and (d). The Director of Seismology of the Directorate General of Observatories, New Delhi, visited Tambaram and investigated the matter. From the facts furnished by him, the

Government of Madras have assured the public that the effects observed in and around Tambaram during the last few weeks were due to genuine earth tremors of mild intensity and that there was no cause for alarm. The State Government are also taking steps to arrange for a study of the seismic tremors in Tambaram by an expert of the Geological Survey of India and for an official of the India Meteorological Department to be posted at Tambaram for personally studying the phenomenon.

Shri Balakrishnan: Is it not a fact that the Director of Observatories who has been deputed there to inquire into the matter has accepted that they were explosions due to the destruction of bombs and old weapons in that area some time ago?

Shri A. M. Thomas: In fact, in this particular case, earth tremors took place between 24th March and 17th April. The last explosion that has taken place as a result of trials or experiments by the Air Force has been on 3rd March 1966, that is, long before, when 25 lb. bombs were demolished individually for instructional purposes. Net explosive content blasted each time was less than 5 lbs. and demolition was carried out on approved site during day in clear weather when the wind speed was 10 knots. Nearest civilian dwellings were more than 4 miles away.

So that this has absolutely nothing to do with air force experiments or anything of that kind. During this period, the Air Force had been making no experiments at all or causing any explosions. The last one, as I said, was on 3rd March. This sort of experiments have been conducted for a long number of years in that particular place.

I may also say that earth tremors of the type which have occurred there are usually accompanied by sound resembling the firing of a gun or muffled underground explosion, so that naturally people thought that it might have been caused by explosions caused by Air Force experiments. But the IAF had absolutely nothing to do with that. This has been due to earth tremors that occurred during this period.

**Shri Muthiah:** In view of the fact that the frequent earthquakes which occurred recently in the Colorado region of America, which was free from earthquakes for over a century, were caused by human factor namely, by army men who sank a deep shaft into the ground and pumped down thousands of gallons of waste water into it, does the Minister think that the Tambaram tremors might have been caused by some human factor, at least indirectly?

**Shri A. M. Thomas:** It was not caused by any human factor in this particular case. It was natural.

**Shri Nath Pai:** I am glad this has come before the House in the form of a short notice question, because I had tried to raise it under a calling attention notice.

The Minister has stated that it is seismic tremors which are causing this. Though I do not know what the normal rule is, whether we trust ex-Ministers or present Ministers, please hear what Shri T. T. Krishnamachari has to say about these explosions:

"Mr. T. T. Krishnamachari, former Union Finance Minister, who lives very close to the I.A.F. station in Tambaram, is definite that the explosions emanate from inside the station. He does not believe that any security considerations could be involved in this matter. The explosions clearly seem to be a threat to the safety of the buildings in the area....

"Expressing in very strong terms the disapproval of the I.A.F. opera-

tioning which he and the rest of the Tambaram residents believe to be the cause of the explosions, Mr. Krishnamachari said that the State Government should investigate the matter and see that the operations carried out in disregard of public safety were put an end to."

Where do we stand? Here is an ex-Finance Minister of the Union Government, not once but twice, insisting that they are emanating from the I.A.F. Here is the Minister of State who says no.

Another thing. Is it not desirable that, when there was a controversy in the whole of the southern papers, the Ministry should have taken the initiative in making a statement? Our efforts were thwarted because of procedure. Why do they come so late? You must tell them. *The Hindu*, a very respectable paper in the South and other journals every day carried front-page news about the explosions and the controversy. He should have come out with a statement earlier.

**Shri A. M. Thomas:** To err is human, and when there was this sound like a gun shot or muffled explosion, even eminent persons are liable to err in these matters. In fact, I have also come across a statement of the former Finance Minister. That appeared, I think, on the 15th or 18th April. The next day there was a denial by the IAF authorities, and subsequently, on the 18th April, the Public Relations Department of the Government of Madras issued a detailed statement indicating how these tremors have happened, and that these explosions had absolutely nothing to do with the Air Force at all.

Although I am a lay man myself, I had a discussion with the technical people with regard to this matter, and they told me that all tectonic earthquakes are caused by rubbing of rock masses against each other, and because of that the perceptible earth movements are accompanied by sound

which is described by observers as that of gun fire or a muffled explosion or the passing of a truck. So, there is no wonder a mistaken impression has been created.

**Shri S. Kandappan:** The statement made by the former Finance Minister is not so harmless as the Minister of State has tried to make out, because I find that people are feeling panicky due to the contradictory statements, since Mr. T. T. Krishnamachari was strongly of opinion that the earth tremors were not so mild as made out by the seismic people there. It was more deep-rooted and more violent. In view of that I would like to know whether the Government is prepared to make further enquiries and further studies and convince the public that it is not very dangerous.

**Shri A. M. Thomas:** It is not at all dangerous. I wanted to allay the fears of the hon. Members also in this matter. None of these tremors have been recorded by distant stations like Delhi even by the high magnification seismographs, confirming thereby the weak nature of the tremors. Some of these tremors have been recorded by the high magnification seismographs installed at the Astrophysical Observatory, Kodaikanal, Meteorological Office, Poona, and by the high magnification seismographs installed by the Atomic Energy Commission. It may be noted that the intensity was rather low; it ranged only between 2 and 3, roughly  $2\frac{1}{2}$ . It is only when it is from 4 to 6 that it becomes dangerous. These tremors were, I do not say, quite harmless. But there is no cause for alarm and there is no damage to any of the buildings. There has not been any damage in the area.

**Shri P. Venkatasubbalah:** May I whether earth tremors have occurred frequently in the same place and whether this has got anything to do with the previous explosions that had been conducted by the IAF and if that is so, whether that aspect has been gone into

by the director general or whoever it is?

**Shri A. M. Thomas:** Yes, Sir. It has nothing to do with the IAF. I have also said that the usual explosive content that is blasted comes roughly to five pounds. These five lbs. explosion could not create all these things. The place is four miles removed from human habitation. I may also submit that even the previous explosions by the IAF had nothing to do with this.

**Shri S. Kandappan:** Shri Krishnamachari said that the doors and windows rattled.

**Mr. Speaker:** Now, we have to get information from the government and not from Mr. Krishnamachari.

**Shri S. M. Banerjee:** It appears from the statement that there was nothing connected with air force experiments. I would like to know whether it is a fact that a similar rumbling sound of an explosion was also heard and you were kind enough to ask the Minister to give us some information about it. That was never supplied to this House. I would like to know whether in Delhi also it was due to some earth tremors or due to some explosion.

**Mr. Speaker:** Delhi remains far away, at least during this question.

**Shrimati Savitri Nigam:** The hon. defence minister said that several seismographs recorded that it was an earth tremor. Why could not they give this information earlier in order to save a lot of panic and misunderstandings? It has also resulted in a statement by the ex-finance minister. Why could not they give it earlier?

**Shri A. M. Thomas:** Soon after this report appeared, the real position was explained by the IAF followed by an announcement of the Madras government. It is not correct to say that we did not take note of these reports.