

LOK SABHA

Thursday, August 24, 1961/Bhadra 2,
1883 (Saka)

The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of the
Clock

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

दिलवा के रेलवे डिपो में अग्निकांड

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श्री रामकृष्ण गुप्त :
श्री सुनीलाल :
श्री त० ब० बिट्टल राव :
श्री अजित सिंह सरहदी :
श्री सुबोध हुंसदा :
श्री नेकराम नेगी :
श्री स० च० सामन्त :
श्री बारियर :
श्री कोडियान :

क्या रेलवे मंत्री २५ अप्रैल, १९६१ के तारांकित प्रश्न संख्या १७०३ के उत्तर के सम्बन्ध में यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि :

(क) जालन्धर के मनीषा दिलवा में लकड़ी के डिपो में जो आग लगी थी उसके कारणों की जांच का कार्य क्या पूरा हो गया है ;

(ख) जांच समिति ने अपने प्रतिवेदन में किन्हे दोषी ठहराया है. और

(ग) इस अग्निकांड से कुल मिला कर कितनी हानि सरकार को हुई ?

The Deputy Minister of Railways
(Shri S. V. Ramaswamy): (a) Yes, Sir.

894 (A) L.S.D.—1.

(b) The Enquiry Committee suspect that the fire was caused by some miscreant in order to cause damage to railway property and cripple the progress of railway works. The fire, which started at about 16.25 hours, was first observed at about 17.05 hours when it had already spread over an area of 700 sq. ft. and it was too late to extinguish it. The chowkidar in whose beat the fire originated was absent from his sector, with the result that the fire could not be detected promptly and put down. He has been held guilty by the Enquiry Committee of gross negligence in the discharge of his duties.

(c) The total loss sustained in this fire is about Rs. 137 lakhs.

श्री प्रकाशबीर शास्त्री : क्या मैं जान सकता हूँ कि दिलवा के अग्नि-कांड में जो इतनी भयंकर हानि हुई है, उस के लिए कुछ व्यक्ति-विशेषों प्रथवा कुछ संगठन-विशेषों को दोषी पाया गया है ?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: No individual except this person, the chowkidar, who was absent. We could not pitch upon the person who was responsible for it and, therefore, nobody has been found responsible.

Shri S. C. Samanta: May I know whether the Report of the Enquiry Committee was placed on the Table of the House, as was promised by the hon. Minister?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: It has been placed on the Table on the 22nd.

Shri Narasimhan: May I know whether it is the usual practice of the Railway Ministry to keep just one

chowkidar when the total value of the property exceeds Rs. 1 crore?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: No, it is in different sectors by different beats. There are a number of persons.

Shri T. B. Vittal Rao: Apart from finding that the chowkidar failed to do his duty, may I know how it was that such a huge stock of timber which is liable to catch fire was stacked in one place? Has the Committee made any recommendations with regard to the stacking of this timber?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: The Committee has made several recommendations. We have accepted some of them. For certain reasons, we have not accepted some recommendations; we have deferred them.

Shri S. M. Banerjee: May I know whether it is a fact that this fire took place at a time when there was a stock verification and there was a tremendous shortage found in the godown?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: No. As a matter of fact, the stock verification was done just one month before. Two sleepers were found in excess; these were accounted for by deficiency elsewhere. That is all.

Shri S. M. Banerjee: May I know whether it is a fact that the yard containing the timber stack is not insured? If so, how do Government propose to recover this loss of Rs. 137 lakhs?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: We do not insure railway property. It is so enormous that we do not insure it.

Shri Goray: I would like to know whether the railway usually takes precautions to stack such valuable timber in a particular way? Or is it only after this timber stack caught fire and the Committee has made recommendations that they will now take precautions?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: There are certain directions as to how it should be stacked. It is in different sectors

and it is stacked according to certain directions. It so happened in this case that the fire was detected only about 30 minutes after it caught fire and had spread rather wildly. If it had been discovered earlier, with the fire fighting apparatus in the factory, we would have put it down. That was the unfortunate thing.

Dr. M. S. Aney: How was the fact known that the fire was detected after 30 minutes?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: Because somebody found the smoke and then raised alarm. Then they sent for the fire brigade.

Shri Goray: When Government do not know when it started, how is it possible to say that it was detected after 30 minutes?

Mr. Speaker: It is not jay or cotton. It is timber. Even in our houses, when we deliberately put a match into the wood, it takes time for it to catch fire. Here suddenly a crore of rupees worth of timber seems to have been destroyed and it was noticed in half an hour. This is rather strange.

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: It caught fire in six or seven places simultaneously.

Mr. Speaker: Did somebody set fire to it?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: That is the finding, that it was done by some miscreant.

Shri Narasimhan: Did the fire start in all the different places just a half hour before it was detected or at different times?

Mr. Speaker: Has the Report Leen placed on the Table?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: Yes, it was placed on the Table on the 22nd

Mr. Speaker: I will allow a discussion on this.

Shri Tyagi: I want to know how they could say that it was detected only half an hour after it caught fire.

Mr. Speaker: There is no good asking the hon. Ministers. They were not there. They appointed a Committee. That was all that they could do. They have placed the Report on the Table. It is open to hon. Members to advise Government as to what further steps have to be taken. Nobody seems to want a discussion on the Report. What is the meaning of cross-examining the hon. Ministers about it?

Shri Tyagi: The Government has failed to find any clue as to the persons who committed this criminal act. Therefore, the House is anxious, naturally, to know what was the proof with Government to show that it was detected just half an hour after it caught fire.

Mr. Speaker: The Report has been placed on the Table of the House. In view of the seriousness of this matter, I am prepared to allow a discussion.

Shri Tyagi: What action has Government taken to trace the culprits?

The Minister of Railways (Shri Jagjivan Ram): The police are investigating the matter. Up till now, they have not been able to lay their hands on any individual. But efforts are continuing.

Mr. Speaker: I shall allow a discussion on this Report. The hon. Ministers also may know the views of the House. If the House is able to give any clues or directions, certainly they will adopt them.

Shri T. B. Vittal Rao: I would like to have some further information so that we can use it during the discussion. Is there any other depot in the railways where such huge quantities of timber are stacked?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: There are four depots. The size of each varies.

Shri S. M. Banerjee: I want to know whether there was any fire fighting apparatus inside that particular depot where it was stacked.

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: Yes. There was a fire fighting apparatus.

Shri Yadav Narayan Jadhav: May I know whether any police force, other than the chowkidar, was kept there for protection?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: No police was there.

Mr. Speaker: Does he mean a regular watch and ward?

Shri Yadav Narayan Jadhav: They had one chowkidar to protect such a huge quantity of timber.

Shri Jagjivan Ram: One chowkidar is in a sector. The sectors cover a large area, spreading to several square miles, and they have a system of stacking in lots leaving a gap of three feet in between, putting sand bags, water buckets, hydrants and hose pipes. All these precautions were there. It was not that just one chowkidar was there; one chowkidar is for one sector.

Shri Tyagi: What did the other neighbouring chowkidars do? Fire is a thing which can be detected from a distance of even one mile.

Shri Jagjivan Ram: That was what has been said. It was noticed when the flames were seen and smoke in large quantity was seen. In the initial stages it was not noticed. It might have been noticed perhaps if the chowkidar of that sector had been there.

Mr. Speaker: In spite of my suggestion the House is not in a mood but merely questions are put. This has become really a place for cross-examination of the Ministers and not for the purpose of constructive suggestions. I said once, twice, thrice what I had to say. The report is placed on the Table of the House. One can charge the Minister or his department for having been careless. But they are going on cross-examining the Minister about the details in the report as to why there has been one

chowkidar and not more. I have said: study the report and then ask for a discussion if you think there are some points in this. Instead they go on elaborating and cross-examining the Minister. What can the Minister do? (*Interruptions*).

Shri Tyagi: It is a loss of one crore of rupees.

Mr. Speaker: I am surprised at this. The Minister seems to be the target here. The hon. Members do not care to study it. The truth is that no hon. Member, evidently wants to study and without a study they cannot discuss it. Therefore, it is easy without any study, to put supplementary questions. Let us not create that impression.

Shri T. B. Vittal Rao: The answers will be used in the discussion.

Mr. Speaker: I have allowed some indulgence to this hon. Member. I thought that he was going to ask something which is not at all in the report. You cannot say that what all he asked cannot be raised in the discussion. This is not necessary or preliminary to the discussion. It appeared as if it was the preliminary point without which you cannot start a discussion at all. I leave it at this stage. If hon. Members still study and say that there are some things certainly I will allow a discussion about this matter. One crore of rupees is not an easy affair. We cannot afford to lose like that. Again, timber has to be stocked tomorrow in that same place.

Shri Harish Chandra Mathur: Will we be able to take up even one-tenth of the number of reports for which notices had been given? Members have studied those reports and there are a number of no-day-yet-named motions. We may not be able to discuss one fourth of them. You have started accusing Members of not studying the reports. Members have studied the reports but they have got so many reports which they have

studied and have given notices. But not even one-tenth can be discussed.

Mr. Speaker: I will give priority. It is not that every report is discussed as soon as it is placed on the Table of the House. I know hon. Members have tabled motions for discussion. Merely because they have not come up, it does not mean that I am not going to give priority to this.

Shri T. B. Vittal Rao: There was similarly the accident in Kurasia collieries involving a loss of Rs. 30 lakhs and we wanted to discuss it but it could not be done.

Mr. Speaker: Therefore? If we do not have time, I am not going to allow the Question Hour to be converted into an hour for discussion. If we do not have time, I am willing to sit for more hours, the hon. Deputy-Speaker is willing and the Members in the Panel are willing to sit for more hours. But as soon as it strikes 5 p.m. the hall is empty. I am really surprised at the way in which things are said. Possibly a few Members are always here but a majority of the Members do not think like that. It is unfortunate (*Interruptions*.) One hon. Member may be there. A single swallow does not make a summer. What can be done?

Shri Ranga: It will be a good thing to have a secret session to discuss all these things—our own defects, instead of ventilating them in this way

Mr. Speaker: After all, hon. Members are not very chary of pointing out the defects of this side; they have attacked the Government. Let them also be subjected to one. Next question. Shri Indrajit Gupta. I will allow two motions next week. There is already one motion today. Hereafter we shall have two motions every week for discussion until these are exhausted. If hon. Members are prepared to sit one more day, I will allow any number of motions; I have no objection. Next question.