

Member is pointing out, to the Labour Ministry.

Underground Fire fighting Machines

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*315. { Shri S. C. Samanta:
Shri Subodh Hansda:
Shri Anirudh Sinha:

Will the Minister of Steel, Mines and Fuel be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the National Coal Development Corporation has purchased underground fire fighting machines;

(b) if so, how many such machines have been purchased;

(c) whether any contribution has been asked for from the private owners of coal mines for purchasing these machines; and

(d) if so, the amount of contribution given by them?

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Steel, Mines and Fuel (Shri Gajendra Prasad Sinha): (a) The National Coal Development Corporation Ltd. have not purchased any underground fire fighting machines. Fire fighting apparatus and equipment are maintained at the rescue stations set up under the Coal Mines Rescue Rules. Collieries generally have only fire extinguishers.

(b) to (d). Do not arise. In any case, there is no question of the National Coal Development Corporation asking for contribution from private owners of coal mines for purchasing any equipment.

Shri S. C. Samanta: Is it not a fact that in other countries there are fire fighting instruments which are different from those which are kept at the rescue stations at present? If so, is there any attempt to import such equipment?

Shri Gajendra Prasad Sinha: I have not got detailed information about such equipment in other countries.

But as I have already stated there is equipment here in the important coal centres.

Shri S. C. Samanta: In the newspapers we often read that nearabout Asansol there is some colliery which is burning and which, sometimes, also rises up. May I know whether the fire fighting equipment which we have would go to extinguish that?

Shri Gajendra Prasad Sinha: It is a fact that some collieries near Dhanbad and Asansol are on fire. Every effort is being made to see that it does not spread; it is just checked.

श्रीमती कृष्णा मेहता : लगभग तीन वर्ष हुए हमारे कुछ संसद् सदस्य झरिया गये थे तब वहां बड़े जोर की आग लगी हुई थी । वे वहां उन लोगों से भी मिले थे जो नजदीक के रहने वाले थे और जिन की बहुत नुकसान होता था । मैं जानना चाहती हूं कि सरकार ने क्या कदम उठाया है जिस में कि नुकसान होने से पहले इस चीज का इलाज हो सके ?

श्री गजेंद्र प्रसाद सिन्हा : झरिया में जो आग लगी है वह कोई नई नहीं है, पुरानी है, और पूरी कोशिश है कि यह आग बढ़ने न पाये । इस के लिये सदन के सामने हमारे मिनिस्टर साहब ने कई बार जवाब दिया है ।

Shri Anirudh Sinha: May I know whether it is a fact that when the underground fires in the Jharia coalfields were detected first there was not sufficient equipment to fight them and as such they were allowed to spread? I want to know how far the Coal Board has been able to check the spread of fire with the acquisition of new equipment.

Sardar Swaran Singh: These underground fires in the Jharia coalfields started several years ago—about 2 decades ago. I think that the steps that have been taken by the Coal Board from time to time have significantly prevented the spread of these fires to the adjoining area. It should be remembered that when these

underground fires break out it is not easy to extinguish them. All effort is mainly directed to prevent their spreading into the adjoining areas.

Shri Brajeshwar Prasad: Is it a fact that the fires started 40 years ago and that no steps have been taken as yet?

Mr. Speaker: In Jharia?

Shri Brajeshwar Prasad: Yes, Sir.

Sardar Swaran Singh: Maybe; the hon. Member comes from that area. I said 20 years ago; it may be more than 20 years. It is a fact and that matter has come up here again and again. But the efforts that have been directed, naturally, have prevented the spread of this fire. It is not easy to extinguish a fire when large seams catch fire.

Mr. Speaker: In view of the fact that it has been going on for 40 years or a sufficiently long period, what steps have been taken? Is there no scientific discovery which can be made use of to check these fires? That is what the hon. Member, probably, wants to know.

Sardar Swaran Singh: These fires are a phenomenon of coalfields all the world over; and once they break out, the quenching of these fires is not an easy matter, particularly when large deposits of coal catch fire. The scientific methods are generally to check the supply of oxygen and give sand bund so that it does not spread. Once it catches fire it is not easy to quench it unless it is confined to a small area. All those steps which are known to the world are taken here also within our resources. One has also to balance the amount of expenditure that has to be incurred in quenching with the loss that might otherwise flow from it.

Shri Anirudh Sinha: Has it come to the notice of the Government of India that the Director of Mines and Geology of the Government of Bihar has submitted a report to the Government and asked them to fight the spread of fire on a war footing and that a representative of the Govern-

ment of Bihar has also come to discuss this matter with the Central Government? What steps have Government now taken to check the further spread of the fire?

Sardar Swaran Singh: It is true that the representatives of the Bihar Government have mentioned this matter and taken this matter with us and we have discussed this matter. We have asked the experts who are serving the Bihar Government to discuss this matter with the experts of the Coal Board.

Shri Tangamani: Recently a team of experts from the U.K. visited this country. I would like to know whether they visited these mines and whether they were consulted about extinguishing these fires?

Sardar Swaran Singh: I do not think that any team came out for this purpose. The team came out for developing some new mines. This matter was not discussed with them, so far as I remember.

Shri Anirudh Sinha: What is the amount of metallurgical coal which has been destroyed as a result of the fire—the supply of which coal is very limited in this country?

Sardar Swaran Singh: I have not got this figure; nor does this arise out of this question which is about fire fighting equipment with the National Coal Development Corporation. This is spreading to other things.

Investible Funds of L.I.C.

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*316. { **Shri Naushir Bharucha:**
 Shri Ram Krishan Gupta:

Will the Minister of Finance be pleased to refer to the reply given to Starred Question No. 505 on the 14th August, 1961 and state what further consideration has been given and what is Government's final decision regarding taking over of the investible funds of Life Insurance Corporation?