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12.26 hrs.

Title: Shri H.D. Deve Gowda called the attention of Minister of State of Road Transport & Highways regarding continued strike by truck operators in the country and steps taken by the Government .

SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA (KANAKPURA): Sir, I call the attention of the Minister of State of Road Transport & Highways to the following matter of urgent public importance and request that he may make a statement thereon:

"The situation arising out of continued strike by truck operators in the country thereby causing scarcity of vegetables and essential commodities and steps taken by the Government in regard thereto."

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI): Sir, a seven-point Charter of Demands was received from the All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) on 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2003. Thereafter, a ten point Charter of Demands was received on 4<sup>th</sup> April, 2003. Since some of the demands were to be acted upon by State governments/other Central Ministries, these were conveyed to the respective authorities immediately. On 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2003, AIMTC were invited for discussions on their demands. However, they replied *vide* their fax dated 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2003 that they would talk only to the Minister and that their President was on tour and he would be available only on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2003.

However, two meetings, on 7<sup>th</sup> April and 11<sup>th</sup> April were held between the representatives of AIMTC and officers of this Ministry. At these meetings, it was explained to them that there was no conflict between AIMTC and Government's stand on most of the issues. They were, therefore, requested to call off/defer their proposed agitation. Yet AIMTC chose to start the strike at 0600 hours on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2003.

The representatives of AIMTC met me on 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2003. At this meeting they conveyed their demands. I explained the Government's stand on each of the demands. I also requested them that they call off the agitation.

Out of the ten demands of AIMTC there is no difference of opinion on seven of them. These seven demands are:-

1. Repeal order pertaining to 15-year old vehicles.
2. Insurance companies be disciplined.
3. Non-inclusion of transporters under VAT.
4. Fix minimum freight rates for trucks.
5. National permit scheme be made logical.
6. Computerisation of Driving Licences and Registration Books, and
7. Amendment of Carriers Act, 1865.

The three remaining demands of AIMTC are as follows:-

1. **Demand**

Diesel prices be made stable and uniform all over the country and pricing mechanism be made transparent.

**Ministry's Stand**

We have taken up the matter with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (PNG). They have stated that the price of diesel/petrol is dependent upon the international price of crude. However, hon. Members are also aware that the administered price system is no more in force, market forces decide the cost of fuel. Notwithstanding this, the Ministry of PNG has agreed that they would be willing to consider not revising the fuel prices every fortnight subject to the condition that price fluctuation remains within 25 paise per litre. In case the fluctuation is more than 25 paise, then they would have to revise the prices.

2. **Demand**

Abolition of Toll Tax on four-lane Highways and Cess on Diesel.

**Ministry's Stand**

It has been made clear to the transporters that funds are required not only for development of highways but also for improving the entire road network in the country, including the Rural Roads and State Highways. It has also been clarified that Toll is a "user fee" which is being charged from those who use this much improved facility, which results in saving to the user. It has also been made clear to the striking transporters that it is not possible to accept this demand.

### 3. Demand

Effectively control the overloading and unloading of overloaded goods be made compulsory.

#### Ministry's Stand

Overloading of vehicles is a violation of the Motor Vehicles Act. The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways takes a serious view of this. Checking of overloading falls under the purview of the respective States/UTs. The States have been informed that if they fail to check overloading, this Ministry would be constrained to invoke the provisions of the Central Road Fund Act, 2000 and stop the grant that is being made available to them.

As stated earlier, the Ministry has no dispute with the AIMTC on seven out of the ten demands. The eighth demand is not negotiable. Therefore, effectively only two demands namely one with the Ministry of PNG and the other one with the State Governments require some discussion. The Petroleum Ministry has already been addressed in this regard.

Hence, my request to the striking transporters has been that inasmuch as there is no difference of opinion for most of the demands, it would help in creating a congenial atmosphere by calling off their agitation. The remaining two demands can be discussed to find a solution which is acceptable to all.

Notwithstanding all these efforts, in anticipation, the Ministry has taken a number of steps in order to see that normalcy is maintained to the extent possible. Some of the major steps taken are as follows:

- i. Control Room has been set up in the Ministry as well as in all the State Capitals to monitor the price situation and law and order.
- ii. Effective steps have been taken to ensure that flow of perishables and essential commodities are not adversely affected. The States have been advised to utilise all modes of transport and movement of such goods.
- iii. States have activated their field staff to caution wholesalers and retailers from profiteering.
- iv. Police force has been alerted so that no untoward law and order situation arises.
- v. Ministry of Railways has been requested to provide adequate support in moving the essential commodities.
- vi. Ministry of PNG has been alerted to ensure that shortage of fuel supply does not take place in the States.
- vii. I am personally in touch with the Chief Ministers and Transport Ministers of various States.
- viii. All States have taken adequate steps and it is well known that in a strike situation some minor hardships would be caused to the citizens. However, by and large, supply of essential commodities including perishables has been maintained throughout the country.

MR. SPEAKER: Now, five Members whose names have been given here can ask clarificatory questions from the Minister. As there is a time limit for this and the issue being of great importance, I would request the Members to be as brief as possible and get the reply from the hon. Minister. Now, Shri H.D. Deve Gowda.

SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA : Sir, the hon. Minister has made some efforts to see that the strike is ended. But, unfortunately he was unable to come to a proper understanding on three demands of the truck operators, according to his own Statement.

The hon. Minister has said that two demands are not negotiable. Further, he has said that the remaining two demands can be discussed to find a solution which is acceptable to all. I do not know which are those two demands, which are not negotiable. ...(*Interruptions*)

MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI: Only one demand, which is not negotiable.

SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA : You have mentioned three demands. The first one is about the diesel price. The second one is abolition of toll tax. The third one is effectively controlling overloading and unloading. Out of these three demands, two demands are not negotiable. ...(*Interruptions*)

MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI: Only one demand, toll tax.

SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA : Today is the eighth day of their strike. The Minister has taken certain steps to see that

hardships would not be caused to the general public. But, Sir, I would like to say that the ground reality is something different. First of all, the drivers are suffering; the loaders are suffering; and the cleaners are suffering. I have travelled about 2000 kilometres during the last three days in my home State. Everywhere the trucks were stopped. Nobody is creating law and order problem. They are sleeping on the roads. And whether they get food or not, they are sleeping on the roads. One hundred to two vehicles were stopped near some of the villages. As far as the workers are concerned, that is the position. No truck owner would pay emoluments, including daily allowance, to the loaders, cleaners and drivers. That is number one.

The second one is regarding the essential commodities. Today, whatever may be the steps that you have asked the States to take, the situation is totally different. The vegetables, fruits, milk products and all perishables are not moving to the required places where the demand is there. Everywhere, the prices of the essential commodities like vegetables, fruits and other items have risen sky-high.

Sir, this is the situation. Now, you have shifted the responsibility on the one side to the Ministry of Petroleum. After we demolished the Administrative Price Mechanism, the fluctuation of the international market price cannot be the reason to ask the truck owners to bear the burden. What can the transport operators do when they want to charge on the goods which they are going to transport? They cannot charge every 15 days and go on trying to fix it according to the international market price of the crude oil. It is a very peculiar system. So, all these three issues should be borne in mind.

About the toll tax, they have to pay it at different places. How many places do you want them to pay the toll tax? Do they have to pay in each State? In addition to that, there is harassment by the official machinery--the police, the Commercial Tax Department and the Transport Department. Everybody knows this. It is not the question of 'x' State or 'y' State. They have been unnecessarily harassed. I do not want to say that there is corruption, but the greasing is so much. So, they cannot sustain all this, what is called, expenditure which is not known, but which is known to all of us. We cannot say how much they have to pay. It is a known fact. So, these are some of the issues to which the transport operators have put to a lot of inconvenience. So, what is the final stand of the Central Government? It is because you put the responsibility on the State Governments on the one side and, on the Ministry of Petroleum on the other side.

About toll tax, it is an issue of your own Department. Ultimately, on these three issues, still you have not come to any final conclusion so far as the negotiation is concerned. How long will this strike continue? If you do not make efforts to end the strike, ultimately, as I told you, the sufferers are the workers, the loaders, even the drivers, the conductors or whoever they may be, and the general public. You should put an end to it. I do not think it is proper on the part of the Government to allow this to continue further.

Today I read in the newspaper that the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, even the senior Ministers and senior office bearers of the BJP have had some discussions yesterday or today on this issue to end this stalemate. Without any further delay, this strike should be ended amicably so that the transport operators should start their operational work. Thank you very much.

SHRI RAMESH CHENNITHALA (MAVELIKARA): This truck owners strike is creating an adverse impact both on the common man and on the economy. The patience of the common man and the industry is running out. The movements of the goods within the country and from the Ports have been crippled. In the best interest of the nation, this strike may be resolved urgently and normalcy may be brought back urgently.

I was going through the statement of the hon. Minister. The statement itself shows the callous attitude of the Government. This strike would have been avoided. The Minister himself is mentioning in his statement that the President of the Truck Owners Association says that he will discuss only with the Minister. He does not want to discuss with the officials. If the Minister had talked to them earlier and settled this issue, this strike would have been avoided. I do not understand, in a democratic set up, why the Minister is shying away from talking to the lorry owners. He says that only my Ministry people, my officials will talk to them. We wasted five days only on this issue. The Minister could have intervened at the right and appropriate time, talked to these people and the trade union leaders and settled the issues. Also, the Minister has said that some minor hardships would have been caused to the citizens. What is this?

I would like to know whether the Minister is not living in this country. The normal life of the citizen is hurt. Every State Government is facing a lot of problems and alternative arrangements have failed.

The State Governments have their own difficulties in meeting the requirements of the people. For example, the State of Kerala is a consumer State. We are getting everything from outside the State, either from Tamil Nadu or from Karnataka. Now, nothing is coming to our State and people are suffering. Even though our State Government has taken a lot of interest and a lot of precautions, unscrupulous traders are trying to exploit the common man. The steps taken by the State Government are not adequate and the people are suffering.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of this month, the representatives of these unions met the hon. Minister. I do not know why the hon. Minister should not have called them much earlier and resolved these issues. Out of the ten demands, seven were accepted and only three were remaining. One of them is the frequent hike in petrol and diesel prices. This is not the concern of the truck owners alone but a concern of everybody. On the frequent rise in diesel and petrol prices, Parliament is not taken into confidence. Nobody is aware why every time they are increasing the petrol and diesel prices. This is the attitude of the Government. Without any kind of responsibility, the Government is increasing the prices. The negative impact of this on the economy is also a serious issue. I do not know why the Government has not taken all these issues seriously.

Shri H.D. Deve Gowda had just now mentioned that some of the BJP leaders are talking about it but I do not understand why this issue is prolonging. There is an allegation that the Government is trying to split the unions. I want to know only two things. What is the strategy of the Government if the strike is prolonged? All the alternative arrangements made so far have not been up to the mark and have not been satisfactory. So, what further steps are contemplated by the Government to ensure availability of essential commodities to the common man? The farmers are also suffering a lot. They are cultivating perishable produce and they are unable to market them. What steps would be taken by the Government to help the farmers?

SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY (KHAMMAM): Sir, please ask the hon. Minister to allow us to use the buses. I have been using them in my constituency. हमने बसों की सीट्स उखाड़ दी है और फ्रूट्स बसों के द्वारा भेज दिए हैं। नहीं तो पार्लियामेंट में किसी को आम खाने को नहीं मिलेगा।

MR. SPEAKER: You are asking him for permission now though you are already using them without permission!

MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI: Sir, it is already being done by many States.

SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY : I am already doing it in my constituency.

MR. SPEAKER: She is doing it without permission and she is now asking for permission!

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI (RAIGANJ): Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all, I strongly disapprove the attitude of the Government of India towards such a situation. On the first day, at the first moment, I expected the Government to come forward to explain the situation and take the House into confidence. Due to our intervention yesterday, in the morning we came to know that the hon. Minister would make a statement. You were kind enough to admit the Calling Attention and we got the full statement. I strongly condemn this attitude of the Government. This is not a fair attitude. Over the last fifteen days, the entire country has come to a halt. In every *mandi* and market place, the perishable items are rotting. The prices are falling in some places and somewhere else people are making profits.

I have only three specific questions. The Government says that it has conceded seven demands. If the Government has conceded seven demands, it has to clear the policy. I am told, as per the guidelines and directions of the Supreme Court, all vehicles that are fifteen or more years old should not be used on roads. The Government says that it has accepted the demand No.1 – 'repeal order to permit 15-year old vehicles'. I am happy if the hon. Minister has conceded it but the hon. Minister will have to clarify in what way he would ensure this. The hon. Minister has further said that he has conceded to their demand no. three about non-inclusion of transporters under VAT. The Union Minister of Finance, while consulting the State Finance Ministers, agreed to the limit of VAT to this sector also. Is it with the endorsement of the Union Minister of Finance? This is a very important question because the Union Finance Minister's attitude and your statement are already confusing. That is why, the truck owners are very much confused.

There is another demand, which he has himself said about fixing minimum freight rates for trucks. If you have accepted their demand about minimum freight rates, then you have to take the House into confidence, what is in your estimation the minimum freight should be. You must tell us, let the public know and the truck owners also know about it.

You have accepted their seven demands. Now, you are negotiating to the other three demands of AIMTC. The hon. Minister has said and I would like to quote:

"Effective steps have been taken to ensure that flow of perishables and essential commodities are not adversely affected. "

The Hapur market, as reported yesterday, and the biggest *sabzi* market of Delhi, the *Sabzi Mandi*, reported yesterday about non-arrival of regular flow of the green vegetables, which are rotting for the last seven days, and there are no fresh arrivals. The hon. Minister has said that effective steps have been taken.

The hon. Minister has further said and I want to quote:

"States have activated their field staff to caution wholesalers and retailers from profiteering. "

Sir, yesterday only the Delhi newspapers, in South, North and Central, have published four types of rates of the vegetables in Delhi varying from Rs. 5/- to Rs. 8/- per kg. Hon. Minister, these newspapers are published right at your nose. Now, you are saying that effective steps have been taken to ensure that flow of perishables and essential commodities are not adversely affected. It is affected. I do not know where from he is buying his vegetables. I have no information. It maybe that he is not taking vegetables.

Now, this is the situation. I think, he is misleading. It is because he has promised that, by and large, supply of essential commodities including perishables has been maintained throughout the country. Has he got the report from the States that it is maintained excepting Orissa? Shri Navin Patnaik has issued the statement that his inner problem is settled. The outside trucks may not come. No State Government has still come forward with a clear statement that it has settled its domestic problems so far as the supply is concerned. How can the hon. Minister make a statement in the House that it has been ensured? It is not. Therefore, he must give a factual position as to how many State Governments have confirmed that the supply is ensured.

**श्री किरीट सोमैया (मुम्बई उत्तर पूर्व) :** माननीय अध्यक्ष महोदय, ऐसा कहा गया है कि कुछ राज्यों में ट्रांसपोर्टर्स ने अपनी हड़ताल वापस ले ली है। यदि कुछ राज्यों में इस समस्या का समाधान हुआ है तो वह क्या है? क्या वही सॉल्यूशन बाकी प्रान्तों में एप्लाइ हो सकता है?

दूसरी बात यह है कि 15 साल वाला कानून मेरे ख्याल से केवल ट्रक या ट्रांसपोर्ट व्हेकलस पर ही लागू होगा, ऐसा दिखायी नहीं दे रहा है। **What is this 15 years?** यदि ऐसा कानून बना दिया उसकी क्या बैकग्राउंड है? अगर इसका सही उद्देश्य पॉल्यूशन को खत्म करना है तो केवल 15 साल पुराने व्हेकलस को हटा देने से पॉल्यूशन कंट्रोल नहीं हो सकता है। विटेज कार सौ साल पुरानी चलती हैं। यदि कोई गाइडलाइन डिफैक्टिव होगी **The Government should come out and should totally amend the guidelines.** यह मिस-कनसैप्शन है। इसे कैसे दूर किया जाए?

अगर सात मांगें मंजूर हो चुकी हैं तो जो दूसरी तीन मांगें हैं, जिन के बारे में आपने बताया, जिसे हम अखबारों में भी पढ़ते हैं और जो ट्रांसपोर्टर्स हम से बात करने आए, उन्होंने भी हमें बताया, यदि उन्हें लेकर वे आन्दोलन जारी रखते हैं तो मैं समझता हूँ कि वह प्रॉपर नहीं है। क्योंकि उनकी तीन डिमांड्स हैं कि अगर पेट्रोल और डीजल के भाव बढ़ते हैं तो **they are passing it on to the industry or the ultimate consumer. They are not paying it from their own pockets. That is question number one.**

**Secondly, regarding toll tax, I would say that everybody is paying the toll tax in the country.** उनके फायदे और नुकसान हैं। नुकसान से ज्यादा फायदे हैं, अगर उसे सरल बनाने की बात कहते हैं तो **I can understand.** अगर ट्रांसपोर्टर्स कहते हैं कि इसे टोल टैक्स से मुक्त कर दो, हमारे लिये डीजल के भाव नहीं बढ़ने चाहिये।

तीसरी बात **Regarding over-loading, I am of the opinion that अगर इन तीन मांगों को लेकर ट्रांसपोर्टर्स स्ट्राइक कंटीन्यु कर सकते हैं, then, the Government of India should join hands with the State Governments.** इस प्रकार से अगर आम जनता को रैनसम लगता होगा तो लोगों के सामने क्लीयरकट बात आनी चाहिये। हम यह नहीं चाहते कि कोई स्टेट गवर्नमेंट या सेंट्रल गवर्नमेंट किसी व्यक्ति या संस्था के खिलाफ कड़े कदम उठाये। जनता को विश्वास में लेना चाहिये और राज्य सरकारों के साथ को-आर्डिनेशन करके कदम उठाना चाहिये। जैसा तीन साल पहले इस तरह की स्ट्राइक हुई थी, अगर अपनी क्लैक्टिव लीडरशिप या क्लैक्टिव आर्गनाइजिंग कैपेसिटी से आम व्यक्ति को या इंडस्ट्री को इतना नुकसान हो रहा है, आम आदमी को इतना नुकसान हो रहा है और इन तीनों मांगों के लेकर अड़ गये होंगे तो मैं सरकार से जानना चाहता हूँ कि क्या सरकार उन्हें 2-3 दिन की मोहलत देगी? अगर कुछ राज्यों में यह स्ट्राइक विवदझ हो सकती है, 7 डिमांड्स मान्य हो सकती हैं या फिर ऐसी तीन मांगों जो इल्लौजिकल हैं और वे इस प्रकार अड़ सकते हैं तो क्या सरकार कड़े कदम उठायेगी, कोई ठोस कार्यवाही करेगी। मैं सदन के माध्यम से यही मांग करना चाहता हूँ कि **After all, this is a democratic society.** अगर इस प्रकार से कुछ लोग यहां कर देंगे तो सदन में भी सरकार की कुछ गलतियां हैं, उनके प्रति ध्यान आकर्षित करें लेकिन सदन को एक आवाज में कहना चाहिये कि कोई भी आम आदमी को रैनसम में नहीं उठा सकता। सरकार को ठोस कदम उठाना चाहिये।

**MR. SPEAKER:** The format of the notice and the format of the reply given by the Minister are good. I am really happy with the format that you have used stating that these are the demands, this is what the Government has done and this is what the Government proposes to do. The only aspect, which I found missing in the statement, is that in the given circumstances, the Government can make an appeal to the strikers to withdraw the strike. While replying the Minister, if he feels proper, can make an appeal to them.

Lastly, from the statement, it appears that there is not much difference between the transporters and the Government. He may also mention whether in the given circumstances, the Government is prepared to meet them again, discuss with them and sort out all these issues as early as possible. These are the two things which are required. ...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN (CHIRAYINKIL): Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have given notice of an Adjournment Motion. I may be permitted to raise the matter. ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Radhakrishnan, there is a strict procedure as per the rules. If you want, I can read the rule.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : I may be permitted to raise the matters even at this stage.

MR. SPEAKER: Only five Members are allowed to speak, which I have already done.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : I have given notice for an Adjournment Motion on the same subject. I may be permitted to put in a word. After all, we are living in democracy. Why should I not be allowed?

MR. SPEAKER: Your name did not come in the ballot. What can I do?

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : I have given a notice.

MR. SPEAKER: I do not deny that you have given a notice.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : I have give a notice for an Adjournment Motion on the same subject.

MR. SPEAKER: May I try my best to convince you?

...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : Now, there is a calling attention on the same subject. ...(*Interruptions*) So, you please see that my right to raise the issue is not taken away.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, you can raise it.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : I had already given notice for an Adjournment Motion, even before this matter was raised.

MR. SPEAKER: I have already rejected that.

...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Dasmunsi, please go to him and convince him. Shri Pramod Mahajan always used to do that. Shri Dasmunsi is not doing that.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Sir, it is beyond my capacity. ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Anyway, you can ask only one question as a very special case.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : After hearing the hon. Minister, an impression is created that everything is normal. It is not correct. We are not getting essential commodities and essential goods in the market. The Civil Supplies Corporation Depots are out of stocks, and nothing is available. All the Civil Supplies Corporations in my State, and in the Southern States, have been closed for the last one or two weeks because no supply is made to these Civil Supplies Corporations. Similar is the case with regard to other stocks. We do not get anything in the market. Vegetable market is more or less closed.

The learned Minister, while speaking, talked about some alternative arrangement. Where is it? If there is an alternative arrangement, vegetables should have been made available in the market.

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Minister, you can reply to his question. Shri Radhakrishnan, please sit down. There are only five minutes left before the House is adjourned for lunch and, before that, I have to complete the business before the House.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : Nothing is available. Therefore, the alternative arrangement about which the Minister is speaking is not a correct position. Something must be done for the movement of vegetables to the market without which we cannot pull on.

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Radhakrishnan, please cooperate and please conclude now.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : Let the Minister say as to what specific alternative arrangements are being made for the transport of vegetables and other essential goods. That is my question.

MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI: I am thankful to hon. Members and respected Shri Deve Gowda for bringing various points with regard to the truckers' strike. I want to clarify one or two things before I come on to the specific queries that have been raised.

Of course, as brought out by Shri Deve Gowda, we are all concerned about the hardship that is being created both to the common people and also to the people who are associated with this business: you have talked of the drivers, the loaders and the helpers. We fully agree with you. My effort all along has been to accommodate as much as is possible and see that this hardship is avoided.

One more issue has created a doubt – Shri Dasmunsi and Shri Kirit Somaiya have raised it. When I spoke about the seven demands, Dasmunsi ji, I said that there was no difference of opinion. It is not conceding of demands because some of the requests do not pertain to me. Therefore, ...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : It is a very confusing statement. Earlier, he said that there was no difference of opinion, and now he says that it is not conceding to the demands.

MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI: You may read the Statement. I had given an advertisement in the papers. I did not want to write all those things here because I presumed that the people who would be talking on this issue would also have seen this advertisement. In that advertisement, item by item, I have given the status. There are certain demands which I cannot concede to because they are pertaining to the State; some are subject matter in court cases. Therefore, I had said that as to what are their views and to what extent we subscribe to their views. There is no difference of opinion between them and us and, therefore, we can get along with those demands properly. This, I thought, I would clarify in the beginning itself. In the advertisement, I have tried to convey to everybody as to what is the Government's view.

Various other issues have been raised and I would like to clarify one general point. I have been personally speaking to the Chief Ministers, State Transport Ministers and finding out what is the situation there. To say that there is no hardship, I think, is not correct. There is hardship, there is shortage and there are also some elements who are misusing the situation, and at the retail level, they are trying to create problems. However, there are States which have gone into this in a very innovative manner. Some of the States have converted their buses into load-carrying vehicles and they are carrying vegetables and other perishable commodities. It is being done very nicely. Even in Delhi, you might have even seen the pictures, some bullock carts from the nearby places are being used. Therefore, alternative methods have been found. In three States where the truck operators have withdrawn their strike, there is no problem there. Even in the neighbouring States, next to these three, movement is taking place, though it cannot be compared with the perfect situation that was there before the strike.

Therefore, hardships are there. What I have tried to convey is that in consultation with the State Governments, all efforts are being made to minimise these hardships. Hardships would be there, but our effort is to minimise them.

One of the issues which has been raised by Shri Deve Gowda is about fluctuations in the cost of diesel. However, the fluctuations in the cost of diesel is an issue which the Petroleum Minister has to deal with, but I have had discussions with him, and he has agreed, as we have conveyed in this, to absorb any fluctuation up to twenty-five paise. However, if the function is large, how will it be absorbed if we do not increase? A similar thing will happen with decrease. Apart from the truckers, there are a lot of other consumers who may not subscribe to this view and, therefore, a *via media* has to be found out. I requested them that let us sit down with the Petroleum Minister and try to work out a *via media*.

Regarding the toll tax, I humbly submit that it is a user fee. There can be various types of arguments. Two things have been said about it. One is that different rates are being charged, and the second is that it should not be charged at all.

**13.00 hrs.**

We are spending three to five crore rupees per kilometre on these roads today. The toll tax charged by us is nowhere near this amount. It is purely meant for maintenance. I have explained this to the truckers also. The World Bank report has also stated that once the Golden Quadrilateral of 5,846 kilometres is completed, about Rs.8,000 crore will be saved per year by the users.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : We are not opposing you on the toll tax. We are supporting you on that.

MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI: I am thankful to you all for that. I would just give you the figures to put the issue in perspective. We are charging only about Rs.1200 crore to Rs.1400 crore toll on the entire GQ network and the saving is Rs.8,000 crore, annually.

Shri Chennithala remarked that the common man is suffering. That is true. That is why I have again and again

requested them to come for talks. An issue has been raised that the Minister is shying away. I would like to say that I am not shying away from it. I have mentioned it in the statement also. Members on the other side of the House have also been in Government. They would know that certain groundwork has to be done. Without doing any groundwork, to go forward on these problems would be infructuous. Even then, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April we wrote to AIMTC asking their President to meet us. The reply we got from them was that he was not available till the 13<sup>th</sup>. Then, I held discussions with them on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Even today when I wanted to have a discussion with him they said, "After all this, you get the Chief Ministers, you get the Finance Minister, you get the Petroleum Minister, we will sit down with the Prime Minister and then we will talk". I do not think this is how things can go on.

I have been telling them that out of their 10 points, I support them on seven points. On one point, I am sorry that I cannot agree with them and that is the point of the States which are overloading. I had spoken to some of the Chief Ministers personally. I explained to them that the issue of overloading is of our first concern. We are also concerned over it because my roads are getting damaged. We had discussed it on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 2003 in the Transport Development Council Meeting. Transport Ministers of all the States were present in that meeting. I had told them not to resort to overloading and cautioned them that if anything is done beyond 31<sup>st</sup> March, we would take action. Even before the notice came, we had started taking action against one or two States. Our intentions are very clear.

I would like to submit another point to the House. How does the problem of overloading occur? Complaints say that some of the States give Golden Pass whereby they load 15 to 16 tonnes instead of 9 tonnes. The money accrued on account of this Golden Pass is taken by the State eventually. The additional freight that is charged does not go to the truck owners. My question is, how does this overloading occur? Why do they pick up that overloading portion? Why do they allow that overloading portion to get into their trucks? If it is not overloaded, there will be no problem and no problem would be created for me. Therefore, we have to get on with the States, we have to go on with the booking agents who are their own people. You have to sit down and do it together.

All said and done, there is only one issue that is to be discussed and that is, how frequently diesel prices should change. I have told them that we would sit down with the Petroleum Minister and do it. I do not know what else I can do and what the House can expect me to do. I am also concerned over this and feel that it should end quickly. Nobody wants to delay it. But, you please tell me what I could have done. They are not even willing to come and sit down for talks.

Shri Chennithala made another charge that we are trying to split the unions. This is not correct at all. There has been no effort on my part or on my Ministry's part to do any such thing. You please go and ask those people. I do not think even they would make that charge. I am not doing that, it is the differences among themselves because of which they are doing it. There are various reasons for that. About 80-85 per cent of the truckers own one or two trucks. They have a different view. As I said, the extra money that comes does not go to them. There are different views.

Alternative arrangements have been talked of. We are trying to do that through the State Governments. I am quite happy that the State Governments are doing their best. They are all the time assuring me that they are doing whatever is possible. I think the hardship is minimised. I am not saying that there is no hardship. I would request you also to kindly understand that.

**डॉ. रघुवंश प्रसाद सिंह (वैशाली) :** खत्म करवाइए।

**मेजर जनरल (सेवानिवृत्त) भुवन चन्द्र खंडूड़ी :** खत्म करवाने के लिए हम भी बहुत इच्छुक हैं लेकिन हमारी कोशिश है कि वे आकर हमसे मिलें। हम अभी भी उनसे कह रहे हैं कि आइए, आकर बात कीजिए। राम नार्क जी को हमने तैयार कर रखा है कि जैसे ही वे आते हैं, हम उनको आपके पास भी लाएंगे। मुझे आशा है और अभी भी मैं अनुरोध कर रहा हूँ।

Continuously, I am requesting them to come and sit with us. I once again request them to come. In all my appeals -- even over television -- I have said this. I request them to kindly come, call off the strike.

**SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI :** Sir, yesterday, in some statement he has reportedly said -- it may be wrong -- that 'let them call off the strike first; then I will talk to them.' If that is the position, how can the things move?

**MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI:** Sir, let me explain it.

If they tell me: "you first finish, comply with all these things", what can I do? Take, for example, overloading. I have to go to the States. There are certain things which are here. They are talking of Carriers Act. Carriers Act has to be passed by Parliament. How can I tell them that I will do it? It is already in the pipeline. It is now with the Committee of Secretaries.

So, various things are in the pipeline. Therefore, we are requesting them to please agree to call off the strike. We are willing to sit down and listen to them.

This is my request to them.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I seek your protection. In your presence, the Statement has been made on the Table of the House by the hon. Minister. In one of the paragraphs, the hon. Minister had stated:

"I explained the Government's stand on each of the demands. I also requested them that they call off the agitation.

Out of the ten demands of AIMTC, there is no difference of opinion on seven of them. "

Sir, we got the message that on three demands only, there are disputes and on seven demands they all agree. But now, the hon. Minister says that even on seven demands, he has to negotiate with the States. This is not the correct position. This is creating confusion.

MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI: Shri Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi, confusion may be in your mind. As far as these people are concerned, the position is very clear. We have told them. They have even sent us some clarifications on this. So, there is no confusion on this.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister has already stated that he individually agrees with their seven demands.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : The Government of India agrees with the seven demands....(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister has made a statement by speaking that he agrees with the seven demands that they have made. He has no difference of opinion. I think, that would be enough.

MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI: Sir, may I clarify it further?

The freight rates are to be fixed by the State Governments under the Motor Vehicles Act. I cannot fix them. I agree with them that these rates should be fixed. If the States are willing, they should fix them....(Interruptions)

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Sir, it means that he has had no consultations with the State Governments before he made the Statement to the Parliament. He is a Union Minister....(Interruptions)â€¦It is not a lighter matter.

MAJ. GEN. (RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI: Of course, it is not at all a lighter matter.

SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA : Sir, I must appreciate the efforts made by the hon. Minister. But there is one point where I would like to draw the attention of this august House. In his own Statement, the hon. Minister has said that the truck owners are not ready to come and discuss with them, and they have taken a different stand. But this is a matter pertaining to the entire country. By and large, the general public is suffering.

The hon. Prime Minister has now taken some initiatives, as reported in some sections of the Press. I would only appeal to the hon. Prime Minister. This is a matter where the States are involved, the State Transport Departments are involved, the Chief Ministers are involved and the Minister of Petroleum is also involved. In a situation like this, the hon. Prime Minister has taken certain initiative, particularly, to end this stalemate. We should not make it a prestige issue.

So, I appeal to the hon. Minister that if the Prime Minister chooses to convene a meeting of the concerned Chief Ministers and the Transport Ministers with the transport operators, he should also join the Prime Minister and see that this matter is put an end to. That is the appeal I would like to make. It is not the question of any *ijjat*.

The matter should be resolved. The stalemate should end. After all, the inconvenience is being caused to the general public.

I am appealing to resolve the matter.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Yes, we are all appealing. We are all sincere and serious...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: There is no question of asking of a debate after the hon. Minister has replied.

SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA : The hon. Prime Minister has himself taken this decision...(Interruptions)â€¦Let us not unnecessarily create frictions. The hon. Minister has done his best.

Now, the hon. Prime Minister has taken the initiative to convene a meeting. Yesterday, he had a preliminary

discussions. At his level, let him convene the meeting with all concerned. Let the matter be ended. The situation should not be worsened by any type of frictions. That is all I wanted to say.

MR. SPEAKER: The House stands adjourned to meet again at 2.00 pm.

**13.10 hrs.**

*The Lok Sabha then adjourned for Lunch till Fourteen of the Clock.*

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