

Title: Regarding side collision of Howrah-Amritsar Mail with derailed wagons of foodgrain special at Sarai Banjara, Punjab.

12.05 hrs.

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE): It is with a feeling of utter sorrow and a sense of deepest anguish that I stand today to apprise the House regarding details of an unfortunate side collision of 3005 Up Howrah-Amritsar Mail with derailed wagons of Down Foodgrain special infringing the up line in Ambala-Ludhiana section of Northern Railway's Ambala Division. The collision occurred at about 0537 hours on 2nd December, 2000.

In this accident, as per the latest reports, 43 passengers have lost their lives....(*Interruptions*) Whatever I am saying is the fact known till now....(*Interruptions*).

Out of 145 passengers who sustained either grievous or simple injuries and were admitted to hospitals, condition of all is improving, except one who is critical. In addition, 44 passengers were discharged after rendering first aid. The injured have been admitted to various hospitals in Fatehgarh Sahib, Rajpura, Chandigarh and Patiala and utmost care is being taken to render the best possible medical treatment. So far, 20 dead bodies have been identified. The list of those and of injured passengers have been displayed at enquiry booths set up at different locations.

In the early hours of 2nd December 2000, Down Foodgrain special passed Sadhoogarh station running through, on the Down line at 0525 hours. At 0535 hours, 3005 Up Howrah-Amritsar Mail passed Sarai Banjara station running through, on the Up line. This train was running about 10 minutes behind schedule. The block section between Sadhoogarh and Sarai Banjara is 8 kms. Long and normally it takes goods and passenger trains around 10 and 6 minutes respectively to cover the stretch.

At around 0535 hours, 10 minutes after passing Sadhoogarh, 15 wagons of Down Foodgrain special positioned after the 3rd wagon from train engine derailed. Of these 15 derailed wagons, 2 wagons infringed the Up line.

Immediately thereafter, 3005 Up Howrah-Amritsar Mail moving on the Up line collided with the derailed wagons. The collision resulted in derailment of the train engine and first 7 coaches of 3005 Up, some of which were totally mangled.

As soon as information about this accident was received, Medical Relief Vans and Accident Relief Trains from both Ambala and Ludhiana were immediately rushed to the accident site. The Divisional Officers concerned of Ambala, along with doctors immediately proceeded to the site of accident. Senior Railway Officers from the Board also left for the accident site to supervise rescue and relief operations.

On hearing of this unfortunate accident, I along with my colleague, Shri Digvijay Singh, Minister of State for Railways proceeded to the site of accident immediately for making an on the spot assessment of the situation. I would like to place on record the outstanding contribution of the State Government of Punjab, Non-Government Organisations and the local villagers, who rendered yeomen's service in selflessly assisting the Railways in this hour of crisis.

While money cannot compensate the next of kin for the irreparable loss suffered by the death of their near and dear ones, I have announced an ex-gratia payment of Rs.2 lakh each to the families of those who have been killed in this accident and Rs.1 lakh each to those who are admitted in the hospitals. In addition, in order to provide a sustainable economic security, I have decided to offer one job in Railways to a family member of those who lost their lives in this accident. Besides, compensation as admissible will be paid to them by Railway Claims Tribunal. This amount varies from Rs.32,000 to Rs.4 lakh based on extent of incapacitation due to injuries and Rs.4 lakh in case of death.

As a token of Railways' gratitude to the noble, selfless services rendered by the nearby villagers, I would like to announce that Indian Railways will place a sum of Rs.20 lakhs at the disposal of the State Government specifically for promoting developmental works in the concerned villages.

Statutory Inquiry into this accident has already been started by the Commissioner of Railway Safety, Northern Circle. Further, considering the gravity of the accident, I propose to hold a judicial inquiry by a sitting Judge of the Honourable Supreme Court.

Accidents of this nature always shake the confidence of the common people on railway system. I have a firm belief that accidents are normally due to some failures. Therefore, I would like to assure the House that based on the findings of the inquiry, exemplary action will be taken against those found responsible for this accident, howsoever highly placed they may be. However, even before the inquiry is completed and guilty are brought to book, I have

decided that in order to facilitate an impartial and unbiased inquiry, seven senior officers, namely, Chief Engineer and Chief Tract Engineer of Northern Railway, Chief Motive Power Engineer (Running), Northern Railway, Divisional Railway Manager, Ambala, Senior Divisional Safety Officer, Ambala and concerned Senior Divisional Mechanical Engineer and Senior Divisional Engineer are being asked to proceed on leave forthwith.

This unfortunate accident has also served to highlight the glaring weaknesses that the system has developed over time due to successive decline in investment and long delay in bringing about the much needed reforms at the structural level. I am thankful to the hon. Prime Minister who has, in his condolence message yesterday, assured that the Government will deal with this issue with utmost seriousness and without any further delay.

On behalf of the Railways and myself, I convey deep condolences to the bereaved families and also express sincere sympathies to those injured. I trust the House will also join me in extending the same. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA (BANKURA): Sir, I would like to seek a clarification....(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: A judicial inquiry has already been ordered. In that case, how can you ask for clarifications? This is not proper.

...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: A Supreme Court Judge has been asked to inquire into the matter. Please understand that an inquiry would be held now.

...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA : Sir, I have given notice to raise this matter....(*Interruptions*)

...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Acharia, please understand that already a judicial inquiry has been ordered in the matter. This is not the proper time to discuss all these things.

...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA : Sir, some serious accidents had taken place in a span of last two years . Similar type of accidents had taken place earlier also. What are the steps taken by the Government to prevent such accidents?...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: That is why, an inquiry has been ordered to inquire into the matter. Please understand that a Supreme Court Judge is going to conduct the inquiry. Government has taken all steps in this regard. Please understand this.

...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA : What is the new thing about the statement? The Minister should take over the responsibility and should resign....(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Sontosh Mohan Dev may speak now.

...(*Interruptions*)

श्री रघुनाथ झा (गोपालगंज) : अध्यक्ष महोदय, यह कोई बंगाल का सवाल नहीं है। यह पूरे रा्ट्र का सवाल है। जो दुर्घटना हुई है उसके बारे में मंत्री महोदया ने स वयमेव सदन में बयान दिया है। मृतकों एवं गंभीर रूप से घायलों को बाकायदा मुआवजा िँदए जाने की घोणा मंत्री महोदया ने की है, फिर क्यों हल्ला मचा रहे हैं ?
(व्यवधान)
