

Title: Regarding loss of lives due to boat tragedy in Kerala.

SHRI LONAPPAN NAMBADAN (MUKUNDAPURAM): On the 20th of February 2007, 15 students and three teachers who were on an excursion to Thattekkat Bird Sanctuary in Ernakulam district were drowned and killed when the boat they were travelling capsized mid-stream.

The students and teachers belonged to Elavoor, St Antony's upper primary school near Ankamaly which comes under our Mukundapuram Lok Sabha Constituency. While 15 children lost their lives, one family lost their twin daughters. The entire Kerala state is still mourning this tragedy.

* English translation of the speech originally delivered in Malayalam.

In a boat which can only carry 8 passengers more than 40 were accommodated. This boat had no license, and was unsuitable for ferrying passengers. Consequently it capsized and led to the death of 15 innocent children and 3 lady teachers.

This points to the urgent necessity of formulating and implementing a comprehensive law which can ensure that the safety measures of all means of water transport is maintained.

To prevent accidents that occur in tourist centers, all unrecognized boat services should be banned. These boats that are not suitable for ferrying passengers and those that do not adhere to safety norms should not be given licenses.

I would suggest, that all the state Governments should be given immediate directions by the centre to enforce safety pre-conditions for all excursions organized by schools.

Educational Rules in all states should contain provisions in which the steps to be followed by schools undertaking excursions are spelt out in detail.

Government of Kerala is now thinking of strengthening the existing provisions of the education laws in the state, and thereby ensure that school excursions can be safe.

The center also needs to take steps where by inland water navigation especially in tourist centers are free from risk. There should be provisions in our law to strictly punish those who violate such safety norms.

In the event of accidents the school concerned and the Government should own up the responsibility and pay adequate compensation. Over crowding of school buses should be immediately stopped. The practice of crowding school children into auto-rickshaws, cars and jeeps should be banned.

Another practice, that of converting old buses into school buses, which is a violation of the Motor Vehicle's Act, should be banned. I request once again that the center and state take immediate steps to protect the lives of children and allay the fears in the minds of parents across the country.

SHRI K. FRANCIS GEORGE (IDUKKI): I would like to associate myself with this issue.