

16.00 hrs.

DISCUSSION UNDER RULE 193

Recent Fire Incidents in Delhi

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will not take up a discussion on the recent fire incidents in Delhi.

[Translation]

PROF. RASA SINGH RAWAT (Ajmer): Mr. Chairman, Sir, the recent fire incidents in Delhi were the unfortunate happenings for both the public and the administration. What is surprising is that from 14th to 20th April, a fire safety week to educate the public against fire hazards, was being observed by the Delhi Fire Service and it was hardly two days after the inauguration of the programme, that is on 16th itself, that hollowness of their claims was exposed, when a fire broke out in the prestigious Vigyan Bhawan and the busy market place of Sadar Bazar. Properties worth crores of rupees were burnt to ashes and it seemed for a while that Delhi too was on fire like the legendary burning of Lanka, by Lord Hanuman. During the fire safety week, one expected the administration to present before the people, a specimen of the skill and efficiency of the firemen, their ability to control fires, but instead of it, major fires became a daily occurrence in the capital city of the country, which projects the image of the entire nation and chaos and confusion became the order of the day. After the incidents on 16th April, 1500 Jhuggies were gutted in a major fire in Adarsh Nagar and incidents of fire took place simultaneously at five places on 17th April. Fire also broke out in Nirman Bhawan, Rajouri Garden Telephone Exchange, Rajendra Place, Jahangir Puri, Lajpat Nagar and Rohit House. After that, another fire broke out in Nirman Bhawan on 19th April. Hundreds of jhuggies were gutted in a major fire in Gita Colony on 20th April. Consequently, the hon. Members drew the attention of the Government towards this. Despite this, on 23.4.90, another

major fire broke out in Motia Khan and it claimed the lives of nine innocent children and two women. About 3,000 jhuggies were also gutted in this fire.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, after the occurrence of so many incidents of fire, we had felt that the Government would be able to control the incidence of these fires, but subsequently on 25.4.90, another major fire broke out in Jahangirpuri and 3,000 jhuggies were gutted therein. After that fire broke out in Seelampur and Shahbad area and many jhuggies were engulfed and gutted. Since 1980, there was fire in Jahangirpuri for the fifth time. After every fire incident, new jhuggies come up and every year during the summers, these jhuggies are burnt to ashes.

On 3.5.90, the F-block of Shastri Bhawan, which is a Government building, caught fire. The fire erupted on the spot where the records of the Ministry of Agriculture had been kept and the V.I.P. telephone exchange was located. During these days itself, a fire broke out in the Department of Electronics at Lok Nayak Bhawan which houses many Government Departments. Thus, there were major incidents of fire, one after another, during the month of April and the first week of May. It has been stated that the per month average of incidents of fires in Delhi is about 300 which causes a financial and business loss of Rs. 300 crores to 800 crores per year. Many such incidents have taken place. What I would like to know is why so many incidents of fires occurred during the fire safety week itself? They had come out to train the citizens, but the weakness of their department was exposed and during the fire safety week one was reminded of the saying 'Nearer to Church, further from God.'

Mr. Chairman, Sir, actually it is a very serious challenge to the Government and it is a matter of serious concern for all of us. Such incidents of fire taking place in the capital city raises doubts in one's mind. Before expressing my views further, I would like to draw the attention of the House towards the fires that had broken out in Vigyan Bhawan and Sadar Bazar.

Construction of Vigyan Bhawan, which is the venue of International meetings and conferences and is unique specimen of architectural excellence was in 1956 when UNESCO Conference was to take place Delhi and the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawharlal Nehru had said about it that he was proud of the fact that our engineers had built such a magnificent building. The architect Shri Gehlot who had designed the Vigyan Bhawan was honoured with Padmashri, by the Government of India. This building has attained historic significance because it was here that in 1984 a conference of the Government Heads of NAM countries was held, in 1983 it was the venue of CHOGM conference and also in 1980, again a conference was held here in which the Governmental Heads of Seven SAARC countries had participated and the 1980 UNCTAD Conference was also organised here. It is a matter of grave concern that a fire should have broken out in such a prestigious, international venue of conferences and that too at such a time when a conference of the Directors-General and Inspectors-General of the Police forces was in progress to discuss matters like national security and law and order situation and our hon. Minister of Home Affairs had inaugurated the conference only in the G and H Blocks of the Vigyan Bhawan complex itself. It is a matter of serious concern that a fire had broken out and continued unabated for about 36 hours, despite the fact that whenever such conferences are held there a thorough search is conducted, utilizing the Services of the dog squad and all security aspects are looked into. At the same time another major fire broke out in Sadar Bazar where about 400-500 shops had been gutted causing a heavy loss worth about 800 crores of rupees. The entire fire fighting machinery got bogged down. To combat fire, 26 fire engines were requisitioned from outside including Ghazlabad and Meerut. Fire fighting equipments were also requisitioned from the Air Force and the Army. Despite all this, the expediency of extinguishing the fire at Sadar Bazar was not of the required level as more attention was paid to the fire at the Vigyan Bhawan. The rumours spread by the rumour mongers too had its negative effect.

A rumour was floated that the Reservation office at New Delhi Railway Station had caught fire as a result of which fire engines stationed at the Teliwara fire stations, adjacent to Sadar Bazar went all the way to the New Delhi Railway Station instead of Sadar Bazar and subsequently they reached Sadar Bazar two hours late and by that time all the shops there had been engulfed in fire. We have learnt from press reports that the fire at Vigyan Bhawan was not due to any short circuit. Earlier, it was said that the fire had erupted due to a short circuit in a corner of the building, but it has been clearly stated in the press reports which had appeared two days back that the fire was caused not due to any short circuit and the Committee constituted by the Director-General of the C.P.W.D. has also stated in its report that it would have caused disaster, if they had not stitched off the electricity, because the entire power system was working properly till then and had there been a short circuit, the electric supply would have been automatically cut off. Thus, there was no scope for a short circuit or any other act of sabotage or negligence on the part of the C.P.W.D. staff. Now the question arises if there was no negligence, then how did the fire break out? In this context, we must remember that Pakistan is trying to browbeat us. Their Prime Minister Ms Benazir Bhutto is threatening us with a thousand year war and many Pakistani infiltrators have found their way to Delhi also beside Kashmir with the sole motive of creating disorder in the country and diverting the attention of the Government from combating the extremists and terrorist forces in Kashmir and Punjab. Therefore, it is definitely, an act of conspiracy or sabotage behind the incidence of fire that has engulfed a Government building like Vigyan Bhawan. Here, I would also like to say that the previous Congress Government had played such a cruel joke on the people, that no other Government would have been able to do.

SHRI KALP NATH RAI (Ghesi): This is wrong.

PROF RASA SINGH RAWAT: Three years back, fire had broken out in Gopal

[Prof. Rasa Singh Rawat]

Towers, Ansal Bhawan and many hotels in the country including Hotel Siddharth Inter-Continental and subsequently a Committee was constituted which after investigation had come to the conclusion that all the Government buildings do not have adequate arrangements and there should be the complete arrangements of fire fighting equipments in all these Government buildings, but it is a matter of regret that they were not made available. Officials of the Fire Services had clearly observed that fire fighting arrangements were inadequate in Vigyan Bhawan. During all these three years, the concerned authorities did not pay any attention and the Government also did not bother about it, but later on when fire broke out in the Ansal Bhawan, Siddhartha Intercontinental and the Gopal Towers in 1986, they took pains to pay their attention to it. In that particular year, an amount of 11 crore rupees had been sanctioned by the Government for that very purpose but again they kept quiet and turned a deaf ear to it. In Delhi, 150 buildings had been declared unsafe from the angle of fire safety standards and half of them were Government buildings including Vigyan Bhawan and the Sena Bhawan and the N.D.M.C. city centre i.e. Palika Kendra. Proper fire fighting equipments had not been made available despite repeated warnings from the officials of the fire service. Not only this, the C.P.W.D. officials stated quite boldly that it would not be possible for them to make adequate arrangements of such equipments in the Vigyan Bhawan, by December 1990, whereas for all the three years Government turned an indifferent attitude in this regard.

This led to the loss of crores of rupees and the figures given by the committee constituted for the purpose by the Director General for its reconstruction should serve as an eye opener for us. According to a rough estimate an amount of Rs. 7.53 crores will be required for the reconstruction of Vigyan Bhawan. Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would like to draw your attention to the loss caused thereby. All the incidents of fire have taken place because of sheer irresponsibility and it

has become very difficult to reckon the loss suffered on that account. The walls, dais and the roof of the main hall of Vigyan Bhawan have been totally destroyed. Besides that, the platform and the walls of the main conference hall have been badly damaged and the G.H. Rooms at the first and the second floor have been badly destroyed. At the time of constituting an enquiry committee, to conduct an inquiry into this fire-accident, the Director General and the Lt. Governor had observed that while constructing Vigyan Bhawan no care had been taken to provide an emergency entry point for the purpose of extinguishing fire in case of such an accident. So in the present case, when the fire engulfed it, the men of the fire brigade had to face a great difficulty to get into the building because large columns of smoke had closed all the entry points to the building. There was no way of making entry through the north eastern gate into the Commission Room H. and that is why that fire brigade personnel forced their way into the Commission Rooms and G and H by breaking open the glazed windows and the water was jetted directly into them. While constructing Vigyan Bhawan had the care been taken for making direct arrangement for the easy access of water into it, the fire could have been controlled soon. It was for that reason that the Director General had to suggest that each and every room should be provided with at least one window and there should be the minimum use of inflammable material in the construction of roofs and also the use of coaltar on the cement and tin roofs should be avoided. It was also suggested that there should be arrangements for air handling grids on each and every floor of the building. Sir, I have placed all the possible details in respect of Vigyan Bhawan with an observation that such a serious incident would not have taken place, had the Government not been negligent. I would, therefore, like to draw the attention of the Government to the fact that I doubt it to be an act of sabotage. It is just possible that with a view to create anarchy in the country, some agents of the Pakistani infiltrators or some person working there as an employee, might have hatched this conspiracy for petty material gains to set

ablaze the building where the conference of the Directors and the Inspector Generals was taking place.

Hon. Sir, after this incident, there were a number of incidents of fire at many other places in Delhi. This is clearly indicative of a conspiracy behind all these incidents. On the one hand, a fire took place in the jhuggie colony of Delhi and subsequently it made Shastri Bhawan its next target, where important agricultural land records and record of the land covering jhuggies and the other land earmarked for the purpose of sale, had been maintained. Simultaneous incidents of fire in Delhi indicate that some racket or some mafia group is active and operating in Delhi and sets the entire colony on fire to get the jhuggies etc. vacated by their occupants on one hand and to destroy the records pertaining to these lands by consigning the same to flames. It seems that this group sets deliberately afire these buildings at various places with the sole aim of accumulating crores of rupees by way of land deals. That mafia group engaged in such activities is also trying to destroy the records concerning the land revenue as well. The Government should pay serious attention to this matter.

It is also an undisputable reality that sometimes incidents of fire take place because of the lapses on the part of an individual resulting in horrible accidents. An investigation into the causes of fire of Lok Nayak Bhawan revealed that one of its employees had left the heater on while leaving for home in the evening. As the heater remained on for the whole night, it generated an extensive heat which resulted in the short circuit and consequently the entire room caught fire. That fire could not be controlled immediately because the door of the room was locked from outside. I would, therefore, like to urge upon the Government, through you, to make such arrangements in all the important offices of the Government of India as would ensure the proper checking of electronic circuits etc. at the time of the closure of offices and see to it that no heater is left on, all the connections are switched off including the main switch. For that purpose an electrician

should be appointed in every Government office so that he can take care of all the electric equipments there. Now-a-days, provision of electric facilities have increased to a large extent in every office. In some important big offices, Government have provided heaters, refrigerators, collars and air-conditioners or some other electrical equipments. That electrician should be entrusted with the responsibility of conducting regular checking of all the electric equipments in that office every evening. Any technically qualified person can be appointed for the job.... (*Interruptions*)....

[*English*]

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have taken the entire time of your party. Your party has got eighteen minutes. You have taken the entire time. And I understand that more names are coming. So, please conclude.

[*Translation*]

PROF RASA SINGH RAWAT: Hon. Sir, please give me some more time. I want to say that besides the incidents of fire in the important Government buildings, the way it took place in Sadar Bazar area (*Interruptions*).....

[*English*]

MR. CHAIRMAN: I thought there is nobody else from your party to speak. That is why I have given you so much time. Now three names from your party have come. So, please conclude.

[*Translation*]

PROF. RASA SINGH RAWAT: I will conclude in two minutes. The factors behind these incidents of fire at various places can be attributed to the carelessness of some person, negligence in one's duty on the absence of an electrician. We are also facing one more problem of unauthorised connections to some persons allowed by certain employees of DESU for their vested interests and there is every possibility of fire

[Prof. Rasa Singh Rawat]

taking places in such cases. The extensive overloading at many congested places in the city is also responsible for the chances of catching fire at any point and moment. Moreover, the fire fighting services available in Delhi are also not so prompt. I wish the Government to give proper attention to it and make such arrangements as to protect the people of Delhi against such incidents of fire.

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shri P.R. Kumaramangalam.

[Translation]

SHRI GULAB CHAND KATARIA (Udaipur): Mr Chairman, Sir, my name appears next in the agenda.

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, no. If the other gentleman was not present, then you would have been called. That is the normal procedure. Two names will be there. The first man will be called. If he is not there, then the second person will be called.

[Translation]

SHRI GULAB CHAND KATARIA: Shall I get a chance after wards?

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, you will get a chance. Only party preference is there; no specific preference is there.

SHRI P.R. KUMARAMANGALAM (Salem): Mr. Chairman, Sir, the 16th of April was not just an ordinary day, if one thought of it from the angle of fire, it was the day when nationality every year we usually celebrate the Firemen's Day. It is a day when the services of those who put their life at stake to protect the citizens of this country, to battle the evil known as fire, which at times be-

comes very auspicious and at times can be the most destructive chemical force that exists, are remembered. Unfortunately, it is on this day on a national level that we saw that the *Agnigod* took the sacrifice of a toll of nearly 720 people in one day, and property worth over a thousand crores of rupees was lost and nearly ten thousand people were rendered homeless. I am sure, Mr. chairman, Sir, you along with many other Members must be wondering wherefrom I am reeling these figures. But the House would recollect that that day was not a normal day. We saw not only our prestigious Vigyan Bhavan burnt down and its roof fell down but it was being gutted. We saw that about 2000 juggies burning down to ashes. We saw children dying in fire, we saw the gas burst all over the railway compartment which roasted, fried and cremated many of our brothers and sisters near Patna. Not only that. On that very day, we saw huts burning in Himachal; we saw huts burning in Madras; we saw fires in juggies; even in Bombay. The loss of property, even though we are a poor country, cannot be estimated. It is impossible to work out the loss. Then, how is it that ever we can console those mothers who have lost their children, those fathers who suddenly find that they have become widowers, no wife, no children are left. They were travelling in a train or they were sitting under the roof of their huts and there were fire accidents. What is the answer? What is the reason? What is the cause for fire? I recollect that a statement was made on the floor of the House by the hon. Minister about the cause for the fire. It was mentioned that certain sparks were seen on the roof. Most probably, quite probably, it is possible that it could have been due to short-circuit; however we are having a committee to inquire into it. What is it that the Committee says? It is out in the press today that the Penal has ruled out cause of fire due to short-circuit. So, if it is not a short-circuit, what is it that set fire to it? Myself and many other Members jointly, including my friend Shri J.P. Aggarwal and Mr. Madan Lal Khurana raised our voice saying that there is sabotage behind this. It is not so simple that when Senior Police Officials getting together and having a

meeting in a prestigious building to discuss important security matters and methods of keeping the nation secure and free from various varieties of vandalism and terrorism, suddenly the building gets fire and burnt to the ground and this is not something new. I recollect that some years ago the Ansal Bhawan in Delhi had caught fire I do recollect a statement was made in this House by the then Home Minister that these high-rise buildings had become fire traps. He listed out a series of Government buildings saying that they were the buildings which need to be repaired. I know that the then Minister of State for Home Affairs, Shri Sontosh Mohan Dey, had gone on record saying that notices had been issued. The CPWD had been intimated every year and it was said that money will be provided. But it looks like that only Vigyan Bhawan and Shastri Bhawan burnt down and money could not be found. This is irrespective of political parties. According to me, when one talks of 'agni' and fire one does not talk of this party or that party. This is a matter of life and death. Are we living in a civilised society or are we living in those 14th and 15th Centuries that whenever you wanted to attract somebody, you set fire to one's house or the building? Have we forgotten the civilisation?

Sir, it is unfortunate that over two weeks have passed and the third week is getting over, yet we do not know why is it that the Vigyan Bhawan got fire? We still do not know the reason. Alternatives have been ruled out, possibilities have been ruled out. But no serious investigation has taken place and just a few days before, the rooms where the files relating to accounts have been kept suddenly got fire on their own. They burn on their own. They burn on their own because it is so hot that they burn on their own. And no real action has been taken. We find Shastri Bhawan coming down in flames, the fire engines take hours on end to reach that place. When is the fire taking place? Early morning the fire takes place. It was mentioned in this House four times in a day in order to ensure that the Government at least sends fire tenders to put off the fire. And we find their reluctance. We wanted a statement

urging them to please explain to this House what happened. No. We had to pressurise this House. The whole House had to get together with the Chairman, with the Speaker, make a point of it to the Government and finally we got a two-lined statement from my dear friend, the Minister of State. It was very kind of him, I must add, to have responded. With two or three lines there was some response at the end of the day when the fire occurred at 7.30 in the morning. There should have been a *sue moto* statement immediately. Any way, one does not worry about the statement. Our friends on the other side seem to think that the normal etiquettes in Parliament can be done away with. Well, that is not the major issue today. The issue is that whether it is a fire in Vigyan Bhawan or in Shastri Bhawan or the fire in the jhuggies, it does not seem to be accident. All the fires show the clear, visible hand of sabotage. There is a conspiracy behind every single fire. They are not natural. Whether it is a real estate mafia, whether it is compensation brokers, whether it is people who want to get rid of uneasy accounts or whether it is terrorists, all of them belong to one common cover—anti-social outlaws and terrorists. Under this umbrella they are taking advantage, may I make it clear, of weak government—our Government that is finding it difficult to respond on emergency, which even after 15 days after a major fire in a prestigious building is unable to put off a fire in its own office at Shastri Bhawan, a Government where the outlaw, the criminal, the kidnapper, the murderer, the mafia considers a Government of theirs in terms of the fact that this Government is incapable of coming down on them heavily. Yes, Khurana Sahib was justifiably angry, J.P. Aggarwal was justifiably going out of control one day as I remember, because he wanted to bring to the notice of this House that in their constituency life has become one of the cheapest commodities going.

Sir, fire has always been worshipped not only in our country, but the world over. We know there are fire gods even in Peru because the strength of this chemical reaction which creates the thing, what we call agni or

[Sh. P.R. Kumaramangalam]

fire, is very powerful. It could be purifying and it could be destructive. But, Sir, when it becomes a tool in the hands of those forces who want to destroy the very fabric of our nation, then I believe that it is time that the Government wakes up and takes some action. Sir, I would like just to bring to the notice of this House that with effect from nearly the 1st of December or the 2nd of December 1989, till date, the record in terms of toll, that is, the death toll of people who have died in fire on a national basis is over 1800 and this started almost immediately—the first fire was on the 7th or 8th December. We found every day in the papers on the one side people dying due to terrorism and on the other side people dying due to fire, and it is not that these are not co-related at all. They have reasonable connection and as my friend said, it is after all, a sacrifice to the Agni Devata.

But it depends as to what level we can go. Are we willing to succumb if Agni Devatha comes really on its own? Those who believe it may say something else. But, is not Agni Devatha being brought there?

Sir, I cannot but say that the first death by fire was of a little girl who was just five years old and that fire destroyed over 500 *jhuggies*. This is way back on the 12th January, 1990. I am not talking of a fire in the month of April; I am talking about the fire of 12th of January, 1990. In fact, it happened exactly on 11th and reported on 12th January and it was in Wazirpur industrial area of Northwest Delhi. Do we have a report as to how this fire accident took place? I would like to know. I am sure the Members of the House would like to know. Was this fire accidental? If so, who was responsible? What was the action taken? What was the compensation given? Thereafter, we find that in the *jhuggi* colony near the Jamuna Railway bridge on the 16th, five people were killed. I can go on; it is like a date—war if one starts from the 11th of January and goes down till Friday last counting death and damage to property. Who is doing it. We would like to know. At

least I see a definite unseen hand behind these fire accidents. It is not simple. It is borne out of the fact that just like in Kashmir, things blew up and went out of control because people thought that there is Government that is not able to manage matters. Just like that, today in my home State of Tamil Nadu, we are finding imported terrorism taking nasty turn. We are finding every form of law-breaker thinking he has the licence to plunder, kill and set fire as long as he does it efficiently.

Sir, I would not take too much time. I can see you looking at me very carefully. I would wind up with only one request to the hon. Home Minister. I do not mean any disrespect to my friend Shri Subodh Kant Sahay, who is the hon. Minister of State for Home Affairs. But, I would like to have seen Mufti Sahib here, because then I could have asked him straightaway, what happened? At that time, when we said, it is possible that there is sabotage, he said, no; the question does not arise. It is on record. But today, I would like to ask him; is he so certain? Every committee which looked into every fire was reasonably certain that fire did not happen as a matter of accident and it was set fire. I would like to know from the Government, through you, as to what is their exact report about every single incident of fire in Delhi, starting from the 11th of January, 1990 till Friday last. I would also like to know as to how long would they take to give this report to this House. Would they make a statement? Would the Minister, if he has the information at his disposal, place it on the Table of the House at the end of this discussion? Is there a connection between one fire and another? Is there a force which is organising the whole picture or is just that our stars are bad?

SHRI BALGOPAL MISHRA (Bolangir):
Mr. Chairman, Sir, it is a fact that from 16th April, to 3rd May, 1990, 6,900 *jhuggies* have been reduced to ashes by fire accidents. Vighyan Bhavan was set on fire on 16th April. Nirman Bhavan was set on fire on 19th of April and Shastri Bhavan on 3rd May. If you take the fire accidents, railway accident, bomb blasts in the city and all these things into account, nobody can ever over-rule the

fact that there may be a hand of sabotage. Saboteurs are there and they have been there for a very long time. Otherwise, how could rocket launchers, AK-47 rifles enter into the Golden Temple, without which Operation Bluestar would have never taken place? And the shield of India should not have become the hangman's rope—what Punjab has become today.

There are a set of people in the Government who were thinking that they get salary from the particular individuals or particular group of politicians. Those people owe allegiance to the individuals or the group of politicians. They were working against the interest of the country and against the interest of the nation. Because of that, Operation Bluestar was launched. Similarly, it cannot be ruled out that these persons are hand in glove with the terrorists who enter into this country. They must have been doing all these things to give a bad name to the Government.

Just now, Mr. Kumaramangalam referred to this Government as a "weak-Government and that is why Mafia dons, black marketeers, smugglers and others think that it is their paradise." He says, we are a weak Government. I would like to know whether the earlier Government was strong enough? Can they say that these terrorist activities had not been there earlier to 2nd of December, 1989? Can they say that smuggling activities were not there earlier to 2nd of December? It was much more during that period and criminality was institutionalised by the then Government. What happened in Orissa during Mr. J.B. Patnaik's time? That was part of the earlier Government. I am citing it as an example.

SHRI P.R. KUMARAMANGALAM:
Think of Mr. Biju's earlier regime.

SHRI BALGOPAL MISHRA: That was the Congress culture.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please come to the fire incidents.

SHRI BALGOPAL MISHRA: Mr. Kumaramangalam has stated that the Minister has given only 2-line statement and that too late. No doubt, the information was very brief but at that time, Shri Subodh Kant Sahay was on the spot of the fire incident taking personal care for relief and rehabilitation measures to those affected in the *jhuggies*.

There is no point in mud-slinging when the burning human problems are there. I would like to ask this Government to take effective steps. There are 39 Government buildings and 137 multi-storeyed commercial complexes in Delhi which do not have any fire protection measures. I will request this Government to take stern measures within a definite time-frame so that such incidents in future are prevented.

We claim that our scientific advancement has been wonderful and we see from the papers of the previous Government as well as the present Government that we have developed fire retardant chemicals. For whom these fire fighting chemicals are developed if they cannot be used for the purposes for which they are developed? Lot of money is being spent on developing a particular product and that product remains in the shelf and it does not help this country.

I request this Government to treat all the *jhuggies* with fire retardants on a compulsory basis. They may charge a little to the inhabitants but this should be a must throughout the country. This decision should be taken immediately.

The owners of multi-storey buildings are not bothered because their buildings are insured. When there is a loss, they claim it.

The Government should fix responsibility of the negligent building owners due to whose fault these huge accidents are taking place and insurance claims, should not be paid to such persons.

With these words I conclude.

SHRI AJOY MUKHOPADHYAY (Krishnagar): Sir, during the last one month, fire incidents have been taking place one after another. It is true that there might be some accidents in some cases but if we take together all the cases starting from 12th April to 3rd May, it seems unusual, so many fire incidents took place in and around Delhi which is the capital of the country. Here we are witnessing many fire incidents from Vigyan Bhavan to Jhuggis. This is something astonishing how so many fire incidents are taking place at a particular time. Anybody may question and people are questioning as to what is happening there in Delhi. So far as Vigyan Bhavan is concerned, that imposing and massive building is totally destroyed in fact. It has to be rebuilt. Such is the position. I have seen in newspaper that the fire broke out minutes after the meeting of the Directors-General of Police and Inspectors-General of Police was concluded. Immediately after that, the fire broke out. Shri Vijaykaran, Delhi Police Chief, was present in that Conference itself and he said that while he was attending the conference, smoke was seen emerging from the Conference Room itself. He said;

"Initially, we took it casually thinking it to be a minor short circuit. We left the building within a couple of minutes but could not imagine the fire could spread to this extent."

This statement is amazing. The authorities of the Police Administrations including the Police Administration of Delhi were there. They saw some smoke there. They reluctantly left the building. How could it happen? But actually it happened. From his own statement it is revealed.

Sir, there was a report in the Press also that the CPWD warned the authorities of the Vigyan Bhavan saying that there was inadequate fire safety arrangement. But nothing was done. This does not tell that the Government is moving in a very responsible manner. Thousands of *jhuggies* were burnt down and thousands of people have become homeless in the Capital itself. The Lt.

Governor of Delhi Administration has announced the formation of a Committee to probe the entire fire incidents. That is good. But is it due to accident alone that things are happening? There might be some accidents in some cases. There might be some short-circuits in some cases. But in each and every case, is it true that it is due to some accident? Is it due to short circuit that accidents are taking place? We cannot conclude this way. That will not be fair. The people of this country will not believe this. So, a thorough probe is necessary. It is to be seen whether there is any sabotage, some conspiracy. From the incidents, it is revealed that some method might be there, behind these. Otherwise, how could it happen? In Nirman Bhavan only the State office of the CPWD i.e. a record room was destroyed. That day I have heard—perhaps I have seen newspapers also—that all the switches were off including the main switch.

In spite of that, how could it happen? But it did happen. The record room was destroyed. It is very unfortunate. This is also very alarming. What the Intelligence Agency of this country doing? I do not know what the Intelligence Agency of the Central Government is doing? Did they give any hint before-hand that such fires were going to take place one after the other? It cannot be ruled out that there is sabotage behind it. There might be some political conspiracy behind it in order to discredit this Government. So, the National Front Government must come forward to convince the people that they are very much concerned and serious in this matter. In the Capital in many Buildings including the Government buildings, Fire safety arrangements are most inadequate. That must be inquired into and the entire report must be placed before this House. People must be told as to what is happening in this country. It is high time the Government must come forward to see that no such things take place. This is the duty of the Government and the Government must see to it that it is stopped. The Committee that was set up for probing into this matter have ruled out the theory of short-circuit. So far as the Vigyan Bhavan is con-

cerned, they have told that this was not due to short-circuit. What is the method operating behind such fire incidents. It is a very serious thing. I urge upon the Government to come forward with a specific statement immediately. They must come out with the facts giving reasons of these fires within a very short time and also giving details as to who are responsible for all these fires. They must take proper steps so that in future such fires do not take place in the capital at least.

With these words, I conclude.

[*Translation*]

SHRI J.P. AGARWAL (Chandni Chowk): Mr Speaker, Sir, All the hon. members who have spoken so far have expressed doubts that somewhere or the other there is a close link in the chain of happenings which have resulted in fire incidents, burning of Jhuggis and bomb explosions in the buses in Delhi and despite all these incidents, the Delhi Administration has not taken any step to curb such mishaps. As a matter of fact, there is a close link between these two and attempts are being made to turn Delhi into a trouble torn area so as to create terror in the minds of the people living in the capital. The fire incidents in the Jhuggis of Delhi, in Sadar Bazar and the bomb explosions in the buses of Delhi are a part of the conspiracy which is being hatched in Punjab and Kashmir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, many questions arise as to the cause of these fire incidents and also the force which is behind this conspiracy. Where from are these people receiving aid and what are the steps being taken to curb such incidents.

It is indeed unfortunate to see that occurrence of such incidents in Delhi has become a frequent affair, whereas in the past the Delhi Police served the people of Delhi diligently and did not allow any incident to take place in the capital and if at all a incident took place once in a while, no similar recurrence was reported in the subsequent six months or even upto one or two years, and further, no coherence could be linked be-

tween the two incidents. All these incidents are occurring openly under the nose of the authorities of Delhi Administration and the Central Government. This should be termed as the weakness of the Government and Delhi Administration and can also be termed as a failure on the part of Intelligence Department because they have made no concrete attempt to look into the cause behind the successive occurrences of such incidents and also did not take any measure to curb them. (*Interruptions*)

I have no objection to this and I shall be the first person to call for an enquiry so that the guilty could be identified, be it a congressman or person belonging to any other party. By such utterances, you are playing with the lives of the people of Delhi. How would you have reacted if such incidents occurred in your own city or locality?

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Home Minister made a statement in this august House regarding the fire that broke out in Sadar Bazar but I regret to say that adequate compensation was not given to the people. Their shops have been gutted and when they start reconstructing their shops, all the acts of the Municipal Corporation would be enforced on them and consequently they would not be permitted to reconstruct their shops. In the past also, when there was a fire in the Sadar Bazar area and in some cloth markets of Delhi, it took years together in getting permission from the Delhi Municipal Corporation, to get electric connection and receive other facilities. I would like to know from the Government whether instructions will be issued to Delhi Administration to ensure that no harassment is caused to the shopkeepers and a separate department or office is opened to provide them all kinds of facilities without any inconvenience? If such an office is opened, the shopkeepers can seek redressed to the grievances. Apart from this the civic amenities in the major wholesale markets of Chandni Chowk, Khari Bawli, Sadar Bazar, Nai Sarak and Chawri Bazar etc. are extremely poor. The wiring is in a very bad shape. The water channel of the fire brigade is not located anywhere in

[Sh. J.P. Agarwal]

the vicinity of these markets. Due to this, when the fire brigade pours water to extinguish the flames, water stops half way through and consequently the fire brigades fail in extinguishing the blaze. Following the fire incidents in Gopal Tower and Ansal Bhavan the Fire Brigade authorities declared certain buildings fire hazard. Out of these, eighty buildings belong to Government or autonomous bodies, but I regret to say that whatever amount of money was given by the previous Government for this purpose was not spent properly by those who were responsible for getting adequate facilities for the fire brigade. Wherever the money was spent, it could not serve any useful purpose as there is no legal provision available with the fire brigade and Delhi Fire Service under which they can seal these buildings. As such will we continue to play with the lives of the people just because they have no legal backing? There are certain unauthorised builders in the city who have constructed big buildings and markets unauthorisedly. How far shall we remain a party to these unauthorised builders and shall not take any action against them? I want to draw your attention towards the pathetic condition of many unauthorised markets in old Delhi which will collapse in the event of a mild earthquake. There are many of such buildings which have been constructed in contravention of the bye-laws and no one takes action against them. Whichever Government comes to power, they try to win their votes by regularising these unauthorised structures. If the support being extended to these violators of law continues, Delhi will continue to fall such accidents unabatedly. I want to mention one more thing that Delhi Fire Service has to pay 40 per cent duty in importing the equipment required by it. I would like to urge the hon. Minister to ask the Finance Minister not to charge duty on the import of equipment required by the Fire brigade on the same lines as is done in the case of life saving drugs. Today the population of Delhi is 80 lakhs and the budget for fire brigade is just Rs. 4 crores, an amount which has remained static for years together. I want to

remind the hon. Minister that for the sake of safety and convenience of the people living in Delhi when we blame the fire personnel for reaching late, we should also ensure that they have adequate means or try to find out why the demands put forth by them have not been fulfilled. A Committee had recommended in the year 1976 that there should be 63 fire stations in Delhi but there are only 23 fire stations as on date. It is matter of concern that the population of Delhi is increasing, but we are paying no attention towards it. It is the firemen who are abused the most, despite the fact that it is they who save the life and property of the people at the risk of their own lives. The Shopkeepers of Sadar Bazar and Chandni Chowk want to get their shops insured, but the insurance Company do not entertain them. It is such a place where fire can break any moment and a mishap can take place. As such for the benefit of the traders and for the safety of their life and property, would you try to find out who are these people or which is this company who refuses to provide insurance cover there and further refuses to provide compensation. The people of Delhi are fear stricken. The people living in *Jhuggi Jhonpadi* cannot afford two meals a day and have only a piece of *tripal* or polythene over their heads in the name of roof. Many people come to Delhi from outside with the hope to earn two square meals a day or to make a living by selling goods on the pavements, but when their houses catch fire, they are given only Rs. 500 as compensation. If we cannot protect them, then at least provide them the basic amenities who drinking water and electric connections, so that they could at least feel that the Government is concerned about them. But whenever fire breaks out in a *Jhuggi Jhonpadi* cluster, nobody goes to them even to enquire about their well being. I am very sorry to note that whatever policies are framed by the administration and the facilities which should be provided to them under the ambit of those policies are not provided them. I feel that whatever has happened, there is some conspiracy behind it. The poor and the traders suffered losses, the people in Delhi are terror stricken and, as such, I expect from the Government and the police

that they would take certain steps which could restore the Shattered confidence of the people in Delhi and they may not have the feeling that Delhi is also becoming Punjab or Kashmir. The conspracies hatched in India at the instance of Pakistan should not compell the people is feel that we are not in a position to do anything and have totally failed in curbing all these activities.

SHRI MADAN LAL KHURANA (South Delhi): Mr. Chairman, Sir, before expressing my views on the subject I would like to say that we should concentrate our discussion on fire accidents in Delhi but the hon. Member who has just spoken before me has tried to prove that it is happening for the last five months and it has affected the law and order system in Delhi. I would like to say that now the amount of relief to be given to the affected slum dwellers is Rs. 500/- whereas it was only Rs. 250/- for the fire victims of that category six months ago. Thus, the amount of relief has been doubled now.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, even earlier there were several incidents of fire in Delhi. 37 people had lost their lives in the fire accidents at Siddhartha Hotel, Gopal Towers and Ansal Bhavan. What was the outcome of investigations conducted in this regard? Three years have passed since an enquiry committee was constituted and what action has been taken by the Government in respect of the shortcoming pointed out by the committee? You have stated that there are 80 buildings of that category. I would like to know as to why the Government has not taken any action in this date? It is very easy to say such things. You have just said that nobody visits the accident sites. 47 people had lost their lives in transistor bomb blasts in Delhi. None of the four Executive Councilors had visited any hospital or the site of accidents but this time when the incidents of fire occurred in Delhi, our hon. Minister of Home Affairs, the hon. Minister of Finance and other people also visited the site of fire accident.

17.04 hrs.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the chair*]

Therefore, I just want to suggest not to give it a political colour. I had already expressed my vies on this problem. Now I would like you to tell me as to under whose regime all these buildings had come up and who were holdings the reins of power in Delhi during the last ten years and how is it that all these buildings have spring up everywhere? I would like to submit that today there is nobody to check them Delhi. This is happening for the last many years. The only thing I would like to submit that the incidents of fire should not be politicised. These incidents may be classified into two broad categories. In certain buildings, it was not merely by accident but in certain other cases, there are definitely some elements of doubts. Therefore, as you, Shri Kumaramangalam and myself had stated here that there was no short circuit at Vigyan Bhavan or Shastri Bhavan. I was quite certain and all those officers who were present in the meeting at Vigyan Bhavan, had also come to this conclusion that there was no short circuit. You should have kept your finger crossed but at that time, the Government came out to make a statement that the fire was due to a short circuit. Today's, some news reports which have appeared in the press confirm all that what I had said at that time that there is no possibility of short circuit. So far as the Shastri Bhawan is concerned the fire broke out there at 7.00 a.m. At that time, the entire office was closed and all the switches were off. It is not only I who is saying this thing but the officers of the fire brigade, Delhi Police and all those officers who were present on the spot, have expressed similar views that it should be thoroughly investigated. But your good self ignoring the gravity of situation made a statement in the House which was prepared by the officers. It appears that you merely read out all that what such prepared by your officers. I would like to submit that there have basically two kinds of fire accidents in Delhi. Some of them have been the natural ones and such incidents have

[Sh. Madan Lal Khurana]

occurred now and earlier also these may be attributed to various reasons. As I know about the other kind of accidents, an element of doubt cannot be ruled out. I would like to mention the names of three places. It was reported that fire first broke out in H Block of Vigyan Bhavan where the meeting of important Senior Police Officers, Director Generals and Inspector Generals was being held. But the next day when I visited the Vigyan Bhavan, I saw that the main hall of Vigyan Bhavan had caved in while ordinarily such a thing is just not possible. I am sure that there was no short circuit and it has also been so reported in the yesterday's newspapers. The Government has constituted a three member committee to enquire into the incident of fire at the Vigyan Bhavan. In this regard, I would like to request you to extend the jurisdiction of this committee and conduct a judicial enquiry into this matter. A judge of the High Court or the Supreme Court may be appointed for this purpose. Besides, I would like to request to extend the jurisdiction of such enquiries to cover thereunder all the fire incidents which have occurred in Delhi at various places so that the real facts may be brought before the House and the people. The appointment of merely a three member committee is not an adequate measure, instead a full fledged commission should be constituted for an independent enquiry which should be fully empowered to enquire into all its aspects. Mr. deputy speaker, Sir, some incidents of fire have occurred in Delhi due to natural reasons and if precautionary measures had been taken well in advance, it could have been averted. It has been discussed earlier that 37 people had lost their lives in the fire accidents at Gopal Tower and Sidhartha Hotel. The previous Government had constituted the Khanna committee to enquire into these accidents. The committee had submitted its report to the Government which has been mentioned here just now. Today, there are several multi-storeyed buildings and skyscrapers in Delhi and the original builders of these buildings have now left this city after selling out these buildings. Any how,

they have obtained the safety certificates from the Governmental agencies whereas the safety measures have not been ensured in these buildings. Only God knows how they have succeeded in obtaining such certificates. It is for that reason that the occupants of these buildings do not care about anything. In fact the builders have left after collecting money. Now how can you control them? Earlier too, I had requested you that the fire brigade units of Delhi should be strengthened. In the event of a fire incident if you have to ask for water tankers from Uttar Pradesh or Haryana, how can you control the fire? The Government should have an idea of the requirement of water tankers for the population of Delhi which is about 80-90 lakhs. It has come to my notice that about 50 water tankers are out of order. If these had been repaired earlier and deployed near the slum dwellings or some other steps of that sort had been taken before hand, these incidents of fire could have been averted.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to say that the officers present there had informed me that the fire which had broken out at the Vigyan Bhavan and the Shastri Bhavan were certainly an act of sabotage. Three or four persons have been nabbed for the fire incident at Badli, the matter is still under investigation. A judicial enquiry should be conducted into this matter to find out all the factors which have been responsible for this incident because an enquiry at a lower level will not serve any purpose.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, my second submission is that the recommendations made in the Khanna Committee's Report, which had been received by the Government three years ago and is now gathering dust, should be considered and an action should be taken on it. The recommendations made therein have not attracted the attention of the Government. Therefore, what I mean to say is, these recommendations should be got implemented and precautionary measures should also be taken to check the fire accidents in such high rise buildings.

Mr. deputy Speaker, Sir, the fire broke

out in Sadar Bazar also. But the cases are not being settled with the required expediency. The actual reason for the delay is the bureaucratic ways of working. On one hand, the affected people have lost their property because of fire, on the other hand, these poor people would be completely ruined due to delay in the settlement of their cases. I would therefore, like to request the hon. Minister of Home Affairs to fix the date and time for the insurance companies by which all the cases of insurance claims are settled. If they fail to do so, the responsibility should be fixed. If a time bound programme is formulated in this regard, the victims will be able to get some relief. The corporation should also be instructed not to enforce their rules very strictly in the cases of those whose shops have been destroyed in the fire to enable them to build their shops again. This discussion should be divided into two parts and precautionary measures should be taken accordingly.

[English]

SHRI LOKNATH CHOUDHURY (Jagatsinghpur): Mr. Deputy Speaker Sir, in Delhi specially, from the 16th of last month till today, there have been many fire accidents and so many lives and property have been lost. There is no doubt that there were fire accidents in Delhi previously also. But the question today is that the prestigious Vigyan Bhawan was destroyed by fire for which a Committee was appointed. They have said that it was not due to short circuit. After this accident, there was fire in Nirman Bhawan and Shastri Bhawan. These buildings need special attention and importance. When the fire took place in Vigyan Bhawan, Directors of Police were sitting inside. There were reasons to doubt that there was some conspiracy or sabotage. After the Vigyan Bhawan fire, the Government declared about 147 or 157 buildings as unsafe. It is told that two Secretaries visited Shastri Bhawan. Though those buildings were declared unsafe, no precautionary measure were taken. This is the thing which we have to ponder over. When there was a suspicion of sabotage and the Government knew about that

such callousness on the part of the Administration not to take precautionary measures after knowing full well that sabotage could be there, shows how the Government is insensitive to these matters.

After the Jhugi fires, I want to point out one thing that earlier also jhugi fires were there, but this year these are much more, it has become a humbug. I agree with the hon. Member, Shri Khurana that not that jhugi fires were not there before, this year jhugi fires in their dimensions are much bigger. The question arises why this year this dimension is much bigger than before. In fact, the fires in Delhi have already scared the people throughout the country that the Central Government is unable to control the fires. The people are suspecting sabotage and they are feeling unsafe I would urge upon the Government and it has become necessary on the part of the Government, and it is the duty of the Government to immediately find out the cause of fires, specially in the Government buildings, and let the country know what is behind all this. If these things are not cleared, unnecessarily even political parties may be casting aspersions against each other.

I remember a story in history. When Hitler came to power, the whole German Parliament building was burnt. There are cases in the history, there are black forces in the history and those who utilized the confused situations to come to power. This should not be forgotten by the Government.

Secondly, I would say that in respect of jhugi fires, the Government knows about the conflicting interests among the slum dwellers themselves. There are rackets in respect of supply of electricity and such other civic amenities. Government is aware of that. In order to control fires, so many things are required. It is not only to hold a detailed enquiry and establish the causes of fire, but also to prevent jhugi and other fires in future. You know there are about 600-odd jhugi clusters in whole of Delhi. If there are some forces, whether supported by a politi-

[Sh Loknath Choudhury]

cal party or not, behind such activities, they would go on burning the bastis and what will happen, you can well imagine, This is not a small job. It is a matter of great concern and worry. Our administration should be responsive and quick to find out the causes of the fire and eliminate those causes which are responsible for these fires. Then, alone we would be able to create confidence in the masses.

Lastly, in order to control fires, the fire fighting measures are not adequate. The high-rise buildings as also the jhugi-jhonparis have now become a fact of life and they are there. The fire fighting organization in Delhi must be equipped with the latest fire fighting equipment and the funds required for the purpose should be made available to them. As it is, they are not able to purchase the equipment. As hon. Shri Khurana pointed out, many of the fire fighting equipment may be out of order. Sufficient funds should be given and at least the capital city of India should create confidence among the people of the country that not only we can control fires, but also the dark forces behind them and the saboteurs, if any, would be eliminated in our country and they would not be permitted to create dangerous conditions. With these words, I conclude and thank you for the opportunity afforded to me to participate.

[Translations]

KUMARI MAYAWATI (Bijnor): Mr. Deputy-Speaker Sir, since 14th April, fires have broken out at many places in Delhi which is the capital of India. These fires have broken out in Government buildings and slums. More than 15,000 jhuggis belonging to depressed people of the society have been destroyed and slum-dwellers numbering more than one lakh have become shelterless. Why do fires break out so frequently in slums? I had an opportunity of visiting the affected areas and talking to people whose dwellings had been destroyed in the fire. I was told that it was an accidental fire but was

set off deliberately. I would like to inform the House that the affected people do not belong to Delhi but have migrated here from other parts of the country in search of livelihood and to escape exploitation by feudalist forces. The number of such people in Delhi exceeds 20 lakhs at present and is increasing day by day. Certain vested interests in Delhi who favour feudalist forces and upper caste people cannot tolerate the growing number of such people in this city. So a conspiracy was hatched to set the huts on fire and force these people to return to their native places to be exploited by the feudalist forces once again. This matter should be given serious thought.

This was not an accidental fire, rather it was a case of arson. I want to throw some light on the responsibility which the National Front Government had to discharge, following this incident. These poor people became shelterless when their dwellings were destroyed in the fire. These people requested the Government to give them proper assistance towards resettlements but the Government did not pay heed to their requests. When a fire broke out in Gandhi Gali in Sadar Bazar on 16th April, the Government acted promptly and granted compensation to the affected people within two weeks. Delhi Administration has started an investigation with effect from 30th April through a Committee constituted in Room No. 56 of the Old Secretariat. The Government has made every effort to ensure that incidents like the one in Sadar Bazar do not recur only because it was the business community that was affected. When it comes to a fire in slums, where the population consists of weaker sections, the Government chooses to drag its feet. To protest against these double standards of the Government, the Bahujan Samaj Party, has commenced a 'dharma' outside Room No. 56 of the Old Secretariat. If the Government does not apprehend the culprits behind this case of arson, the slum-dwellers of Delhi will rise against the Government. Then it will become very difficult to control the situation. Under the leadership of the Bahujan Samaj Party thousands of slum-dwellers will march to the

it. Governor's residence, on 9th May to draw attention towards the Government's dual-policy in such matters. In the end I want to repeat that the fires breaking out in Delhi's slums are not accidental, but are cases of arson. People of upper castes hate to see people of weaker sections migrating to Delhi in search of livelihood and settling here in peace. so I request the Government to conduct an investigation into this matter and award sever punishment to the guilty. Appropriate compensation and assistance for resettlement should be given to the people belonging to the weaker sections affected in the incident.

With these words I thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak.

SHRI YUVRAJ (Katihar): Mr Deputy-Speaker Sir, the incidents of fire in Delhi are a matter of concern. Of particular importance is the fire in Vigyan Bhawan and the message given by the Khalistan Liberation Force to UNI that such incidents would continue if the Punjab crisis is not resolved. The Committee setup by the Director General, C.P.W.D. has submitted its Report. The Report says that the fire was not caused by a short-circuit. I would say that the fire was caused partly by sabotage and partly due to inefficiency on our part. Delhi is a city of 88-90 lakh people. There are 23 fire stations employing 1300 persons for the entire city. There is no fire station from Palam to Safdarjung and Mathura Road. We could have set up more fire stations and taken greater precautions, but we did not do any such thing it was mentioned that last year's budget was Rs. 4 crores but by 2001 we will have to spend Rs. 43 crores for this purpose. After the aircrash in which Shri Kumaramangalam died, an Expert Committee was set up. The Report submitted by this Committee recommended that 2-3 fire stations be set up at the landing site of aeroplanes. The recommendations of the committee were not implemented. Other facilities were provided but nothing was done regarding setting up of fire stations 58% of the fires which broke out last year were due to short-circuits. The electricity cables in buildings have to carry a

load greater than their capacity Short-circuits occur when inferior quality wires made of aluminium are fitted instead of copper wires which are of superior quality. Claims have been filed in the Supreme court as this is a case of mismanagement on D.E.S.U. part. Compensation should be given to rehabilitate the affected people. The Government's responsibility does not end with blaming the extremists of Punjab or saying that it is a case of sabotage. the fire fighting organisation has to be strengthened through setting up of more fire stations so that fire fighting services are easily available whenever the need arises.

The Vigyan Bhawan which caught fire is one of the best mansions not only in the country, but also in whole of Asia. The architect of this building was awarded Padmashree. It was constructed under his supervision.

I would like to tell you that special attention should be paid to fire fighting. Only because this incident took place in Delhi, we discussed this matter in house. But there are thousands of houses made of straw across the country and what is their condition? There are jhuggi clusters at about 4400-4500 places in the country. There is no proper arrangement of water in these jhuggi clusters. Even if fire tenders are sent to these places, they take a lot of time to reach there. As per international standards, fire tender should reach the site within 5 minutes, but in our country, making telephone call to fire service itself takes 5 minutes. There are no approach roads for tenders to reach these places. Moreover when these vehicles reach the site, people started running away from that place. This is the standard of our thinking and, therefore, we have to educate people to change their attitude. At the same time suitable measures should also be taken to strengthen this service.

I would like to congratulate the Fire Service Personnel for the yeomen service they rendered in this incident about which a statement was made in the House.

PROF. VIJAY KUMAR MALHOTRA (Delhi Sadar): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would not like to repeat the points that have already been made. I would like to make one or two points only.

The most important thing is that enquiry into the above incident which has since been ordered, will continue, but there is a great danger to the country in the next 3-4 months. Apart from the Pakistani elements, Kashmiri militants and pro-Khalistanis, there is a large section in the country which thinks in communal terms and is making preparations to engineer disturbances in the country. The danger is that the coming 3-4 months. In order to deal with such an eventuality, the Government should gear up its intelligence agency so that nefarious designs of these elements are foiled effectively. Our intelligence is in a bad shape. It is, therefore, essential to strengthen it.

Secondly, I would like to know as to how far we are prepared to meet the exigencies if all of a sudden fire breaks out places simultaneously? That day fire incidents took place at Sadar Bazar and at the Vigyan Bhawan at a time. Everyone was nervous and the situation had become very grave. Unfortunately, if the anti-social elements set fire at 4 places at a time, we are not prepared to face such an eventuality. It is very essential to make reparations to face such a situation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have had discussion on the fire fighting equipment. But the wiring system in Delhi is very outmoded and primitive. Due to that there are more chances of fire incidents taking place in Delhi. Besides purchasing fire fighting equipment, arrangements should also be made to electric wiring again in Delhi. Electric cables should be laid underground. One can notice that even a small fire in Delhi could spread throughout the city. As such, the entire wiring should be done once again. The Government should look into it.

At present about 15 lakh people live in jhuggies and there are 600 jhuggi clusters in

Delhi. All these clusters fall within the danger of fire. It is because these people take direct electric connection from the poles as electricity is not made available to them in an authorised manner. When the Government does not supply them electricity and the children of jhuggi dwellers living near a 5 Star hotel do not get light for their study purposes, it is quite but natural that they will take direct connections unauthorisedly and when these slums catch fire, they are reduced to ashes. The hon. Minister of State for Home Affairs should give an assurance in the House that these slum dwellers will be supplied electricity and they will no longer be required to take electricity connection unauthorisedly. Before people living in the jhuggis take electricity connection unauthorisedly for study purposes, viewing television and other such things, the Government should supply electricity to these people in a regular way and make full arrangements in this regard. Now let me take up the condition of our fire service personnel. Their condition is worse than that of bonded labourers. They are being put on duty round the clock and are not given any reliever during this period. While on duty, the danger to their lives looms large. There is a long standing demand of these personnel that they are not being paid proper salary. They have not so far been given proper scales of pay. They are not being provided proper amenities. Service conditions in fire service are very bad and they are worse than that of bonded labourers. These fire fighting personnel should be provided all amenities.

Thirdly, it has been rightly said that the compensation being paid to victims of jhuggi fire is too meagre and that also they do not receive fully. The victims of Sadar Bazar fire did not get any compensation though such a claim was made earlier. Even the insurance money has not been paid to them by the insurance company. The total insurance claim comes to Rs. 1 crore or 1.5 crores whereas the loss suffered could be between Rs. 50 crores and Rs. 100 crores. Now they cannot be paid any compensation. The Government may well ask a question as to what compensation should they be paid. At

least they should be granted loans on easy terms, but so far no such arrangements has been made. Adequate funds should be provided to jhuggi dwellers so that they could be rehabilitated. It is also very essential that the victims of Sadar Bazar fire should be given loans on easy terms. I would also like to say that suitable arrangements should be made to re-settle the jhuggi dwellers. While re-setting these people, it should be ensured that sufficient space is provided between two houses so that when one house catches fire other houses do not come within the range of fire very easily. Small fire tenders should be stationed at central places in these colonies so that they could be put to use at the time of need. I would like to request the Government to take suitable measures in view of possible dangers in the next 3-4 months.

SHRI GULAB CHAND KATARIA (Udaipur): A lot of discussion has taken place on jhuggis in this august House. I am of the view that the incidents of fire are the handiwork of some unsocial elements who make a living at the cost of jhuggi dwellers. A proposal to issue ration cards was approved in the House and the process of issuing ration cards was in progress. In the meantime, these elements developed an apprehension in their minds that once jhuggi dwellers get permanent ration cards, they will stake their claim on the plot of land and stop paying money to them. That is why they hatched a conspiracy and set the jhuggis a fire.

I would like to tell the hon. Minister that Delhi is the capital of the country and all of us reside here. If the Government cannot nab the culprits involved in the incident which occurred under the very nose of the administration and punish them, how can they give an assurance about the rest of the country. These incidents have caused losses to the extent of lakhs and crores of rupees. If such a tendency is allowed to develop, a crazy man can commit such an offence in a city or in a village at any time and reduce the entire locality to ashes.

At least, this mentality—the mentality which provided such a disaster—should be stopped. The fire that broke out in Shastri Bhavan is said to have started the previous night because the smoke was emitting from the building for quite some time. Shri R.C. Sharma, who went there, said in his statement that the fire did not break out suddenly, and the smoke was emitting from there for quite sometime. There is some conspiracy in the incident of fire. There is an apprehension that some persons wanted to destroy some documents. These three incidents are of different types.

Therefore, my humble request is that, merely saying that the architecture of this building was appropriate at the time when it was built but now we should reconsider keeping in view the present ends, would not suffice. We will have to think over the architecture and wood panelling of these multi-storied buildings once again. It should be stopped because it is prone to quick fire and we do not want such incidents to recur in future. Similarly, the hon. Minister should think about the decorative items, due to which fire spreads quickly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the suggestions made by the Members in this House or in Rajya Sabha should be considered seriously. The fire incidents in Sadar Bazar and other places in Delhi should be investigated thoroughly. The reason behind the fire and the loss due to fire, all these things should be investigated. It should not happen that after discussion in the House and the next day after publishing the matter in the newspapers the matter ends. It will not solve the problem. Actually, prestige of the Government is involved and therefore the reasons behind the fire incidents should be brought to light and the culprits punished. As has been stated five persons have been apprehended for the incidents of fire in jhuggi jhonparies in the capital but other details are not yet known. When all these things will come to light, then only the people would believe that the government is taking effective measures in this regard.

[Sh. Gulab Chand Kataria]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I want to make an humble request to the hon. Minister, through you, that if such incidents of fire are occurring in Delhi, the capital of our country, and if this trend spreads throughout the country, what will happen to the country. Keeping this thing in mind, stringent action should be taken by the Government in this direction.

SHRI M.S. PAL (Nainital): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, so many incidents of fire have taken place in Delhi, thousands of jhuggis, have burnt. Fire has broken out about seven times in the jhuggis, and the incident of fire at Motia Khan was the most tragic in which many children and women were burnt. Besides, we are very much grieved with the incidents of fire that broke out in Vigyan Bhawan, Norman Bhavan and Shastri Bhavan, which is the property of the nation.

Sir, in my opinion, there can be two reasons behind these incidents of fire. One can be some local reasons which might have caused fire and the other can be sabotage by same infiltration. In the first case, there can be a lapse on the part of an employee, faulty wiring or inadequate arrangement of fire fighting equipments in the buildings. This has been pointed out by the Press and some hon. Members have also drawn the attention of House to this aspect. It has been stated that two workers have been caught for being involved in these fire incidents. They can be mischievous elements.

The other reason behind these incidents of fire can be a foreign hand. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shrimati Bhutto has announced the creation of a Fund to fight with India and Rs. 10 crores, has been sanctioned for it. This has been reported in the newspapers also. The Government of Sindh has announced an amount of Rs. 6 crores for this Fund to start a chain of incidents in India.

Mr. deputy Speaker, Sir, I would not like to go into further detail and would like to

congratulate the Minister of State for Home Affairs, Shri Subodh Kant Sahay for having reached Shastri Bhavan immediately with his staff and officers as soon as he heard this news in the morning. It shows how alert the Government is and also indicate that the Government is functioning with good intentions.

I would request the Government that keeping this incident of fire in mind, a Commission should be set up in Delhi to go into the causes of incidents of fire in detail and all the facts should be brought to light so that the country could know causes of these fire incidents that have been taking place in a very systematic manner.

With these words, I thank the House for giving me time to speak.

17.45 hrs.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Review of National Policy on Education

[English]

THE MINISTER OF STATE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI CHAMANBHAI MEHTA): Even after 43 years of independence, a majority of our people continue to remain deprived of minimum needs of food, housing, clothing and education. It is also a matter of grave concern that our people comprise 50 per cent of the world's illiterate, and large sections of children have to go without acceptable level of primary education. Government accords the highest priority to education—both as a human right and as the means for bringing about a transformation towards a more humane and enlightened society. We need to make education an effective instrument for securing a status of equality for women, and persons belonging to the backward classes and minorities. Moreover, it is essential to give a work and employment orien-