

12.13 hrs.

STATEMENT RE: TRAGIC LOSS OF HUMAN AND ANIMAL LIFE AT BHOPAL AS A RESULT OF LEAKAGE OF POISONOUS GAS FROM STORAGE TANKS OF THE UNION CARBIDE FACTORY THERE

[English]

THE MINISTER OF CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS AND INDUSTRY AND COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL): It is with a deep sense of anguish that I rise to make this statement on the tragic accident that occurred in Bhopal on the night intervening 2nd and 3rd December, 1984 due to leakage of Methyl Isocyanate (MIC) gas from the factory of M/s. Union Carbide. Because of the wind direction, the gas drifted towards thickly populated areas of the city. Persons affected by the gas suffered eye irritation, cough, breathlessness, nausea and choking sensation. There was substantial loss of human and animal life. The State Government authorities took immediate action to mobilise transport and medical personnel. Medical teams were despatched for house to house visits to render, on the spot, medical first-aid and to take the affected to hospitals. Arrangements were made for free distribution of food packets and milk. On the very same day, the city water was analysed for toxicity and was declared to be safe. Scavenging teams were organised to remove the carcasses of dead animals and affected areas disinfected to prevent outbreak of epidemics. The Railway authorities took immediate action to control all incoming trains to Bhopal.

2. The Prime Minister and Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers, visited Bhopal on the 4th and 5th December respectively. Experts from various disciplines, including Medical, Technical & Environmental, were immediately

rushed to Bhopal. Dr. Varadarajan, Director General, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, and Secretary to the Government of India, was assigned by the Government of India to coordinate all scientific efforts. A Coordination Committee was set up in the Government of India to deal with all matters arising out of the accident.

3. It was, decided, after examining various alternatives, that the safest course for neutralising the balance MIC was to convert it into the end product, i.e. Carbaryl pesticide. Elaborate precautionary measures were taken for performing this task and detailed plans were drawn up by the concerned State & Central authorities, at a very high level. All plants and equipments were got tested for reliability and necessary modifications made. Three specially equipped helicopters and two spray planes were kept ready for spraying water in the atmosphere above the factory, should the need arise. A meteorological control room was established for checking atmospheric conditions. The entire factory area was sealed off. Control rooms were set up and a hot-line tele-communication between Delhi and Bhopal and wireless system were also established. A list of dos and don'ts was also prepared for advising the public.

4. The 'Operation Faith' for neutralising MIC commenced on the morning of 16th December, 1984 when the Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh was also present in the plant and was completed by 22nd December, 1984. The transfer of MIC from the tank to the Carbaryl plant was conducted only during the day time. There was a potential danger throughout. However, on account of the untiring efforts of our scientists and the guidance given by them, the operation proved a complete success.

5. On 3rd December itself, all medical personnel from Bhopal and neighbouring districts were mobilised and 700 doctors were actively engaged in medical operations; of them 200 were brought from outside Bhopal. Eminent specia-

[Shri Veerendra Patil]

lists, including anaesthetists and ophthalmologists as also medical stores and equipments such as oxygen cylinders were also sent from Delhi. Another 1,200 paramedical staff was engaged for treating patients in 21 hospitals and dispensaries and 12 additional temporary dispensaries, round the clock. About 1,70,000 persons, including 10,700 with serious ailments were treated in and outside Bhopal.

6. Immediately after the accident, the State Government announced ex-gratia relief, the scale of which was Rs. 10,000 per deceased person, Rs. 2,000 for seriously affected individuals and upto Rs. 1,000 for those sustaining minor injuries. The distribution started from 4th December. A total sum of Rs. 100.58 lakh has so far been disbursed. The State Government are distributing foodgrains at the rate of 12 kg. per family unit per month in affected areas. This facility has also been extended to families living in Jhuggi Jhonpar-pattis. An amount of Rs. 42 lakhs has been made available in cash and another approximately Rs. 55 lakhs through supply of edible oils and sugar to the State Government from Prime Minister's Relief Fund. The Government of India has released a ways and means advance of Rs. 5.00 crores to the State Government.

7. Air and plant foliage, including vegetables and fruits, were also got analysed and found to be free of any toxic contents. A multi-disciplinary team of the Department of Environment, comprising of Botanists, Zoologists, Entomologists, Soil Microbiologists and Limnologists, in coordination with state authorities, is continuing to closely monitor any possible further change in the flora and fauna, in phase.

12.17 hrs.

[SHRI SHARAD DIGHE *in the chair*]

8. To study the symptoms and to

determined the long term effects, three teams had been sent from Indian Council of Medical Research and a team of toxicologists from Ministry of Agriculture has also been deputed to determine the long term effects on human beings.

9. The number of dead persons as ascertained so far by State Government is about 1408. The final figures are being further verified by publishing lists of these persons; the State Government have also engaged the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, along with a few other institutions of social work, to do a house to house survey for assessing casualties and other details.

10. Immediately after the accident, the District Magistrate, Bhopal passed orders under Section 144 of Criminal Procedure Code to restrain the Union Carbide from carrying out further production operations. The State authorities registered a criminal case under the Indian Panel Code against the plant authorities. The investigation of this case, which was subsequently transferred to the CBI, is headed by an officer of the rank of IG and assisted by technical personnel from Government of India. The State Government have also set up a Commission of Enquiry headed by a Judge of the High Court and its terms of reference, *inter-alia*, cover investigation into the events and circumstances of the accident, the adequacy of steps taken by the factory authorities, the adequacy of safety measures and their implementation and recommendations in regard to measures for prevention of similar accidents in industries of this nature. The Inspectorate of Factories of the State has not renewed the factory licence of the factory beyond 31st December, 1984 and the factory is at present closed. The State authorities have also issued a notice under the Insecticides Act, 1968, to the Company for cancelling the manufacturing licence under the said Act.

11. The Government of India in consultation with the State Government is

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considering various options available for obtaining adequate compensation for the victims of the gas tragedy and recovery of expenses incurred by Government. For this purpose, a legal cell has been established in the Ministry of Law. A final decision in this regard is expected to be taken after the return of the Attorney General who has gone to USA to consult American lawyers.

12. The Ministry of Labour have advised all State administrations to undertake a thorough review of the existing rules and regulations under the Factories Act and its implementation, particularly with reference to industries using hazardous operations and processes including highly toxic substances.

13. Government have already decided to set up a special cell to make a detailed study of the practices in vogue in developed countries for dealing with hazardous substances and the institutional controls in force, to ensure safety for man and environment. Based on these studies, it will be possible to make a detailed review of the existing systems and practices to identify gaps in the prevailing legislative and institutional arrangements in our country and take suitable steps for streamlining or strengthening such arrangements.

14. Government is also considering the setting up of a National Scientific and Medical Committee for a coordinated study on the effects of toxic gas leakage on live systems and to give authoritative opinion about appropriate steps that need to be taken on the medical and scientific level.

15. I am sure all the members will join me in expressing sympathy of this House to those who have suffered from this tragedy. Immediately on assuming charge as Minister for Chemicals & Fertilizers, I visited Bhopal and had detailed discussions with the State Government officials. I would like to assure the House that Government is firmly resolved to take such steps as may

be necessary to avoid the recurrence of such accidents, and to ensure fair compensation for those who have been affected by the tragedy. In this immense task, I am sure that effective participation by the Members of this House, will be readily forthcoming.

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE (Panskura) : This is a tongue-in-the-cheek statement. That is why we had tabled an Adjournment Motion. I had been to Bhopal only day before yesterday and I saw what had happened. What he has said in the statement is wide of the mark..... (Interruption).

MR. CHAIRMAN : You cannot put any question after the statement. I am not going to allow any question now.

12.22 hrs.

STATEMENT *re* : PAYMENT OF INSTALMENT OF DEARNESS ALLOWANCE TO CENTRAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AND DEARNESS RELIEF TO PENSIONERS INCLUDING FAMILY PENSIONERS

[English]

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY) : According to the existing scheme payment of an instalment of Dearness Allowance to Central Government employees is taken up for consideration after every eight point increase in the 12-monthly average of the All India Average Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (base 1960-100). The last instalment of Dearness Allowance was sanctioned on 15.9.1984 with effect from 1.6.1984 with reference to the average index of 552 points. Since then, payment of two more instalments of Dearness Allowance with effect from 1.8.1984 and 1.11.1984 respectively have become due for consideration.