

12.21 hrs.

**CALLING ATTENTION TO
MATTER OF URGENT
PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

[English]

Accident in Singareni Collieries

SHRI G. BHOOPATHY (Peddapalli) : Sir, I call the attention of the Minister of Labour to the following matter of urgent public importance and request that he may make a statement thereon :

“Reported recent accident in Singareni Collieries caused by sudden influx of noxious gas containing carbon monoxide resulting in several deaths and affecting several others and the measures taken by the Government to prevent such mishaps”

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR (SHRI P.A. SANGMA) : A minina accident occurred at 8.20 P.M. on 27th March, 1986, during IInd Shift in Godavari Khani No. 9 Incline of the Singareni Collieries Company Limited, located at Ramagundam, Karim Nagar District, in the State of Andhra Pradesh. This accident was caused due to influx of noxious gases into the working panel No. 7 of No. 4 seam through fire seals of panel No. 8, from the same seam. Out of the persons working in the area, 12 persons were affected and rescued and out of which 6 died before reaching the Company's hospital. During the rescue operations, 8 officials (including the General Manager, the Manager and two Under Managers) were also affected by noxious gases and one mining Sardar died later on. Thus in all 7 persons got killed and 13 were affected. Of the latter, who received treatment in the hospital, 12 have been discharged and one person is under observation.

Immediate measures were taken for rescue of the affected persons working in the mine. All workers working in other parts of the mine were also immediately withdrawn.

Two Deputy Directors of Mines Safety, Hyderabad Region, reached the site of the accident on 28-3-1986. Subsequently the Director of Mines Safety, Hyderabad Region, and the Director General of Mines Safety also visited the accident site to assess the situation and to render appropriate advice. Director of Mines Safety, Hyderabad Region, is conducting the enquiry under the Mines Act, 1952.

According to the report received from the Management, an ex-gratia payment towards funeral expenses and part of compensation payable under the Workmen's Compensation Act has been disbursed to the families of the deceased.

The Mines Act 1952, rules and regulations framed thereunder contain provisions for the safety of the workers in the mines. Director General of Mines Safety and his officers enforce the statutory provisions in respect of mines. The Director General of Mines Safety has been directed to intensify inspections of mines and take other action under the Mines Act, including issue of improvement notices, prohibitory orders, launching of prosecutions, etc. to ensure that mines managements take appropriate preventative measures. Steps are also being taken to strengthen the inspecting machinery of the Directorate General of Mines Safety.

[Translation]

SHRI G. BHOOPATHY (Peddapalli) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, coal-mine workers have their long history. They work inside the mine from eight to ten hours and extract coal. Godavari mine supplies coal to NTPC and Fertilizer Corporation of India. The coal is transported to far off places and to the small-scale industries. The coal is extracted from the mines after hard work put in by the workers and thousands of people have been able to get employment because of coal. But no attention is being paid towards the welfare of coal-mine workers and to provide amenities for them.

The main problem is that of accommodation for them and education for their children. There is no facility of education

[Shri G. Bhoopathy]

for their children. The mine workers are living in jhuggies and there is neither any road nor any transport facility for them. I am not criticising the Central or the State Government, but these workers are engaged in these coal mines for the last fifty years and have been facing accident hazards. Obsolete safety measures of the Coal Ministry are still being adopted and have not yet been changed. I request the Minister to make suitable change in these measures. Workers are dying in accidents but nothing is being done for their safety. Accident took place on 27th March and I went there and came to know that carbon monoxide gas was leaking. When I contacted the officers for safety measures, they simply directed the workers to keep a piece of onion with them as preventive measure. No other measure was there to be adopted. I am not going in detail but the matter should be looked into. I request the hon. Minister to send experts to examine the situation. Not only there alone, but in all mines, safety measures should be taken to avoid accidents and consequent casualties. These experts should inspect the coal mines every month regularly and check up safety measures. I request the hon. Minister to inform us, at the time of his reply, as to what steps will be taken by the Government to ensure safety in coal mines.

SHRI DHARAM PAL SINGH MALIK (Sonapat) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the recent accident occurred on 27th March in which 7 persons were killed and 13 others affected. Such accidents are occurring frequently in collieries. We have the history of such accidents and their causes are very clear to us. The deficiency of oxygen in collieries is the main cause of influx of carbon monoxide. The deficiency of oxygen increases the pressure and carbon monoxide gas is formed. The workers engaged there, start feeling suffocated and suffocation causes unconsciousness leading to death. Sometime, accident occurs due to electric short circuit or cigarette-bidi because carbon monoxide catches fire. Our Government should give it a thought. Such accidents should not be taken lightly. It should not happen that after

paying compensation and funeral expenses, the matter is closed. Therefore, the hon. Minister should give it a serious thought. I explained to you how accident occurs and what are its causes. I would like to ask the hon. Minister what steps are being taken in this regard by the Government? I would also like to suggest certain measures to prevent accidents. Firstly, I would like to know whether oxygen cylinders are kept in collieries or not? If not, such arrangement should be made and to make-up the oxygen deficiency, oxygen cylinders should be blasted after a specific interval in the mines so that the quantity of carbon monoxide may not increase. Secondly, I would like to suggest that Fire extinguishers should be installed inside the mines and operators should also be appointed to operate them. Danger-signals should be fixed there to alert the workers about gas leak. The hon. Minister should kindly consider this matter seriously.

These were my suggestions. Now I would like to ask some questions from the Minister. Firstly, I would like to know whether any suit has been filed against Singareni Collieries Company Limited or not because nothing is said about it in the hon. Minister's statement. If yes, under which section and has anyone been arrested or not?

As mentioned by the hon. Minister that some senior officers went there for on-the-spot inquiry, I would like to ask what are the findings of the preliminary inquiry? Has anyone *prima facie* guilty or not?

I would like to ask whether all the workers of these collieries are insured or not? If yes, I suggest that they should have heavy insurance so that insurance company may compensate them properly in case of such accidents.

As mentioned by the hon. Minister that compensation has been paid, I would like to ask as to how much and at what rate Government has paid the compensation? For future, how much compensation is being considered by the Central or the State Governments for the injured and the killed persons.

I would also like to ask whether latest safety measures were available there at the time of accident or not? If yes, whether they were used or not? Whether danger-signals of carbon monoxide were fixed there or not?

I would also like to ask whether Government will consider to debar the management if found guilty.

12.34 hrs.

[Shri Sharad Dighe *In the Chair*]

I would also like to ask whether Government would consider the need to provide job to one family member of each deceased on compassionate ground to support the kith and kins of the deceased or not?

I would also like to know whether Government realises the shortcomings in the present Mining Act and whether Government proposes to amend it to make it foolproof and thus to prevent accidents in future?

Many accidents have occurred in Andhra Pradesh and State Government is not discharging its responsibility in this regard. So I would like to ask whether some directives have been issued to the State Government to take action in this regard?

I would request the hon. Minister to touch all these points while replying to the debate.

SHRI C. JANGA REDDY (Hanamkonda): Mr. Chairman, Sir this accident occurred on the 27th March. Just now my friend stated in his speech that these type of accidents were common there, but I want to tell him it is not like that. This is the second accident since 1947. It is not fair to blame the Government without going into the depth of the matter.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I reached the site of the accident on 29th and went around it. The management seems to be at fault for which action should be taken. The seam no. 9, where this accident took place, has seven panels. Somebody calls them panels,

some call them districts. It does not make much difference. To prevent gas leakage, panel 1 to 6 were sealed after extracting coal from them. Walls were constructed and fireproof seal applied to these panels. On the 13th March, after exhausting coal in panel no. 7, they put fireproof seal properly there in order to start extracting of coal from panel no. 8. Due to that on 30th September 1985, an air blast took place at the floor of that panel, and the earth sank down by 100 feet inside, even the people could be seen working inside from the surface. This seam is 30 metres deep. When it caved in, it also damaged the road. There were cracks on the floor in an area of 200 square feet. These cracks let the oxygen enter inside the panel for four months. The carbon mono-oxide formed in the panel no. 7 on which fire seal was put on 13th March, came out due to the pressure of oxygen from these cracks. The residents of nearby village Vakilpalli vomitted after inhaling this air and also had pain in their eyes. Then on the 17th March, the residents went to the management and informed them about this and also demanded some remedial measures. The management brought bulldozers from the other site on the 17th March and used them to fill cracks with earth. The bulldozers worked for 3 days, and after a gap of 3 days they worked again, due to which the air which had entered inside was converted into carbon mono-oxide. It was sealed from inside on the 13th March and from the surface on the 17th. Due to this reason the carbon monoxide which was formed from coal in three months changed into carbon dioxide after mixing with oxygen coming from the surface. The leakage started from panel no. 7 which was sealed on 13th and 17th March from inside and the top respectively. Four days prior to this accident, the workers had complained to the management that tears were emanating from their eyes and that there was pungent smell. The management replied that there was no cause to worry and that everything was all right. The management apprised them that they had installed three pipes—one for water, the other for air and also a third one. They said that they had tested the air and that was not found contaminated. The people were complaining of pain in eyes and their inability to work. The manage-

[Shri C. Janga Reddy] ment gave them onions and assured that those onions would absorb the carbon monoxide. The management made them work for another four days although the pungent smell had been coming for the last four days. This happened on 27th, and on 30th the accident occurred due to air-close and cracks in the surface. The panel was sealed on the 13th and the carbon monoxide started coming out on 17th. The residents of Vakilpalli felt it and told the management. Only then the management sealed it. The cause of this accident is the cracks in the walls and the negligence on the part of the management. The management is totally responsible for it. I want to ask you whether the panel wherefrom the coal was being extracted, was supplied oxygen cylinders or not. If not, then what were the reasons for it. When the management was apprised of the pungent smell in advance, why was it not examined despite the existence of laboratory there. If the air was clean, then why did this accident take place; what were the reasons for it.....(Interruptions) I also want to ask why the self-rescue equipment was not used. I want to ask the hon. Minister why the seventh dead body was brought out after 24 hours. I have also come to know that in the whole country only Bihar has a rescue station at Dhanbad. It was in Vallampalli but it was not operative in the absence of equipment. Why do you not make such station at Singareni, which is also a large colliery. The pungent smell had been coming for four days. I would like to know what report had been given by the Safety Officer. If the report did not find anything untoward, then what are the causes of this accident. I want that the Safety Officer should be that of the Central Government and never from the management. The management's Safety Officer can never give report against them. He can also change the report. The workers lodged a complaint but it was not registered. When we checked the register, they said that there was no complaint. When we went to the hospital, the workers told us that they already had informed the management but management did not take any action. I want to know from the hon. Minister what objections does he have in deputing Safety Officers from the Central

Government in every mine. If the Safety Officer is from the management side then he can conceal the facts. What steps are you taking for appointing Safety Officer from the Central Government. (Interruptions). The workers from other site came for the rescue of the affected workers. They are Mallaya and Prabhakar Reddy. Prabhakar Reddy thought that the seventh person might be alive and, therefore, he went inside to rescue him. He works at the other site. As they took a great risk, you should consider the welfare of their family also. They rescued three persons at the risk of their own lives. What reward are you going to present them for their bravery. These are the people who risked their lives, saved other workers and are now admitted in hospital. What are you going to do for them and their families. I also want to ask you what steps are you going to take against this type of accident.

N.T.P.C. and F.C.I. are also operating there within an area of one sq. k.m. Due to this the air is being polluted and the water of Godavari is also getting polluted. The people are facing difficulty there. If you go there you will not be able to see the sun from 5 to 10 in the morning. The coal which is being supplied to the workers takes 3 to 4 hours to burn. Therefore, you may supply them coke instead of coal or they may be supplied gas. It may save there time and also prevent air pollution. Therefore, in order to maintain their health and to prevent air pollution, the workers must be supplied coke or gas connection instead of coal. The workers are the wealth of the country and the coal is the gold of the country. Therefore, we must pay due attention towards both. I would like the hon. Minister to give specific answers to my questions.

[English]

SHRI P.A. SANGMA : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am grateful to the Members of Parliament who have, in the course of putting their searching questions, have also given very valuable suggestions for the future action. Mr. Bhoopathy has mentioned that there was a threat earlier, a threat was noticed in this particular panel. This was brought to the notice of the Management. This is a fact. It was because the

threat was noticed and it was brought to the notice of the Management the panel No. 8 where the accident had occurred was abandoned. That was in March, 1986, just a month back. They were sealed. Fire seals were put. People working there were shifted to some other panel. So, the accident occurred in Panel No. 8 which was abandoned. The gas leaked and it affected another panel No. 7 where the accident did not take place. The sufferings has occurred because the accident has taken place in one panel and it has affected another panel. This is the correct situation.

Another question arose whether there were enough safety precautions and safety measures available in the mines. I would not like to claim that enough safety measures are available. I don't know what is enough safety measure and what is not. So I will not be right in claiming that. But I must say that some arrangements existed and perhaps the Management thought they were adequate. But accidents are accidents. Sometimes even with adequate protective measures and preventive measures accidents take place. Accidents cannot be avoided. I am told that safety measures were available in the mines like Sensitive Gas Detectors. These Sensitive Gas Detectors were being used and I am told also that every one hour or so, the gas was being checked. And safety lamps which the hon. Member has referred to were also available and I will not go into lot of things. Active rescue trained persons with apparatus are also kept near the places.

SHRI C. JANGA REDDY : But equipment is not there.

SHRI P.A. SANGMA : As far as equipments are concerned, the hon. Member has asked as to whether sophisticated equipments are available in our mines. I am told that in many places sophisticated equipments are not available, the reason being that these sophisticated equipments are not manufactured in our country and these equipments have to be imported.

Now, the Coal India has constituted a Committee and these Singareni Collieries

have also requested that their colliery also should be included in it in order to study the requirements of those safety equipments necessary in all the coalfields of India and how much risk would be caused and how much would it cost. Because it is not available within the country we have to get it imported. So, all these exercises are going on and are being done by the Coal India.

As far as the occurrence of the accident of this type is concerned, in this particular mine, in the last five years that I had the figure, only one accident occurred in 1985 where one person was killed, and in the last five years this is the second accident that has taken place. But if we take Singareni colliery as a whole, of course, the figure is different—I am talking about this particular thing, but if we look at the figures of accidents that are taking place in mines in our country and if we compare them with the figures of accidents taking place in other parts of the world, well the figures are comparable, but that does not mean that we are satisfied with them. We must prevent accidents and we should go to the extent of not having any accident at all.

To just give you a comparative statement, the death rate per thousand persons in Indian mines in the year 1984 is 0.32, in Belgium it is 0.97, in Czechoslovakia it is 0.40, in Japan it is 3.87, in USA it is 0.63, and in West Germany it is 0.40. That is the overall picture all over the country and we, in our country, have been able to contain it. At least the number of deaths due to accidents is not going up. It has been contained for the last many years, but I think there is certainly a need to make serious effort to check and to prevent those accidents that take place in our country.

A number of steps have been suggested for this in my Statement itself, I have said that the inspections should be intensified and more prohibitory orders should be issued and prosecutions should be launched. All these actions under the Mines Act have been taken and I directed that they should be intensified. Besides this, I

[Shri P.A. Sangma]

think what Mr. Reddy has suggested is a very correct point. Mr. Reddy has said that we should go in more for rescue stations and rescue rooms in the mines. I do agree with the suggestion of Mr. Reddy and I do feel the necessity of going in for more rescue stations and rescue rooms. In fact a high powered committee has been constituted by the Government to make an assessment of how many rescue stations and rescue rooms should be set up and our intention is that rescue stations should be available at least within a kilometre's range. This is the intention of the Government of India and we are working towards that.

As far as this particular mine is concerned, we have a plan or scheme which we call Survey of Accident prone Mines and Identification of Corrective Measures. This scheme was actually formulated for Dhanbad coal mines, but the Government of India has decided that this scheme should also be extended to Singareni Collieries. We are going to do this also in Singareni.

Then there was a question whether some people have been prosecuted, or no person has been prosecuted at all. We have been launching prosecutions. As far as Singareni colliery is concerned, in the last five years...*(Interruptions.)* You are asking about now, In the last 5 years, we have launched prosecution in 8 cases. As far as the present incident is concerned, I have stated that the Director of Mines has been asked to go into it. He is investigating the matter. What further steps can be taken would be thought of only when we receive report from the Director of Mines. He is at the moment going into all this.

One last point has been made about the compensation paid to them. Those who have died, funeral expenses of Rs. 500/- each were paid and another interim compensation of Rs. 10,000 for deceased person has been paid. This will be part of the entire compensation that their heirs will be entitled to under the Compensation Act. This is what has been done.

But I want to place on record my appreciation about the officers who have been on the site. As I have stated in my statement, out of 12 persons who had been affected, 6 people have died and others have been affected. 6 persons were the people who were working there. The 7th person who died was a person who had gone to rescue them. So, the rescue operation immediately started. The 8 persons who had been affected include the general manager, the manager and two under-managers. They have gone into such a risk of rescuing people that they themselves were affected. So, I would place my deep appreciation for the prompt action taken by them.

[Translation]

SHRI C. JANGA REDDY : My main question is that on 30th September, 1985.....

[English]

SHRI P.A. SANGMA : I am replying on behalf of your Government,

SHRI C. JANGA REDDY : You are my Government. He is not my Government. In fact, all are our Governments.

[Translation]

Why only our Government? Anyone who commits a blunder, should be punished.

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN : No second chance is given for asking questions now.

[Translation]

SHRI C. JANGA REDDY : I did not get an answer to my main question. On 30th September, 1985, the "bauli" slipped from the upper surface owing to which oxygen went in. What was the cause of its collapsing? The workers had informed the management four days earlier that pungent smell was coming from that spot

and also issued a notice in that respect. Even then they were provided with onions and sent back to work forcibly. What have you to say about this matter ?

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN : Have you anything to say ?

SHRI P.A. SANGMA : About the real cause of accident, I would not be able to say now. Until and unless we get the investigation report which is going on, and the report is available, I would not be able to say definitely what was the cause.

SHRI C. JANGA REDDY : There should be enquiry. You send your inspectors to that place.

13.00 hrs.

STATEMENT RE : FURTHER CONCESSIONS AND EXEMPTIONS IN EXCISE AND CUSTOMS DUTIES

[English]

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI VISHWANATH PRATAP SINGH) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response to post-Budget discussions I wish to announce further concessions and exemptions in Excise and Customs duties which will help industry generally and small scale sector in particular.

Representations of body builders in the small scale sector have been considered. It is proposed to exclude the chassis value from computation of assessable value for charging the excise duty. It is also proposed to have a special SSI scheme to cover this industry which will be notified shortly. I propose to extend the exemption for all special purpose motor vehicles.

I also propose to restore the exemption in respect of components for certain

final products exempted from duty namely : power driven pumps primarily designed for handling water, water coolers and compressors used in water coolers, agricultural tractors of PTO HP not exceeding 25 and other exempted motor vehicles, namely, motor vehicles manufactured by ordnance factories and electrically operated vehicles ; kerosene stoves and pressure cookers.

In order to help the leather industry excise duty on wattle extract is being reduced from 15% advalorem to 10% advalorem. On electrical wires and cables duty is being reduced from 30% to 25% advalorem. I am also providing total exemption from excise duty in respect of a number of small items including gas mantles for kerosene pressure lanterns ; non electrical iron/brass presses, hurricane lanterns ; flax and ramie fibres ; cooper and brass utensils, and plastic cane used in furniture etc. Similarly, exemption is being provided in respect of sawan timber, wood wool and wood flour, railways and tramways wood sleepers and certain other articles of wood like frames for slates, brush handles, match splints, wood veneers for match boxes etc. and all forms of marble other than slabs and tiles.

I had provided for excise duty relief in case of certain identified areas where goods are manufactured without the aid of power. After considering the representations received I propose to extend this exemption to clothing accessories and certain made-up textile articles ; kajal and kumkum i galvanised iron buckets and certain other goods made without the aid of power.

In the new classification bulk drugs are classified as chemicals falling under chapter 28 or 29 which came under the Modvat scheme. It was not necessary to exempt the bulk drugs from duty as full Modvat was available under these chapters. It has been represented that these bulk drugs are being used in the production of a number of drugs and medicines which are fully exempted from duty and hence unable to benefit from Modvat. To remove this unintended anomaly I propose to exempt bulk drugs from excise duty.