

give them travel facilities and medical facilities. I think that this is the minimum courtesy that we can show to our freedom fighters.

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity.

16.05 hrs.

DISCUSSION UNDER RULE 193

Large scale loss of ammunition due to fire at Central Ordnance Depot, Jabalpur on 23rd March, 1988

[English]

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : We are now taking up Discussion under rule 193. Shri Purna Chandra Malik.

[Translation]

*SHRI PURNA CHANDRA MALIK (Durgapur) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, you know that a terrible explosion occurred at the Central Ordnance Depot, Jabalpur on the 23rd March last, at 4.10 P.M. After this incident, I alongwith a few other hon. members gave a calling attention notice to the hon. Speaker for discussing the subject in this House. This calling attention notice was admitted and listed for discussion on the 0th March last. But when it came up for discussion, some hon. members demanded that this may be converted into a discussion under rule 193. As the House was unanimous on this demand, the same was converted into a discussion rule 193. This important issue is now being discussed. After this incident, the hon. Minister of State for Defence, Shri Shivraj Patil, gave a statement in this House. In that statement he stated "The fire started outside magazine No. 20 where ammunition had been stacked for sorting prior to storage in the magazine." In that statement the hon. Minister treated the matter rather lightly and the seriousness and gravity of the

incident was not reflected therein. I want to know what was the type of ammunition, which was stacked therefore sorting purposes. Whether guns, explosives, rockets, bombs etc. can be stacked at one place. It appears from the statement that all these were stacked together for sorting in the open fields without any shot or covering. Sir, through you, I want to know from the hon. Minister how long were those kept stacked there? Moreover, Sir, the 'Indian Express' dated 26.3.88 has published a news item on this incident which says, "It began when shells manufactured at the ordnance factory exploded while being offloaded at the railway station platform near the COD magazines. Now, Sir, there is a wide variance in the news published in the Indian Express and various other newspapers and the statement made by the hon. Minister. The press reports say that fire was observed when the ammunition was being off-loaded at the railway platform near the magazines. But the hon. Minister said in his statement that the ammunition was stacked in the open ground for sorting before being stored in the magazines. Many other press reporters who witnessed these incidents at Jabalpur also confirmed that the fire started first at the railway platform when the ammunition was being off-loaded from the wagons. Which of these two versions is true? That of the hon. Minister or that of the press reports? Now my question is who were those persons who were engaged in the work of off-loading of the ammunition? We know Sir, that in such type of jobs civilian contractors from outside are normally engaged. We are all well acquainted with the character of the contractors. With a view to making bigger and biggest profits they employ unskilled labour at a cheap rate. Now we know that the contract labourers employed by the contractors are mostly used to loading and unloading of rice and wheat bags, cement bags etc. If the labourers handle explosives and ammunition in the same manner as they handle rice and wheat bags then what tragedy can occur? We can easily understand that. What will happen if explosives are also thrown down from the wagons in the same way as wheat and rice bags? Therefore I want to know from the hon.

*Translation of the speech originally delivered in Bengali.

[Shri Puran Chand Malik]

Minister whether contractors who engaged in this case or not. Who were the persons who were actually engaged in this off-loading work? Whether they were contractors labour or not. This is my question. It has been published in the Indian Express and the hon. Minister has also said in his statement that two persons were injured in this mishap. Now, Sir, 10,000 shells of 105 mm exploded in this incident and only two persons were injured in this devastating explosion. Is it believable? When 10,000 shells of 105 mm explode, what a dreadful impact will it have. My another question is whether all these shells that exploded were shells of the Bofors guns or not. Because it has been reported in the newspapers that "The controversial Bofors guns are also kept here." Hence our apprehension is that a deep conspiracy is involved in the whole episode. Were these shells of Indian manufacture or foreign? It has been stated in your statement that two persons were injured in this incident. One was a labourer and the other was a fireman. It has also been stated that the ammunition was stacked in the open field and there was no shed. Who detected the fire? It is said that the Commandant of the COD detected the fire. Then how were two persons, one labour and one fireman injured in the blast? Who were these labour and fireman? Were they employees of the defence establishment or were they employed from outside? I want to know this. Sir, such a dreadful blast occurred but there were no deaths. This is indeed fantastic. When there is a blast in a ammunition dump you know how dreadful the impact is. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, you know that on the 10th of this month i.e. the Sunday last, there was a terrible explosion at a ammunition depot at Faizabad in Islamabad in our neighbouring country. You know about its fearful effects. Today's newspapers have reported that 1000 people have been killed and 5000 persons have been injured in that blast. The blast caused devastation over an area of 15 sq. kms. Many houses have been blown away. But in this incident of our country where 10,000 shells of 105 mm exploded, only 2 persons were injured. Therefore, we feel that the hon. Minister is belittling the whole thing

and taking it lightly. We think that the reality is being concealed and the facts are being suppressed. It has been reported in the press that after this incident the whole city of Jabalpur was in total darkness throughout the night. Power lines were switched off. It has been reported in some papers, for example, the Week has reported that the 'Khalistan Commando Force' has claimed responsibility for this blast. It is not a matter of one day. For a long time various types of arms and ammunition have been supplied to them from there. They have even claimed that the rocket which they used in Punjab was also supplied to them from this very depot. If this is a doing of the terrorists, then it assumes very sinister proportions. These terrorists, supported by the Imperialist forces are trying to devastate the unity and integrity of our country. What do we find today? The extremists in Punjab, in Tripura the TNV, in Darjeeling the GNLFF all these secessionist forces are raising their heads. Our question is, where from are they being supplied with all these arms and ammunition. Are the real facts being suppressed from us by the army authorities? These things should be investigated in depth. Such explosions many occur due to another factor. If there is excessive heating in the magazines, then also such explosions may occur. If that is the cause of these explosions at Jabalpur, then what precautions and preventive measures were taken to prevent excessive heating. This is my question. This COD at Jabalpur was set up in 1940. The hon. Minister may not be aware that 4 years after that i.e. in 1944 a similar explosion occurred at Panagarh depot in Durgapur which is my constituency. In that blast at Panagarh in 1944 many army officers, many civilians and labourers were killed. Now my question is what lesson did the army officers derive from that experience? We know about the tragic case of gas leakage in Bhopal adjoining Jabalpur, some 4 or 5 years ago where the Union Carbide Company was involved. Did the army authorities learn any lesson from that incident also? The COD at Jabalpur is one of the biggest ammunition depots in the whole of Asia. The security of some 80 crores people of our country depends on this depot. Any mishap can occur at

such a place at any time what precautionary measures were taken by our army authorities to prevent them? From the facts available it is clear that two factors may be responsible for this incident. One may be case of internal sabotage and the other may be an act of the terrorists.

The hon. Minister has said in his statement that a court of Inquiry has been ordered to investigate this incident. But we find that a Brigadier of this very Department has been entrusted with the responsibility of the investigations. My question is whether the real facts will be unearthed if the investigation is carried out by a brigadier of the same department? Will the brigadier be able to take action against officers of equal rank or of higher rank of his department? Our experience is that if an officer of the same department is entrusted with work of investigation then he tries to give protection to the people of his department and the real facts are suppressed. Therefore my question is that before the investigations start, whether the officer who was in charge of the COD has been arrested or not. Whether he has been court martialled or not. My demand is that all such worthless and inefficient officers must be suspended forth with. The nation is spending crores and crores of rupees on them and the security of our country depend on them. Our country spends 25 to 30% of its budget on them but we, the members of Lok Sabha are kept in the dark about what is going on. We are told that what is going on in the Defence establishment are secret and cannot be disclosed. But we find that this is the area where there is maximum corruption, misappropriation and wasteful expenditure. Therefore my demand is that this so called 'court of inquiry' may be dispensed with immediately and a Parliamentary Investigating Committee consisting of members of Parliament or a Judicial Enquiry may be instituted to probe this incident. With this demand Sir, I conclude my speech

[Translation]

DR. G. S. RAJHANS (Jhanjharpur) :
Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the fire accident at Central Ordnance Depot, Jabalpur on

23rd March is a very horrible incident in itself, which should not be ignored lightly. It is true that the hon. Minister made a statement very next day, but the way the thing is being guessed by the newspapers and the extent of irresponsibility with which the situation is being narrated by trade union people, make the situation more awful.

It has appeared in the newspapers that the loss amounted to Rs. two thousand crores. The representative of trade union are claiming that the loss is more than that. It has also been reported that arms and ammunition stacked there bore no price-tags, therefore, it is difficult to estimate the exact amount of loss. Even if there were no price-tags, there is a Department of Defence production under Ministry of Defence, who must have known by now the amount of loss sustained. If its disclosure is not considered to be a confidential matter or against the interest of nation, the hon. Minister must tell the nation extent of loss caused by this fire. Along with this, kindly also state the reason for this fire. I know that you have set up a court of inquiry and it will take some time before its report is received but some preliminary inquiry must have been instituted about such a huge fire. It is just not possible that no inquiry has been held. I will again say that if it is not necessary to tell in national interest then please do not do so and if it is necessary, please do tell, because many things are being guessed in this connection. Rumours are fast spreading and these rumours are making harm. In almost all newspapers and magazines, a very painful thing has been alleged that a military personnel did not take civilians authorities into confidence. Fire occurred in the afternoon on 23 March but civil authorities were not informed till 2-3 A.M. on 24th March. How fearful is this incident? An M.L.A. of Jabalpur was approached by the people belonging to his constituency. They said that very fearful sounds were being heard and it seemed as if whole of Jabalpur and its adjoining area would be blown up. That M.L.A. went to see the D.M. and S.P. and all the three contacted the officer commanding of the depot over telephones. No News was received for full one hour. Then they all went to

[Dr. G.S. Rajhans]

commander Dutta. Mr. Dutta said that there was nothing to worry. Everything would be alright. Should we treat such a big incident like that? I insist that it should be fully investigated. According to a report in the newspapers, such a big fire occurred, fire took place at platform of magazine-20 and then it spreaded to magazine-20. Fire could not be controlled there, then it spreaded to magazine-19 and both the magazines were burnt to ashes, and completely destroyed... (Interruptions)... An :ss went to ask for horns but lost his cars. It is a serious matter. I did not want to say. People of your own trade union are spreading rumours. It is the question of the interest of the country. Do not spread rumours. Whatever is true must be told. It is the question of the country. According to a report in the newspapers only 6 fire tender were available in COD. When fire broke out authorities at C.O.D. sent S.O.S. to Jabalpur Municipality to sent fire tenders and it took a lot of time for fire tenders to reach whereby much loss had already occurred. Fire could have been checked and then there. When fire broke out at 20 magazine platform, it could have been extinguished there only but it was not extinguished by which fire spreaded to magazine-20 and then spreaded to magazine 19. It is necessary to mention one thing in this connection that one of the magazine at COD Jabalpur had caught a huge fire during 1974, and that magazine still exists in depleted position. It still remains in the same condition. At that time, some sort of inquiry must have been held and some preventive fire measures must have been suggested. May I know the findings of the inquiry held at that time, were any measures suggested to prevent fire, if so, why those measures were not implemented, if not, why not?

I want to say one thing more. God be thanked that only two persons were injured in the incident. A similar incident has occurred in Pakistan recently where it is said that about 1000 people were killed. Some such thing could have happened here also. It was a divine favour that not more people were killed while more people could have been killed here too. A report has appeared in the newspapers that long

grass have grown around C.O.D. for many years. Fire spreaded fast due to that long grass. Has C. O. D not enough funds to get the grass cut? How surprising it is that such a big ordnance depot has not the funds to cut down the grass around it.

I would like to say one thing more. The C. O. D. was established in Jabalpur during the second world war by the British Government. They must have built the depot after due consideration or otherwise. Circumstances have since changed. It is known to both friends and foes that arms and ammunition are stacked at Jabalpur. Do you not think that C.O.D. should be decentralised and depots should be set up at different places in the country. Will it not be called a parochial attitude that there exist 7 ordnance factories at Jabalpur, as I have read in newspapers, while there is not a single depot in Bihar? How will the hon. Minister justify it. (Interruptions). There should be some justification. If the people of Bihar do not agitate, this does not mean that there should be no ordnance factory in Bihar... (Interruptions) why should I not speak? People of your party are canarding rumours. I make an open allegation that men belonging to your party have briefed the B.B.C. and B.B.C. propogated it and canarded rumour. I do agree that this is not a proper occasion to raise issued about Bihar. I will speak about this at some other occasion but I must say that C.O.D. should be decentralised. Arms and ammunition should not be stacked at one place.

I would also like to know that complete news was not broadcasted by Radio or T.V in our country but who was that 'Vibhishan' who gave the news to B.B.C that a very big fire had broken out in C.O.D. in which rockets and missiles received from USSR got burnt and due which, we would be paralised for many years with regards to arms and ammunition. It is a very serious matter. When you are holding an inquiry, this also should be enquired into.

If you feel it appropriate, please do tell if we have really suffered such a huge loss that we will not be able to make up the loss of arms and ammunition destroyed in the fire for many years to come. If the national interests so permit, please

tell us this information, if not, you need not tell us.

In the end, I will say one thing more. Fire which broke out in the C.O.D. is a very serious incident. Why did the fire break out, somebody has referred the Indian Express in this connection. I have also read this news item in the Indian Express. I doubt that fire broke out due to unloading or loading. I also doubt that the fire may have broken out due to some other reason. I feel that it broke out due to negligence. When such a loss has occurred due to this fire, what steps are being taken by the Government to avoid recurrence in future? Will Government assure the country that such incidents will never occur in C.O.D. in future? I have also heard that how people of Jabalpur were terrorised at that night and the defence personnel did not co-operated with them. In order to check the recurrence of such incidence in future, hon. Minister may throw some light about the steps to be taken.

[English]

SHRI ANIL BASU (Arambagh) : Sir, the matter which we are discussing here today is a very important matter not only because a large quantity of ammunition exploded at COD Jabalpur on 23rd March, 1988 but also because of the fact that this question relates to the Defence preparedness of our country. I will be very brief and specific and I hope the hon. Minister while replying to the debate will not avoid replying to the question raised by the hon. Members on the plea that an inquiry committee has been set-up to go into the matter.

In response to the Calling Attention Motion which was later converted to discussion under Rule 193 in the statement circulated by the hon. Minister at that time he stated that fire started outside Magazine No. 20 where ammunition had been stacked for sorting prior to storage in the Magazine. Now the question is that why it is necessary to stack the ammunition outside the Magazine and why it is necessary to sorting out the ammunition outside the Magazine without caring

that some mishap may occur if ammunition is stored outside the Magazine. After offloading, why is it necessary to stack the ammunition outside? The reason stated is that it is for sorting of the ammunition. The sorting of the ammunition could be undertaken within the magazine itself. Then, why it is necessary to stack it for sorting outside the magazine?

In para 3 of the statement in response to the calling attention. The Minister stated :

"...However, because of the intensity of splinter effect, ammunition stacked outside Magazine 20 could not be removed."

That means, the ammunition which were stacked outside magazine 20 could not be removed and they exploded.

In para 5, the Minister stated that :

"Magazine 19 itself was also receiving continuous impacts from the splinters from the fires in and around magazine 20 and magazine 19."

Earlier, he stated that the ammunition were stacked in front of magazine 20 and that stacked ammunition were fired and started explosions. Now in para 5, he stated that the splinters from stacked ammunition outside magazine 20 started explosions and that also is the cause for explosions of the ammunition in magazine 19.

A question arises. How is it possible that splinters from ammunition stacked outside magazine 20 could pierce the wall of magazine 19? I think, the Minister will reply to this question also.

Sir, the COD at Jabalpur stores a huge number of ammunition, especially ammunition for our artillery and infantry. There are about 30 magazines there. It is reported that magazines 19 and 20 contained missiles whose cost is more than Rs. 1,000 crores. They were exploded in this explosion. I would like to

[Shri Anil Basu]

know whether it is a fact that in magazines 19 and 20, the missiles were stored or not.

Regarding loading and unloading of the ammunition, one of the important factors is, who are engaged for unloading of this ammunition? Whether they are trained Army personnel having knowledge of loading and unloading of ammunition or whether there are some other people or some workmen employed by the contractor? There are certain guidelines for handling the ammunition which are of highly explosive nature. There are certain strict measures which should be observed during loading and unloading of the ammunition. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to who are the personnel engaged in the loading and unloading operation at COD, Jabalpur, specifically on that very day on which the explosion took place. Whether there are any strict instructions from the concerned authorities to carry out such jobs keeping in view the high explosive nature of the ammunition. If so, please give the details of the strict measures observed for unloading and sticking of the highly explosive ammunition.

It has been reported in the Press all over the country that there may be some sabotage due to which the explosion took place. I would like to know whether any prima facie proof has been found involving any foreign agents who were responsible for this explosion. I would also like to know whether any workmen or Army personnel engaged there were responsible for this explosion. I would like to know whether a part of the ammunition has been smuggled away from the Jabalpur COD through the extremists or the terrorists or through other forces which are working inside the country detrimental to the interest of our country. In view of the importance of the incident, I would urge upon the Government, as already stated by my colleague, Mr Malik that an Inquiry Committee under a Brigadier is not sufficient keeping in view the seriousness of the incident. So, I will urge upon the Government to constitute a Committee of the Parliament to go into the details including the safety aspects which are

violated or which are likely to be violated for loading, unloading and storing of ammunitions at Jabalpur COD and other CODs inside our country. If the Government is not willing to constitute a Parliamentary Committee, it may consider to constitute a Judicial Committee to go into the details of the incident.

With these words, I conclude.

SHRI SOMNATH RATH (Aska): Mr. Deputy Speaker Sir, at the outset I congratulate the Minister having made a statement in the house at the earliest opportunity. We know the forces inside and outside the country are active enough to destabilise our country. Extremists and terrorists are being trained in neighbouring countries and are sent to our country with arms and ammunitions. They are causing great havoc, killings and looting. They are out to capture arms in any way, at any cost. Under these circumstances, the fire at the Central Ordnance Depot has created great suspicion in the minds of the public. It is bound to occur. The point is it should be investigated whether the fire which engulfed the Central Ordnance Depot is an accident or sabotage. By this time certainly investigation might have proceeded and may be the Minister, in the public interest and the interest of the State, may not disclose all that investigation but is it a fact that there is some clue that it is a sabotage? Is it merely an accident or a sabotage? Sir, it has come out in newspapers that an employee was working there and he has gone out since 18 months. He has not returned his gate pass which was with him. He was seen loitering that day near about that depot and was residing nearby the depot. Recently, he has taken the family somewhere. If it is a fact, if he is the prime suspect in this affair, taking the clue, the Minister may kindly take steps to see who are the persons responsible for this incident and what further steps are going to be taken. Of course, the Khalistani commandos and others have taken the responsibility but it is only for a political gimmick. It may be. So the Minister may speak only, if not the details, the broad aspects as to what is the cause of the fire. Is there any suspicion that there is sabotage? At this stage, I only want that the hon. Minister

will make a statement to clarify this matter.

SHRI V. SOBHANADREESWARA RAO (Vijayawada) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the speakers who have spoken already have made several points which I would not intend to repeat. But this incident is a very grave incident. It may be either purely accidental or it may be due to sabotage. The truth will come up only after an enquiry. But, in this context, some serious questions are before us.

If it is an accident, why should this happen, even for argument sake, when the ammunition has been subjected to fire on the platform of Magazine? But there should be some check. When explosion takes place within a Magazine, the temperature goes up. In such an eventuality, we are told that there will be sprinkler system which automatically functions which drenches water and extinguishes the fire. On March 23, when explosion took place in Magazine 20 as well as Magazine 19, why did the sprinkler system fail? What was the cause? Now, suppose, if this type of accident occurs again in some other Magazine either at Jabalpur or at some other place, this accident will make us to get up from our long sleep and find out about what is wrong. Why did the sprinkler system not work on that day? And what is the state of this sprinkler system in the Magazine? There are around 34 Magazine in Jabalpur which is the biggest in Asia, and also in several other places. I would like to know whether these sprinkler systems are functioning or not? If not, what is the defect? We should take immediate steps to see that they are put into proper action. Sometimes, due to some handiwork of some disgruntled employees, this type of incidents happen. Some time back, in some ordnance godown in U.P. some fire accident took place where thousands of pairs of shoes were gutted. But later, the enquiry revealed that it was the work of some interested persons and it was not the fact that such a huge quantity of shoes were damaged. Maybe, we don't know. It is the Hon. Minister who has to clarify this position about the theft or losing of the ammunition from this Depot. It may be due to some connivance of somebody. We don't

know. If such a thing is there, it may be the handiwork of some such persons also.

16.52 hrs.

[**SHRI SŌMNATH RATH** *in the chair*]

So, my submission to the Government is that apart from the Defence personnel there are a large number of people who are residing in that area. And as my friend, Dr. Rajhans told when the District Collector, the Superintendent of police and the local MLA approached the Commandant of the COD, he told that they need not worry at all and that this magazine 19 and 20 are perfectly safe. It is only at 3.00 A. M., after few hours, very high and alarming sounds came out of it. Now, the thing is that this particular incident which has taken place at Jabalpur should act as a warning for us. Such type of incidents do happen in the Army ammunition depots. The ordnance depots. So, there should be proper coordination between the top Army officers there and the Civilian officers. After all, for some lapse on the part of some people others should not lose their lives. It is of some comfort that only two people got injured in this grave incident whereas some hundreds and thousands of people died in Pakistan. It is a different matter. But what is the fate of the nearby civilians? So the Government should take necessary steps to intimate the Ordnance Depot Officers that in such eventualities they must coordinate with the local civilian officers like District Collector and the Superintendent of Police and take necessary steps to evacuate the civilians from the nearby areas. So, Sir, I request the Hon. Minister to remove the doubts and make it clear as to what has happened. The loss may vary from some crores of rupees to several thousand crore of rupees. Dr. Rajhans cannot simply say because some details were given by some trade union leaders. He should not say things as he likes. It is for the Government to come out with the fact as to whether there were really Russian made sophisticated rockets or RPG 7 or the artillery ammunition. Whatever it is, if it is not in the interest of the country, you may keep it for yourself but if it is not such a case, then you may take this House

[Shri V. Sobhanadreeswara Rao]

into confidence and come out with all the facts and assure this House that such type of incidents will not take place in future, and what happened in Jabalpur will not secure in future.

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY (Midnapur): Sir, the matter is very very serious. Since the entire country is facing danger from the secessionist forces and in such an eventuality when some terrorists commando groups of Sikh community or Sikh terrorists group claim that they have been responsible for this, the menace becomes all the more serious. The question is like this.

Whether there are certain safety rules in the matter of handling ammunition and arms regarding loading and unloading? Whether these rules have been violated or not?

As we know, Sir, in such cases in the name of pragmatism in the name of doing things quickly, in the name of doing things with cheap labour, in the name of doing things at a cheaper prices, most of the times the safety rules are given good byes at the cost of the lives of the commoner who do not belong to some elite section but who always belong to the common men section like the casual labourers, contract labourers, etc.

Here, I would like to know whether there are certain safety rules in the matter of handling arms ammunition or not? Whether they are violated or not? Further, I would like to say that perhaps the trade unions have done a good job by informing the people what they thought best. The Trade Unions have said that so many things have been lost. It is not proper to grudge here. You say, it is not so much, it is this much and that will be enough. But if our officials have failed to do their duty in coordinating with the civilian officials, at least our trade union people, the common people, the MLA, they did their duty. That particular MLA who had been to the District Magistrate and to the S.P. tried to do his duty towards the common people, while the

military authorities failed to do the same. They did not even think it necessary to do so. I feel that the military personnel have a certain bias against the civilians which is not proper. There should be some co-ordination in this matter. This is very serious.

17.00 hrs.

I am told that the hon. member from Jabalpur himself is an ex-military man, and a big officer. He says that the magazine of that place is the best and the biggest in India. The system there is such that if there is any extra heat that can be brought down by sprinkling of water. I do not know about it and I never thought that we have got such a thing in India. I am really proud that there is such a thing in India. But I do not know why it has failed.

We all know from our own experience as to what generally happens in a Department. The Department tries to save its reputation and it gives two reports. Internally, they do conduct a proper inquiry to see that the man responsible for the mistake is brought to book, but externally to save the department from the wrath of the common people or the Parliament and the Ministers, they concoct a separate report, may be a false report. These things also happen in a department. Otherwise, had there been no failure at any place, such an accident could not have taken place. There must have been some failure or failures at some place, because of which, the accident took place. And the apprehension in the minds of the members of Parliament from both the sides is that there may be an attempt to cover up the whole matter. In such a situation, I do not think it will be proper to have the inquiry done by a brigadier only. I again echo the sentiments of my other comrades and friends. I strongly feel that the inquiry must be conducted by a parliamentary committee and if that is not possible we should think of some other proper method. There are many military persons in this House, members of Parliament with an army background. They are sitting in the Congress benches also. I would suggest that such people along with some other people should form a committee to

to inquire into the matter. If that is not possible, there should be a judicial probe. With anything less than a judicial probe, you are not going to convince or win the confidence of this Parliament.

SHRI AJAY MUSHRAN (Jabalpur): Mr. Chairman Sir, first of all, I would like to express my thanks to the hon. Speaker for having converted the calling attention motion into a discussion under Rule 193 because on that calling attention, I would not have had an opportunity to speak.

Besides being the representative from Jabalpur, I have had the privilege of commanding that place for one year, where the accident has taken place. Within 48 hours of this explosion, I had the opportunity to visit the place also. On the 24th of March, the hon. Minister had given a statement in response to the query raised during the zero hour on that very day. And we did come to know certain details about the accident. Based on my previous knowledge and my visit to the place, I wish to bring certain details to the notice of all the hon. colleagues through you, Mr. Chairman.

Firstly, there are some misgivings in the mind of some of the colleagues. There is a misgiving that the labourers who are employed in such sensitive places are contractual labourers not used to handling of ammunition. But, the fact is the opposite. My experience has been that in spite of being technically qualified as an officer, I found that the labourers who work in that place, have more technical knowledge than an average officer who might have been just trained theoretically without any practical experience of handling ammunition. And if my knowledge is not wrong, no contractual labour has ever been used in handling of ammunition, so far as this depot is concerned.

Secondly, we often confuse a factory with a depot. Factories are under the Ministry of Defence. But this particular place where the accident took place is under the Army. This is an army unit. I am glad that Patilji went and investigated matters also in that place. What happened was that on 23rd March, the Commandant

accompanied by his two or three other officers who are connected with that place visited the magazine. The aim of the visit of the Commandant at 4 O'clock, when the Depot closes the work, was to see that everything was all right because the next day, I am told, that the T.V. team from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was coming to film the activities of the ammunition which was being done. So obviously, the magazine must have been cleaned up, i.e. I am talking of magazine number 20. There are—if I remember correctly—about 34-35 magazines in total. They make very ideal storage conditions so far as ammunition is concerned. They have in traverses. They have got overhead earth. They are all semi underground. There is fire-fighting arrangement as hon'ble Choubeyji has said. Automation of fire-fighting is existing as well as handling is done by careful and experienced labourers.

Moreover when the Commandant went there, just about as he was reaching magazine number 20, there was some fire noticed in one of the boxes on the top of the stacks which are kept on the railway platform. As we all know, Mr. Chairman, that these magazines are all rail-fed and between railway track and the magazine, there is a railway platform on which ammunition which is being received or ammunition which is being issued is kept. It is not stored, but it is kept, till it is to be loaded in the wagon, if it is to be issued or if it is to be taken inside the magazine, if it is to be received. Now, under those circumstances when the Commandant reached and saw these boxes on fire, magazine number 20 was opened. The boxes of ammunition once catch fire, the instructions are not to fight the ammunition fire, but to get away from it and try to save whatever ammunition you can save. Consequently, the ammunition which was also stacked near magazine number 21 was removed; to reach the other side i.e. magazine number 19—since magazines are serially numbered and the Commandant was standing between 20 and 21 the removal of the boxes should take place from magazine number 21 and onwards. To reach magazine number 19, he could not go through the magazine 20, since it was affected. So he had to take

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a longer route and go on the other side and they could only save the ammunition between magazine numbers 18, 17 and so on and so forth. In the meantime, magazine number 19 also got affected. Now at about 2.30 in the morning, there was no major explosions. It was only at about 2.30 that there was a very big explosion, noise, light and the whole town which was not very close to the place—the town is about 15 kms, it is a big town with about 10 lakhs population—all the windows of the houses shook and people experienced tremor. That created a little confusion and panic among the people and moreover among those people who are living close by. That was the time when the MLA and the Collector reacted—quite rightly—and got the village neighbouring the depot evacuated to a degree. Consequently the explosions kept on taking place till about 21st of March or 1st April, even. Those must be the explosions which are taking place in the ammunition which are buried under the debris of these magazine numbers 19 and 20. These magazines are built in a way that if there is an explosion, the valves collapse inside so that the ammunition does not fly about and create any casualties. I have visited the patients. There are about 12 people who were affected. Ten were allowed to go home because they have minor injuries. They were treated in the first aid system. They were allowed to go back home after that. Only two people were admitted in the hospital because they were hit by sharpnels. They had an injury in the thigh and the head. So, they had to be removed for observation and not for treatment. They are also well, and have been discharged. Why I am saying all this is

that the ideal storage conditions and the handling by experienced people, and the Commandant going at that time certainly to my mind, rules out any explosion because of careless handling or because of deteriorated ammunition, because either the ammunition must have been just received or the ammunition must be going. Otherwise, it has no business to be on the platform; and the ammunition which is going to be received or which is going to be issued, obviously, cannot be in a state of deteriorated storage.

Keeping all this in view, I possibly am right to say that it cannot be because of any careless handling, or because of any mis-management on the part of those people who are responsible for the safe custody of this ammunition.

But there is a background to this depot. In about November, there developed a situation where the gaps started occurring between the management and the labour. This kept on escalating and a stage was reached in February when the misunderstanding between the management and the labour was complete. The bone of contention was the stoppage of overtime. As you all know, the overtime has been stopped for the Ministry of Defence, not only in the depots, but even in the factories, and there has been a certain amount of opposition even in the factories. However, so far as this depot was concerned, this point was allowed to escalate by the management, and this situation was taken advantage of by the labour union—I will not name this labour union, but that labour union was not interested in the labour, but was interested in creating a situation which is not conducive to efficient working in any Defence installation.

working in any Defence installation.

These are the facts of this case. The loss must have been to the tune of Rs. 20 crores to Rs. 50 crores. The ammunition which was involved was of a heavy type, which cannot explode on its own unless somebody can explode it; unless the person who knows how to explode it does the mischief, it cannot be exploded, whether it is 105 ammunition of artillery or tank use, or it is 120 mm or 106 mm—these are the types of ammunition which was probably stored there.

I even told the villagers where this was situated—and you will be surprised to know that the civilian population, a couple of people, told me, mischievous people, that 10,000 rounds were found in a village—which had flown from the depot on to the village. I went, and I requested them to show me even one sharpnel. They could not. There was not even a single injury anywhere. There was not even a single fall-out, out of the depot but these are the rumours which enhanced the public chaos. However, that chaos lasted only for 2 or 3 days, thanks to newspapers like 'Indian Express' and all that—but that is beside the point.

The main point which I wish to make is that had the depot—not only the Commandant and his officers, but even the men, the men including civilians and combatants—not reacted in this exemplary manner, the damage, the loss, probably not only to property but to life also, would have been immense and would have been, as hon. Mr. Rao said, in thousands of crores. So we have saved more than what we have lost. But it is not the loss which I am as much worried about, as the reason why this has happened. Simply to

say that the box got fired, and we have ordered an enquiry, is not enough.

As I said, either the cause can be mishandling or the cause can be carelessness or deteriorated ammunition being kept there for days; or it is a case of accident of sabotage or mischief. I think that best person to say this is the hon. Minister. However, since a court of enquiry has been ordered which will be of a technical nature, I do not think they will be covering the aspect of this labour trouble, the union trouble.

What I wish to emphasize on the hon. Minister through this discussion is this : why was this atmosphere allowed to be created in a unit where sensitive things like ammunition are kept ?

If the over-time has to be stopped, why the labour leaders were not taken into confidence and why the situation was allowed to develop in which the entire blame was put on the commandant as it was the Commandant's order ? It was not the order of the Commandant. It was the order, as I am told by the union people, who are also as close to me as to the labour, of the Commandant. Whereas the fact is that it was the order of the Ministry.

Since we are talking of the union, I think a stage has come when we have to think about it. We should not only think in terms of votes, particularly I am appealing to the hon. members who belong to the same party as to the party to which these union people belong who created this situation. Is it only votes that we have bothered ? It is only that we have bothered as to who gets representation by these votes or we are also bothered about the safety of the war material, which is so much required for the country's defence. Why we cannot think in terms of putting some restrictions on the union activities

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and labour union activities in those units which are under the Chief of Army Staff to begin with as an experiment? If we want to have a union, then they should be taken into confidence; if we do not wish to have the union, then you must come out with an act to restrict the union activities in those army units at least to begin with, if not in the factories and other public sector undertakings which are producing war material for the units. I personally feel that the interest of the country is supreme and the interest of the labour or anybody else for that matter must come second and should come second.

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY (Midnapore): Do you want to say that workers do not live in this country?

SHRI AJAY MUSHRAN: I have the experience of both being an officer and being a labour leader now. Mr. Choubey, I have seen both sides of the coin; you have seen only one side of the coin. If you were made incharge of that depot, probably you would have made a mess of it.

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY: You make me that and it will be all right.

SHRI AJAY MUSHRAN: Now the time has come. Will the hon. Minister be kind enough to react to the situation?

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY: He wants to impose a ban on the union. There will be a serious trouble.

SHRI AJAY MUSHRAN: I do not want to ban that union. But there should be certain restrictions like you have put on the universities unions. There used to be a bigger headache than the labour union. But they have been set right, because now only the person who tops in the class is allowed to be the class representative; and the person who tops in his faculty is faculty representative and the union boy is one who tops & generally he; is considered as the most outstanding student. In the similar manner, would you like to do more thinking of that

nature? I do not hold brief against the labour or the labour union in Jabalpur. I hold both the management and the labour union equally responsible because, after all, the ammunition belongs to both of them equally and all of us equally. It is a serious thing. Now, today, you are holding only about 15 to 16,000 tonnes of ammunition in COD, Jabalpur. Whereas there are small fields ammunition depots where you are holding upto 20,000 tonnes of ammunition; they may be only made for about 5 to 6000 tonnes; and the ammunition is lying in much worse condition of storage than what they were lying in COD, Jabalpur and COD, Pulgoan. You have no money to build accommodation for that ammunition, leave aside Magazine; you have no even proper explosive store houses to keep that ammunition; it is all lying in the open—15 to 16, 20,000 tonnes of ammunition, and if there is a person who is allowed to do mischief in COD, Jabalpur where definitely the storage condition, the security condition and the control environment is much more strict or it can be increased. In probably fields you have got just double-wire fencing and that is about all; and here there is a depot where you have got roads; it has got walls; it has got electricity; it has got observation task, and in spite of that, there has been an explosion of this nature.

The technical enquiry which has been ordered by the authority is the demand of the procedural rules. But since keeping in view the political situation today, our defence environment in South East Asia, I think I will be within my right if I request the hon. Minister to order a CBI enquiry. If you cannot have an inquiry of the Members of Parliament, at least the hon. Minister can take a few Members to show them. And I must suggest, you take the Members who have nothing to do with the union activities like Choubeyji, you should take people who can really know and see the environment as to how these things should not happen. But so far as the inquiry is concerned, it should be by the highest authority, whether it is the CBI, or IB or judicial, you are a better judge. Only departmental inquiry will not do, will not help.

In the end, I only wish to say that the people who are involved and directly concerned with the establishment as well as the civilian authorities of the district deserve all congratulations for fighting the fire in a very exemplary manner as well as keeping the civilian population well informed, because by the time the people were told that everything was all right, the explosion had not taken place. It was only at about 2.30 or 3 when the big bang took place and both magazines were blown up. Even after that, the Collector had the good sense of organising people's evacuation taking them to a place of safety, deep inside the town. The hon. Chief Minister also visited that place and all arrangements were made for their safety. But what has been published in the papers is far from the truth. Both the civilian administration of the State Government and the Depot administration, have put in their mite and controlled the situation in a very exemplary manner.

I am really worried as to what is the cause of this and I at least can smell mischief and I am sure that whatever form or type of inquiry the hon. Minister may like to concede, is a necessity. Only a departmental inquiry will not do.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE PRODUCTION AND SUPPLIES IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL) : I would like first of all to thank the Members who have shown interest and given some suggestions. Hon. Mr. Mushran has given the information which is going to be useful to other Members also, as he had worked in that Depot, his information can be treated as first hand information in certain respects.

It is not necessary for me to recount as to how the accident took place. That was explained in the statement which was given before and that was explained to some extent by Mr. Mushran also.

There are certain points which have been raised by the hon. Members and I would like to respond to those points only.

One of the points which was raised

was whether the persons who were loading and unloading were employed by the contractor, whether they were the contract labour. The reply to this is, no. They were not contract labour, they were from the Defence.

The second most important point which is raised here is about the value of the ammunition which has been destroyed. For the information of the Members of this House, I would like to say that the primary estimate of the value of the ammunition destroyed is in the vicinity of Rs. 20 crores, and not Rs. 200 crores or Rs. 1,000 crores.

DR. G. S. RAJHANS (Jhanjharpur) : Rs. 2,000 crores. This is published in the newspapers.

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL : Yes. It is better to take the information in newspapers some times with a pinch of salt.

Then, some members complained that there was a communication gap between the military authorities and the civilian authorities. When it was found that the ammunition on the platform in front of Magazine No. 20 had exploded; and the ammunition in the Magazine also had begun exploding, the first duty and responsibility of the officers in the depot was to see that the fire was extinguished and it did not spread to other Magazines. There are about thirty Magazines over there. We all know that two Magazines were affected Magazine No. 20 and 19. On the platform in front of the Magazines, some ammunitions were stored. They were in open. When the ammunition in front of Magazine No. 20 exploded, the fire reached the ammunition which was stored in front of Magazine No. 19 also. Initially the Officers and the fire fighting agencies were trying to control the fire in front of the Magazine No. 20 and in the Magazine No. 20 also, from the Magazine No. 19. But when they found that the fire was spreading to Magazine No. 19 also, they withdrew and started controlling the fire from Magazine No. 18. Fortunately for us, the fire could be contained only to Magazines No. 20 and 19. Of course, the bushes, grass and trees, which are standing over there to control and to

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keep down the temperature caught fire and it was necessary to see that the fire in those areas outside the Magazines was also controlled. Those people who were working there were successful in controlling that also. They had worked throughout the night; they had to sprinkle water here there and everywhere around it to control the fire and they successfully could do that.

A question was asked, whether the sprinkler in the Magazines were working or not. Well, we do have sprinklers in certain Magazines and the sprinklers are expected to keep the temperature at a particular level. If the temperature rises beyond a particular level, the sprinklers are expected to work automatically and bring down the temperature. In this case, it would be difficult to say, whether the sprinklers were working or not, because sprinklers are not in tact now. They were exploded. The entire Magazines No. 20 and 19 have exploded and the devices which are available inside the house, cannot be easily reached now. You know, the explosion started on 23rd and went upto 31st night. Even today, there live ammunition lying here and there and very carefully the Magazines have to be approached. So, it would not be possible to form any opinion as to whether the sprinklers in Magazines No. 20 and 19 were working or not. We will come to know about it after the inquiry and after we examine some parts of the device which are available there.

The hon. Members wanted to know whether ammunition for 155mm gun was stored there. The answer is 'No'. The ammunition was not stored there.

Then, a question was asked, whether the rockets stored in Magazine No. 20 and No. 19 were destroyed. The RPG rockets or for that matter, any other kind of rocket missiles were not stored fortunately in Magazine No. 20 and No. 19. Of course, the rockets and missiles were stored in other Magazines. The fire fighting agency, the Army personnel, the Officers and others in the depot fought the fire very valiantly; they extinguished the fire and they did not allow the fire to

reach the other Magazines, where the rockets were stored. Fortunately for us, this major mishap was avoided.

Again, a question was asked, whether that is a procedure laid down for handling the ammunition over there for loading and unloading and things like that. Yes, there is a procedure which was followed, and Shri Mushran has rightly said that the workers who are working for a long time have become experts in handling the ammunition over there. And the procedure is followed. The procedure is being followed. We do not think that there was any lapse on the part of the workers who were handling the ammunition. But I would like to be very cautious and I would not like to give any clean chit to anybody at this point of time. The inquiry is on and only after the inquiry is completed we would be able to say whether any procedure was properly followed or not. Today as the information is available to us, we can say that generally the procedure is being followed and we can hope that the procedure was followed there also. But the final verdict on this point can be given only after the inquiry is completed.

SHRI AJAY MUSHRAN : This inquiry which has been ordered, cannot compel the civil witnesses to be examined.

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL : I am coming to that point a little later.

There are various suggestions made by the hon. Member over here. One of the suggestions is that let there be a parliamentary committee to inquire into this matter. Well, I do not know whether the parliamentary committee will have the wherewithal, the expertise needed to inquire into a matter of this kind. That is my first apprehension. Even if some of the hon. Members are having knowledge about these things, yet things have changed. They by themselves may not be able to look into so many things and it may not be necessary also to have a parliamentary committee to inquire into those things. This is after all a military matter.

As Mr. Mushran has rightly said, I did go there on 29th. But the matter is

being looked after by the Army and not by the Defence Ministry as such. Of course, Army is part and parcel of the Defence Ministry; we cannot distinguish. We did go there not in order to interfere but in order to see what has happened there and to be of some help to them. I do not know whether it will be useful to have the Members of Parliament looking into all those things when a sort of expertise will be required and when things have to be done in a particular manner. I am having a little apprehension in my mind and I think, it may not be useful to have a parliamentary probe as such into it. We can very well rely upon a court of inquiry.

A member has said that the officer who is heading the court of inquiry belongs to the same service. Brig. Puri is appointed and he does not belong to the Ordnance Corp but he belongs to the Signals. So it will be possible for him to look into all those things and give the report.

The second suggestion was that let there be a judicial probe also. I do not know whether a learned judge or a legal luminary will be able to understand all the complications involved in this matter and whether they will not again require some sort of expertise and all those things. To ask the judicial officers to go into all those things, maybe a little overburdening them and in that case also some sort of help from outside will be required.

A third suggestion came that let this be looked into by the CBI or some other investigative authority. I would like to say on this point that this matter has already been entrusted to some other investigative authority and they are looking into the matter which really does not come under the control of the military authority as such and which may have ramifications outside also. So the investigating agency is looking into all those things and they will certainly come to some conclusion. What is applicable to parliamentary committee or judicial probe may also, to some extent, apply to the investigative by other authority. They

also need some sort of help but some sort of help can be given. But I am sure that we can rely upon the court of inquiry. Even the biggest matters are referred to the court inquiry and they would be able to do that. After we get the Report, we will be able to find out what is the reason, and whether the inquiry has been properly done can also be clear from that.

One of the points which was raised is about the labour dispute. Well, it is a fact that for some time the management or the officers and the workers were not seeing eye to eye with each other. There was some dispute and the cause of this dispute was the payment of the systematic overtime allowance. The workers over there are paid overtime allowance when they work overtime but they were asking for systematic overtime as such. That means whether they work overtime or not, they should be given overtime allowance. Well, on this point, it was difficult for the officers and the Commandant also...

(Interruptions)

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY : Had they been getting this thing earlier ?

(Interruptions)

I am not asking him, Sir, I am asking the Minister. Have they been getting this thing earlier or there was a break in the old system for which the dispute arose ? *(Interruptions)*

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL : I have understood your question and I am going to reply. You know, the systematic overtime, as far as my information goes, was not given there. The systematic overtime is available to the workers in the Ordnance factory in that area. So, they were saying that if the systematic overtime is given to the workers in the Ordnance factory, it should be given to them also...

(Interruptions)

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY : That means this was a new demand.

SHRI AJAY MUSHRAN : They said that since the workers in the Ordnance factory are getting, they should also get. That is the bone of contention.

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL : That is exactly what I have said. I am informed and I can inform you that systematic overtime was not paid in this depot. The systematic overtime is paid in the Ordnance factories which are in the vicinity of that depot, and they were asking that "If this can be given to them, why this should not be giving to us?" This dispute could not be easily resolved. They had gone on strike, they were working to the rule, and the ammunition which was coming over there, which was delivered into the depot could not be sorted out in time and it could not be put into the packets all these days... (*Interruptions*).

SHRI AJAY MUSHRAN : That is why, Sir, I said that the CBI should inquire what were the circumstances which resulted in the worsening of good relations between the management and the workers because their so-called union leaders were exploiting and teaching them this logic.

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY : Why don't you exploit them? Go and teach your union there.

SHRI AJAY MUSHRAN : No, we do not exploit.

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY : We have seen your DTC strike, how you tackled DTC strike,

SHRI AJAY MUSHRAN : Instead of telling them why they are not getting overtime, you are telling them.... (*Interruptions*).

MR. CHAIRMAN (SHRI SOMNATH RATH) : Please take your seats.

SHRI SHIVRAJ PATIL : Sir, I am happy that Mr. Mushran is helping me a lot... (*Interruptions*).

I have already said that this matter is not only being inquired into by the court of inquiry, but this matter has been referred to other investigating agencies also, and they are looking into it... (*Interruptions*).

SHRI AJAY MUSHRAN : I wanted

to know as to who has been instigating the labourers to come to this situation.

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL : The point which you have made on the floor of the House cannot just go unnoticed.

Sir, one of the Members said that no casualties were there, and we should be happy that nobody was really injured over there. Only two persons were hospitalised and fortunately they have also been discharged. They are not in the hospital now. We are happy that nothing of a very serious nature, causing loss of life, has taken place over there. Of course, we have lost the ammunition, of course the value of the loss is also quite big, yet we have not lost the life, which is the silver lining of this black cloud. As far as the solution to problems of this nature which may arise in future is concerned, we have certainly taken note of what has happened in the country and outside the country and we would certainly try to examine this issue very very carefully and we will like to take certain steps which will help us to avoid the possibility of the recurrence of this nature at the places where the ammunition is stored and where the ammunition is dumped.

One more point which I would like to make is that somebody mentioned about 10,000 rounds of 105 mm. ammunitions were lost. Well, the number is quite big. Unfortunately, this has reduced the availability of ammunition to our army. But I can assure this House that it will be our duty to see that the preparedness is not affected and it is not affected and it is not going to be affected.

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY : What is the loss?

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL : I have already said that the loss is in the vicinity of Rs. 20 crore. But this is the preliminary estimate. Final thing can be given only after the enquiry. The loss is enormous. But no life is lost. That is a silver lining. Sir, I do not think that it is necessary for me to speak on this point any more.

SHRI AJAY MUSHRAN : What I wish to ask is whatever is going to be investigated by way of probable or definite case of this explosion how things are going to be safeguarded in future against such explosions is a different matter, but what I would like to know from the hon. Minister is that even today the labour situation in that depot is not conducive to smooth functioning? I would like you to please react and tell us what efforts have been made in the last one week and what efforts are going to be made in the 10 days to ensure that at least the depots start functioning in a smooth and satisfactory manner, because there is a strike going on, there is a work to rule being adopted by the labour and there is a fight in regard to 9 days' pay and all that.

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL : Sir, there was some difference of opinion between the officers and workers over there and they have gone on strike. There was work to rule method adopted by the workers and all those things were there. One of the workers was suspended and the negotiations took place between the Commandant and other officers there and works. They were told that the suspension will be withdrawn and I am told that they have come back to the work. As far as systematic over-time is concerned, this is a matter for which there are certain kinds of rules laid down and there is a certain kind of stand taken and I think it continues.

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY : They have all joined duty and everything is peaceful now there.

SHRI V. SOBHANADREESWARA RAO : Sir, about the magazines, we are told that they are taking all necessary precautions to meet the situation. Even when some explosions take place, the walls are very very strong and sometimes they are part of the hills or some structures will be there. And some 4 ft earth will be there on the top. Now, my point is, whatever may be the cause either accident or negligence or keeping the ammunition there for quite a long time in the scorching heat or sabotage, whatever it may be, the fact is, if I am not wrong, from your

Statement we are led to understand that very high level officers of the Depot were very near the place because some Information Department people were coming for taking some details. Now, my point is that when such a fire accident takes place, the opening portion of the magazine, that is the only door through which this ammunition can be taken in or taken out and the door could not be closed instantaneously, immediately after observing this fire accident. (*Interruptions*). Please hear me. If till now such arrangements are not there, with this experience should we not take all necessary steps.

MR. CHAIRMAN : The Minister has already replied.

SHRI V. SOBHANADREESWARA RAO : I am asking a clarification, Sir. Should not the Government take necessary steps to make necessary arrangements to close the shutters of the magazine to prevent such firing?

MR. CHAIRMAN : The matter is under inquiry.

SHRI V. SOBHANADREESWARA RAO : Not the cause, Sir. I am not asking about the cause. It has taken place.

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL : I have followed what you said. I know, when a fire of this nature takes place, it is very very hazardous to control it, very dangerous to control it, because the ammunition is there, it is exploding. If one piece of ammunition explodes, it causes the explosion in other cases around it also. So, the reaction is there, the temperature also rises, and it is very very difficult and one does not know in one direction the splinters and all those things are going to be there. If you have something in front of the magazine—now you are suggesting that there should be a mechanism for closing the door automatically.

SHRI V. SOBHANADREESWARA RAO : I mean, opposite, just near that.

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL : There are things which have to be examined by the experts and they have to do it. Sometimes being able to close the door automatically also causes some danger. So, there are aspects which have to be examined. This time the explosion took place outside. The explosion then went inside also. There was explosion inside the magazine also. These kinds of things can be better examined by the experts and they would be able to say what should be done. I don't think that at this point of time this aspect can be examined, and the Court of Inquiry is going to see what was the cause whether the facilities available there were enough or not and whether there were other reasons also. These things will be examined.

DR G. S. RAJHANS : Sir, I am told that once such an accident had taken place at COD in 1974. An inquiry was held at that time also. May I know the outcome of that inquiry, and have we learnt any lesson out of it ?... (*Interruptions*). If it is very confidential, well I won't like to ask. Have we learnt any lesson ? (*Interruptions*).

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL : Sir, I am told that the explosion had taken place in 1974. Whenever anything of this nature happens, the matter is carefully examined and whatever suggestions are given are generally implemented.

[*Translation*]

SHRI HARISH RAWAT (Almora) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would like to bring this in the notice of the Hon. Minister that on 3rd March, 1988 an agreement was reached between the two unions and the management and a clause was inserted in the agreement that for any incident occurred in the campus of C.O.D., union would not be held responsible. What was the justification of including this clause ? Was any clause like this included ? A man named Avtar Singh who earlier worked in C.O.D., went outside for a long time and then suddenly came and joined the duty, he has been missing since the date of occurrence of this incident. Would you kindly tell about his whereabouts ? Besides, there are many incident of theft in the C.O.D and a large number of ammunitions are smuggled outside, F.I.R.s in

many cases have also been lodged. What are the steps that have been taken to stop such thefts.

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL : So far as the question of Avtar Singh is concerned, this question was raised by another hon. Member also. He disappeared from C.O.D. but later on he returned there.

SHRI HARISH RAWAT : Not only he came before the incident but also disappeared afterwards.

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL : I have no such information. I will tell you after gathering more information. The third thing you said was about thefts...

SHRI NARAYAN CHOUBEY : Thefts were committed in the past. It is still being committed it will continue to be committed in future also.

SHRI SHIVRAJ V. PATIL : I don't know from where you have got the information about F.I.R. etc.

17.50 hrs.

DEMANDS FOR GRANTS, 1988-89—

Contd.

[*English*]

Ministry of Home Affairs—contd.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Now, the discussion under rule 193 is over. About 10 minutes we have got. Let us go back to the Discussion on the Demands for Grants relating to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

[*Translation*]

DR. G.S. RAJHANS (Jharkhand) : The Ministry of Home Affairs is the most important Ministry for this country. Sometimes ago, we made a discussion on Punjab and passed a Bill. I would like to submit one thing that naxalites are again raising their ugly heads in our country with renewed speed, be it in Bihar, Bengal, Madhya Pradesh or Andhra