

of Business in the Rajya Sabha, I am directed to return herewith the Food Corporations (Amendment) Bill, 1988, which was passed by the Lok Sabha at its sitting held on the 4th August, 1988, and transmitted to the Rajya Sabha for its recommendations and to state that the House has no recommendations to make to the Lok Sabha in regard to the said Bill."

12.03-1/2 hrs.

MATERNITY BENEFIT (AMENDMENT)  
BILL

[English]

As Passed by Rajya Sabha

SECRETARY GENERAL : Sir, I lay on the Table the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 1988, as passed by Rajya Sabha.

(Interruptions)

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY (Katwa) : Why don't you make a statement ? (Interruptions)

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (S. BUTA SINGH) : I don't know what they are asking. (Interruptions)

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA (Bankura) : He has to make a statement on the killing of the National Bird. (Interruptions)

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY : He is ready to make a statement. (Interruptions)

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE (Jadavpur) : The Home Minister should make a statement. (Interruptions)

PROF. SAIFUDDIN SOZ (Baramulla) : Mr. Brahma Dutt should visit Kashmir immediately.

MR. SPEAKER : I will ask him.

12.04-1/2 hrs.

SUPPLEMENTARY DEMANDS FOR  
GRANTS (GENERAL), 1988-89

[English]

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EXPENDITURE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI B. K. GADHVI) : I beg to present a statement (Hindi and English versions) showing the Supplementary Demands for Grants in respect of the Budget (General) for 1988-89.

(Interruptions)

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (S. BUTA SINGH) : Sir, the Hon. Members are agitated over disrespect to the National Flag. As I said yesterday, the Government is duty-bound to uphold the dignity and respect of the National Flag. I will have to ascertain facts before I come with a statement. I will definitely ascertain the facts. (Interruptions)

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY (Katwa) : We want a statement about the killing of the National Bird. (Interruptions)

12.07 hrs.

CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER  
OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

[English]

Reported capsizing of launch near  
Manihari Ghat in Bihar resulting  
in drowning of several hundred  
persons

SHRI V. S. KRISHNA IYAR (Bangalore South) : I call the attention of the Minister of State of the Ministry of Surface Transport to the following matter of urgent public importance and request that he may make a statement thereon :

"Reported capsizing of a launch overloaded with passengers and cargo near Manihari Ghat in Bihar resulting in the drowning of several hundred persons and the steps taken by the Government to avert such mishaps in future."

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI RAJESH PILOT) : This House had learnt with deep regret and anguish the tragic boat accident which took place in the river Ganga near Manihari ghat of Katihar district in Bihar on 6th August, 1988.

It has been reported by the Government of Bihar that the ill-fated vessel named 'Jaltarang' started its journey in the cross ferry service from Manihari ghat to Sahebganj on 6th August, 1988. At about 10.45 a.m., after proceeding about 100 yards from Manihari ghat the motor launch lost balance and capsized. Reportedly about 300 passengers were on board the vessel against the rated capacity of 123 passengers. A number of country-boats which were near the site of the accident picked up about 125 persons and brought them to shore. Some of the passengers swam ashore. 22 bodies have been recovered and 66 persons have been registered as missing.

The State Government has further reported that immediately after the occurrence of the accident, the Block Development Officer, Manihari reached the spot within half an hour. The District Magistrate, Katihar also reached the spot at 2 p.m. Efforts were made by the local administration to bring out the vessel with the help of tractors which was not successful. Therefore, immediately the Naval Headquarters and Eastern Naval Command were approached for assistance. 7 Naval divers from Delhi and 30 jawans with 6 boats from Siliguri arrived for rescue and relief operations on 7th August, 1988. The Chief Minister of Bihar, his Cabinet colleagues and other senior officials of the State Government reached the site on 7th August, 1988 and supervised rescue and relief operations. The Chief Minister also announced an ex-gratia payment of Rs. 5000 to the kith and kin of the dead.

12.08 hrs.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Due to the swift current in the river, the salvage operations could not be undertaken effectively. However, with the assistance of a private steamer and one steamer of CIWTC, attempts were made on 7th, 8th and 9th August, 1988 to pull out the submerged vessel. On the evening of 10th

August, 1988 the rescue vessels succeeded in temporarily lifting the ill-fated ferry launch out of water for about 30 minutes. At this time the local MLA and about 100 persons who had collected there were present and the State Government has reported that no dead bodies were trapped inside the vessel. It has further been reported by the State Government that the ill-fated vessel was built in 1975 and registered in 1976. The State Government has intimated that "the statutory requirement for the purpose of registration, grant of certificate of survey and issuance of certificate of competence of the crew members have been complied with in accordance with the provisions. The competent authority carried out the fitness tests of the vessel and on completion of such tests on 19.2.1988, issued a receipt in form No. 6 as required under Section 7 of the Inland Vessels Act 1917, which is valid till 18.2.89."

A criminal case under various Sections including 304, 304A, 307, 280 and 282 of the Indian Penal Code has been registered against Shri Narain Prasad Singh, the proprietor, the Manager, Driver and other crews totalling 9. The Manager has been arrested on 7th August, 1988. Other accused persons are absconding. Warrant of arrest has been issued for the arrest of the absconding persons and the State Government has initiated action to attach the property of the absconding persons. I may inform the House while I was in Rajya Sabha yesterday I had received information from the State Government that the court has been approached to attach the property of these absconding people by the State Government. Show cause notice for cancellation of lease of ferry service has also been issued against the proprietor.

The State Government had on 9-8-88 ordered a high level administrative inquiry by the Divisional Commissioner, Kosi Division, but subsequently on 13-8-88 has announced the holding of a judicial inquiry.

I have visited Patna as well as the site of the accident on 13th August, 1988. I had also an occasion to meet a large number of people at the site of the accident including some survivors and relatives of the victims and I have conveyed to them the heart-felt condolences of the Government of India at the tragic loss of the lives.

As already stated, the State Government have decided to order a judicial inquiry into this tragic accident. The full facts will be known after the inquiry report becomes available. In the meanwhile, what is important is that effective action should be taken against those who have not exercised due care and caution in the running of the ferry. Equally important is the need to take steps to prevent recurrence of such tragic accidents. We have received assurances from the State Government that they have initiated deterrent action against the owner of the ferry, the Manager and staff connected with the running of the ferry. We have also been informed by the State Government that all District Magistrates have been instructed to take adequate steps to prevent overloading of the ferries and to ensure compliance with the rules and regulations in order to prevent such mishaps. Other State Governments also have been requested to take similar action. We have also advised Bihar and all the State Governments to verify the fitness certificates and the availability of safety equipments of all the licensed vessels ferrying passengers.

I may also inform the House that the hon. Prime Minister's office has informed our Department that Prime Minister has been kind enough to sanction Rs. 10 lakhs for the deceased families and the people for their help from the Prime Minister's relief fund. This information I got before coming to the House. (*Interruptions*)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Shri V. S. Krishna Iyer.

SHRI BAJU BAN RIYAN (Tripura East) : Sir, I was here.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : I will call you afterwards.

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY (Katwa) ; His name is there. (*Interruptions*)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : His name is there but inspite of the Speaker's calling his name repeatedly he did not call the attention of the Minister.

(*Interruptions*)

SHRI HANNAN MOLLAH (Uluberia) : When the Member is in the House how is it his name is not being called.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : We have to follow the procedure. When the Speaker called him he did not rise. He did not call the attention of the Minister. I will call him afterwards. Please take your seat.

(*Interruptions*)

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE (Rajapur) : Sir, I have a request. There is no disrespect for the Chair. The question is, when there was so much notice during Zero Hour, he could not listen. (*Interruptions*)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Prof. Dandavate, I told him that I am going to call him also. Mr. Krishna Iyer has already raised a call attention. Therefore, let him speak. Let Mr. Krishna Iyer speak. I will call him afterwards. What is wrong in that ? (*Interruptions*)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Mr. Krishna Iyer called the attention. He has to speak. That is a simple thing.

SHRI BAJU BAN RIYAN : When Speaker called me, I did not listen.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : What can I do ?

SHRI BAJU BAN RIYAN : No, Sir, it is injustice to me.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : It is not injustice.

SHRI BAJU BAN RIYAN : I rose to call the attention of the Minister.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : No. (*Interruptions*) I told you, I will call you afterwards.

(*Interruptions*)

SHRI RAJESH PILOT : May I request the hon. Members ? I am here to reply to any question. (*Interruption*)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Take your seat.

(*Interruptions*)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : I cannot allow. Nothing will go on record.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : Mr. Krishna Iyer, you surrender your right.

SHRI V.S. KRISHNA IYER : I will take only three minutes.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Afterwards he cannot speak.

*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : I have to follow certain rules. Mr. Krishna Iyer.

SHRI V.S. KRISHNA IYER : (Bangalore South) : Sir, I am very sorry that a situation has developed like this.

It is very shameful that the mafia gang is still operating in the ferry services. It is going on for the past so many years in total disregard to passenger safety. I am surprised that the hon. Minister has made a statement and it looks as though the Government are not aware of the whole situation. The hon. Minister says that there were only 300 passengers in the ferry. It is reported in all the papers that nearly 520 tickets were issued. Besides that, 150 quintals of wheat were also loaded in that ferry. It is really unfortunate that there is nobody to control this mafia gang which is operating for the last several years. Moreover, the ferry owners are exploiters. We have also learnt that as some political leaders in the State are colluding with them, nobody can tackle them. Even the law-enforcing authorities are siding with them.

In this particular case, it is also reported that the ferry was purchased in public auction and they have been running it by flouting all rules and regulations. Eleven days are already over. Today, the hon. Minister has said that the owner has still not been arrested. They have arrested only the driver. What about the owner? Have you not been able to trace out the owner? Of course, the Minister says that his property has been attached now. But more important is that the owner, who is responsible for all these things, should have been arrested by now.

We want to know and the whole country is very much concerned to know about the fate of other passengers. Assuming that there were 300 passengers and hundred rescued and 22 are dead, what about the other passengers? What steps have been taken to save the other passengers? But how to believe? What is the fate of the passengers? Even assuming the figure to

be 300, as you gave is correct, what happened? Even if it is one life, it is a precious life. The hon. Minister has not explained that. Now I want a categorical assurance from the Government that this nonsense of private ferry owners, in Bihar or in other parts of the country, should be stopped. This is nothing but exploitation. Wherever you go, these ferry owners, I am sure even the Kerala people will agree to this, exploit the people. The Government is callous towards this. I learnt from the newspaper that if only a small bridge across the river had been constructed, there was no need for the ferry at all but in spite of the demand of the people of the locality for a bridge for the last forty years, the State Government has not cared to construct it. This has happened because of the callousness of the Government. There has been least concern for the passengers. I want the Government to say that these ferry operators will be banned. They should have Government operators because it is a lucrative business. Government will not lose anything by saying this. It should be nationalised. It is very necessary.

About compensation for the victims, the Chief Minister has announced an ex-gratia payment of Rs. 5000. You should identify all those families and see that they are given adequate compensation so that their dear ones will benefit by it. These ferry owners should not be allowed to go scot free. You must recover the amount due for compensation. Even the ferry owner is bound to pay. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether we have got any set rules for the running of these ferries. Should they not operate under certain rules? Can they overload? Can they have any number of passengers? Even for a small bus, we have got fixed number of seats. We have got the Motor Vehicles Act. They cannot exceed that fixed number of seats. But in a ferry, you do not have any control at all. It is water transport. It is surprising that the Government has no rules to run a ferry. I request the Government that they should come out and tell the House about the fate of the other passengers. How are they going to search the other passengers? Have they got any hope at all? What steps the Government intend to take to see that such things will not occur again in future?

Every time, when an accident takes place, the Government says that steps will be taken to see that such things will not occur again. But unfortunately, what is happening? It recurs. So many lives are lost. Government must take proper steps. They should have set rules. The Government must come out with a policy as to whether they are going to allow these private ferry operators even in future or are they going to nationalise. I expect a categorical answer from the hon. Minister for all these points.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Nothing will go on record except what Mr. Riyan will say.

SHRI BAJU BAN RIYAN (Tripura East) : Sir, I rise to convey my deep sorrow on my behalf and on behalf of my party to the next of the kin of those who lost their lives in the unfortunate launch accident. Sir, it is reported in the papers and I come to know from two of our hon. Members, Shri Anil Basu and Shri Sudhir Roy, who visited the spot that when the accident took place, some portion of the launch was above water. It was not fully drowned inside water. When the local people started rescuing the victims, the local police arrived there and resorted to lathi charge to disperse the people. The people who were doing the rescue work were also dispersed. After that the owner of this ill-fated launch Shri Bacha Singh came with another launch or boat and started going round and some portion of the ill-fated launch was still above water. With this process the launch started going inside the water and after some time it completely submerged. The local District Magistrate and other officers actually did nothing in the rescue operations.

According to the statement made by the Minister, there were about 300 passengers on board the launch, whereas the capacity is 123 passengers only. However, according to the eye witnesses and those who came there to see the Members of Parliament from our party, who visited the place, the number of passengers on board was more than 600. The number of those who had purchased the tickets, according to some people, was 446, whereas according to some newspapers, this number was 535. According to the local M.L.A., there may be more

passengers than this number. In addition to this, of course, some ticketless passengers would also be there.

According to the number of persons who were picked up, the bodies recovered and the persons missing, the total comes to 213. What about the rest of the persons even if there were 300 persons on board as indicated in the statement? Where are they?

It is reported that Bacha Singh is running all the ferry services throughout the Bihar State. It is a funny thing. This ferry service earlier was operated by the Railways Department right from 1902 to 1979. But during the last elections in 1980, the Government tried to give it to some other private persons. From 1980 Bacha Singh started his business throughout the Bihar State. He did not bother to obey the rules, did not bother to follow the safety measures. I know, Sir, there is an Act called the Inland Vessels Act, 1970. Under this Act you can punish the person if he is wrong. So, under this Act we can punish Bachcha Singh. But what we see is that Bachcha Singh is a very powerful and the political party in power in Bihar is with him.

SHRI YOGESHWAR PRASAD YOGESH (Chatra) : How do you say that?

DR. SUDHIR ROY (Burdwan) : Because he has the monopoly. (*Interruptions*)

If you go to Bihar you will come to know. (*Interruptions*)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Order, order, I have not allowed anybody.

(*Interruptions*)\*

DR. SUDHIR ROY : You succumb to Bachcha Singh.

SHRI YOGESHWAR PRASAD YOGESH : Never. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI BAJU BAN RIYAN : Sir, before the Parliamentary elections the ferry service was introduced by the Railways. (*Interruptions*)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Order, order, nothing will go on record.

(*Interruptions*)\*

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA  
(Bankura) : These people are with you.

DR. SUDHIR ROY : Why were the  
railways services withdrawn ? (*Interruptions*)

[*Translation*]

AN HON. MEMBER : You have taken  
money from Bachcha Singh. That is why  
you have done so.

SHRI YOGESHWAR PRASAD  
YOGESH) : You might have taken. We are  
in no way related to Bachcha Singh.  
(*Interruptions*)

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA : They  
get money for the elections. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI BAJU BAN RIYAN : Sir, it is  
clear from the Statement made by the  
Minister that a case has been registered, but  
the funny part is, who has registered the case.  
The case is registered by one BMP (Bihar  
Military Police) Constable. Mr. Mohan  
Pandey is the investigating officer at the  
Kathiar Police Station. So, the case is regis-  
tered by a police constable and not by the  
Government. I feel that at least in this case  
the Government should have come forward  
and registered the case.

Sir, it is very funny to note that today  
is 17th and the accident took place on 6th.  
11 days have passed but till now all the  
accused persons have not been arrested. I  
don't know how the Government is working.  
I think they are unable to arrest them  
because they are very powerful people.  
(*Interruptions*)

Sir, I would like to have some clarifica-  
tion from the Government; firstly, whether  
the ferry services will again be run by the  
Railway Department or by the Government;  
secondly, whether the guilty persons will be  
punished under law, including Bachcha Singh  
and others. (*Interruptions*)

The Chief Minister of Bihar announ-  
ced an amount of Rs. 5,000 to the victims  
as an ex-gratia relief. I request that the  
amount should be more than Rs. 5 000.  
Also, the Government should give one per-  
manent job each to the next kin of the  
affected families. I want to know whether

the Government have made any announce-  
ment in the local newspapers or through the  
public media seeking information about the  
missing people. This will give a scope  
to the local people to inform to  
the Government about the missing  
people. If the Government have done  
this, I feel it would have helped them  
to find out the actual number of people  
missing.

I also want to know whether it is a fact  
that as soon as the Government came into  
the picture to rescue people, not a single  
person's life was saved. Rather, it is alleged  
that this launch was damaged intentionally  
so that in future it cannot be used on the  
waters.

I also want to know whether it is a fact  
that on the night of 18th August, people  
from the nearby localities heard a big explo-  
sive sound. Their apprehension was that  
this ill-fated launch was destroyed by some  
explosive material. I want to know whether  
this is a fact or not.

It is also a fact that this boat which was  
just 50 metres away from the shore was  
taken to the middle part of the river,  
immediately after the Government came into  
the rescue picture ? I want to know whether  
the launch was taken to the middle part of  
the river at a distance of about five kilo-  
metres away from the shore.

With these words, I conclude.

SHRI SURESH RURUP (Kottayam) :  
Sir, this tragic accident occurred on 6th  
August, 1988 at 10.30 in the morning. On  
that particular day, a religious festival was  
going on the other side of the river and  
there was a terrible rush of pilgrims. Sir,  
accidents can happen. But this tragic  
accident occurred due to the callous and  
criminal attitude of the authorities towards  
the precious lives of the people. The state-  
ment of the Minister contains half truths  
and it is clearly intended to save the autho-  
rities. The number of passengers mentioned  
here is only 300. But all the newspaper  
reports which have come from the spot have  
said that at least 500 persons were in that  
boat and in addition to this, 600 bags of  
wheat were loaded in that boat. So there  
was no doubt that that boat was clearly  
over-loaded.

My colleague Mr. Anil Basu and Mr. Sudhir Roy who went there have reported that the local people have told them that they have heard some explosive sound. Their apprehension was that the boat was completely destroyed due to the explosion. Shri Anil Basu has brought a photograph of that boat. It capsized some 100 yards away from the starting point. The point in which these authorities tried to recover the boat was some 5 kms away from the bank. This photograph shows that the local people have heard the sound of the explosive. They clearly believe that the licence was taken by showing some other boat. I do not question the authenticity of the Minister's statement saying that this boat was made in 1976. This boat was given a certificate and all that. Probably they might have shown some other boat and obtained a licence. But this vintage boat which the Press had reported was of the Second World War type. It was used for ferrying passengers and in order to destroy the evidence they have destroyed this boat also. That is what the Members of Parliament who visited Bihar...

SHRI ANIL BASU (Aram Bagh) : And the only job of the administration was...

*(Interruptions)\**

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Not allowed.

SHRI SURESH KURUP : This matter has to be looked into. It is common knowledge that this ferry operator Shri Narain Prasad Singh has got tremendous political hold over Bihar because he has the monopoly of all the ferry operations in Ganga. It is reported that it was he who obstructed the construction of the bridge in Patna across the Ganga and the duty of collecting the toll of this bridge is given to this particular person. The Minister should clarify all these things. He is practically a Zamindar of Bihar. Earlier also there have been complaints against him. Why are you so particular in defending him ?

DR. G.S. RAJHANS (Jhanjharpur) : We are not defending him. We want him to be arrested.

SHRI SURESH KURUP : I would like to know how this particular person managed to get all these contracts and all these ferrying operations in the Ganga ? Earlier some years back as the Minister has already stated in the other House, this ferry was operated by the Railways. Why did the authorities stop it ? What forced the Railways to stop it ? Is it not because of this particular person who managed to submerge this ferry operation of the Railways and managed to get this contract ? Some serious obstruction were placed in the working of the Railways. Nobody was there to help them, because the whole of Bihar is controlled by these people. Finally, the Railway Commandant allowed these people to operate it. *(Interruptions)* I would like to know whether there is anybody to check this. *(Interruptions)* Sir, I seek the indulgence of the House. Nobody is listening.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Come to the point.

SHRI SURESH KURUP : I would like to know what are all the arrangements to check and control these operators, to control the number of passengers. Has the Government entrusted the work to anybody; are there any authorities posted in those places ? At least they could have taken sufficient precautions, because these days there will be a large number of pilgrims going to the other bank. Have the authorities posted anybody to control the influx of passengers into the boat ? I would like to know this.

Even after so many hours of this tragedy, nobody turned up there. No rescue operations were done by the authorities. It was the local population which came to the rescue of these passengers. In all humility I would like to point out that when the tragedy occurred recently in Kerala, not a single accusing finger was raised against the authorities regarding rescue operations or anything else. Here, everybody—the local population, the passengers who escaped, the kith and kin of those who died, everybody else—is accusing the authorities in the matter of rescue and salvage operations. The Minister should take all these things into account.

The Minister has mentioned that a private steamer was engaged for the recovery

[Shri Suresh Kurup]

of this boat. Under whose ownership is this private steamer? This steamer is owned by this particular man. How has this happened? Is there no system at all in Bihar? (*Interruptions*) If this type of a tragedy occurs, is there no system? Do you have again to depend on these criminals for the recovery of this boat also?

Our hon. colleagues Mr. Anil Basu and Dr. Sudhir Roy who had gone to the spot, have brought a ticket issued to the passengers of this boat. No charge is mentioned in this ticket. They charge whatever they please: Rs. 4, Rs. 5 or Rs. 6 they charge from the passengers. No charge is mentioned in this ticket. How do they allow this type of a ticket to be issued?

DR. G.S. RAJHANS: Is the date mentioned?

SHRI ANIL BASU: Yes, on 6th August the ticket was issued.

SHRI SURESH KURUP: You can verify it. Everything is here. (*Interruptions*) It is a very valid document. They are charging enormous amounts, and nothing is mentioned in the ticket\* about the charge. So, to all these points I request the Minister to reply.

The local population still thinks that there were so many passengers who have got drowned, but their bodies have not yet been recovered. What measures is Government taking for the recovery of these bodies?

Finally, I do not find the local M.P. Mr. Tariq Anwar, who was there when the discussion started. I am sorry he could not find time to sit here in this House and listen to the discussions. (*Interruptions*)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Do not mention it; why are you bothered?

(*Interruptions*)\*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: No; nothing will go on record. I am not allowing this to go on record. Mr. Kurup, you please speak what you want to.

SHRI SURESH KURUP: Naturally, he was received with protest slogans when he visited the spot.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr. Maheshwara Rao is not present. Now the Minister.

SHRI RAJESH PILOT: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, to begin with, I totally share the anguish of the hon. members who have spoken on the subject, whether they are from this side of the House or that side of the House. Every one has the same opinion. I am not here to defend which is wrong or which has not been done properly. My duty is to bring to the notice of the House the facts. That is why I personally went there. When I spoke during my statement, I think I might have said something which was not correct. So, I would like to correct myself. I had said that the Prime Minister was kind enough to sanction Rs. 10 lakhs; I did not say, the Prime Minister announced. If I had said this, it may be corrected; it was sanctioned. It will be disbursed through the State Government. It was not the announcement; it was sanctioned by the Prime Minister.

SHRI ANIL BASU: Only Rs. 500 were paid to the kith and kin and not Rs. 5000 as was announced by the Chief Minister. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI RAJESH PILOT: There was some misapprehension because some members said that it was announced; it was sanctioned, Rs. 10 lakhs for the families of those unfortunate people who were involved in this. When I visited that place, I also heard people; I met the local people; I also met the people who were the relatives of those who were involved in this tragedy. When I read the newspapers I found that some paper said, 500 people while some other paper said, 530 people. So, I wanted to know the correct figures, how many people were involved. It was really impossible to find out the exact number of people who were involved because the Clerk who sold the tickets was absconding; he was not available. We had seized the record whatever little they had in their offices here and there. But there was no person who could



tell us that so many people were travelling on that day. It was an assessment of each individual; somebody said, 200; somebody said, 300; somebody said, 500. This 300 we calculated with a bit of technical knowledge. I said, "59' long, 12' wide having a cabin of 100' area." I calculated the area of the total boat to find out how many people it could accommodate; it was just a calculation; it was not a perfect number. That was how we thought that it might be 300 and odd people. *(Interruptions)* I have said in my statement "reportedly 300 people." I think there were only 300 people; there were not more than 300 people; but there could be 500 people. Till it is not clearly checked up and the finding of the inquiry is not brought out, how can we say that so many people were involved. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI ANIL BASU : You may say, 300 or more people. Why did you say, 300 people? Why did you fix the number? *(Interruptions)*

SHRI RAJESH PILOT : The government made a public announcement in the nearby villages, newspapers and radio that people were missing and the family members who feel that their people were involved in this tragedy must report to such and such place. That is why 85 families reported that their members named so and so were missing. Out of 88, 22 bodies were recovered; 66 bodies are still missing.

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY (Katwa) : To whom had they to report?

SHRI RAJESH PILOT : We had there offices of DDOs, DMs, etc.

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY : People telephoned from there to say..... *(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : I cannot allow you.

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY : Why not?

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : You have no right to speak on the calling attention because your name is not there. I cannot allow you to speak. Only Minister's reply will go on record.

*(Interruptions)\*\**

SHRI RAJESH PILOT : The State Government has announced a judicial inquiry to keep every doubt away from the people because for such type of a tragedy in our country we must go into the depth to find out the real information; that is why a judicial inquiry has been ordered by the State Government. *(Interruptions)* As far as an individual, Mr. Narender, he is normally known by Bachchan Singh. I do not know whether his name is Narender Prasad Singh. But in Bihar he is normally known by Bachchan Singh. I share the impression of the hon. members from both sides that this is the reputation he carries. People told me clearly that this is the reputation he carries. Nobody is having any different views on this. What could Government do? When we came to know that the State Government issued a non-bailable warrant and approached the court to attach their property, I should say that this was the maximum legal weapon available with the State Government which they utilised. While I was speaking in the Rajya Sabha, I got a telegram from the State Government saying that the court had been approached and the court was likely to give permission to attach his property.

It is a fact that there are six main ghats in Bihar State, one is run by the CIWDC and the rest are run by private people, who go by different names.

AN HON. MEMBER : Baccha Singh.

SHRI RAJESH PILOT : People say that he is running all the six. That also has to be found out by the judicial inquiry. That is also going to be investigated.

SHRI V. SOBHANADREESWARA RAO (Vijayawada) : This circuit was earlier operated by the railways.

SHRI RAJESH PILOT : It is also a fact that this service was run by the Railways till 1985. I remember when the hon. Chief Minister at the moment in Bihar, Shri Bhagwat Jha Azad when he was a Member of Parliament came to me when this ferry was stopped asking me whether we could take it over from the CIMDC or the Inland Water Authority. He never wanted this ferry to be run by private persons, anybody whether Baccha Singh or somebody.

[Shri Rajesh Pilot]

The late, ex-Chief Minister Mr. Singh's wife, Mrs. Singh who is a member here, she also approached me. I have talked to the Inland Water Transport Authority Chairman, Mr. Arakkal and asked him to go and see whether we can operate it. It is a State subject, totally. It comes under the Bengal Ferries Act, 1985, which has been adopted by the Bihar Government. So, it is totally a State subject. I have sent officers for consultation and they say that with the help of the State Government, we can run it, but we do not have the passenger vessels. We had only one which is also not totally a passenger vessel. The CIWDC is using it. So, that step was not pursued. Because we do not have the vessel this ferry continued.

When I reached the spot, I have seen it myself, where the accident took place. Now it is only a point. They can only point out that particular point. The vessel has submerged, must have gone further up. It is hardly one hundred metres from the point.

It is also a fact that there was some negligence on the part of the administration not to channelise the system. There was no check as to how many passengers were going. (*Interruptions*) There were surprise checks, once in a while. But there was no complete system which could have stopped. When I checked with the people somebody said 150 bags and somebody 100 bags were there when cargo was not allowed in that ferry at all. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI ANIL BASU : If the hon. Minister wants, I can give the photographs of the submerged vessel. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI RAJESH PILOT : The regulations are not effective; enforcement was required, and I have accepted that there was some negligence on the part of the administration to regulate the system. It should not have been overcrowded. It should follow a complete system. There were surprise checks as reported by the State Government but the system was not as effective as I had expected when I personally saw, when I had gone there.

Now the question is that the tragedy has taken place. The House will agree with me, and there are two courses which we

must follow, which are open in front of us. The guilty should be punished. Action should be taken against those people who have failed in their duty.

Secondly, what is our future plan to stop any recurrence of such accidents? These are the two points on which the Government must go ahead, and to give the facility to the people. I am sure that the House will agree with me on this.

As far as strong action is concerned, I have mentioned that the State Government have ordered a judicial inquiry. The State Government is taking action against those absconding people and the moment the judicial inquiry is over further action will be intimated to the country, what has been proposed to one.

I have also, from the Central Government, as I have mentioned in my statement, written to the State Governments. In the next meeting of the Transport Development Council where the Ministers of Transport of all States come we will take up this subject and discuss with them, to see what is to be done, by amending their laws, by taking very strict rules, where such accidents take place, to ensure that it does not recur.

In the meantime, we have written letters to all the State Governments to check the certificates, the safety equipment of these vessels which carry passengers.

Next point is about the facility. Some hon. Members have asked about it. At the moment there is no passenger vessel with the CIWDC. Tomorrow we have called the people of the Government of Goa, and the Government of Kerala, and also Assam to have a discussion with them so that we can take vessels from them and officers on deputation from the Central Government can go and assist the State Government to run the ferries.

At the moment the mood of the people is that private ferry should not be allowed there. That is the mood of the people. And we must go according to the wishes of the people.

13.00 hrs.

So, we will ask the State Government to run it or if required, as an exceptional case, the State Government would discharge their

responsibility and give whatever little help they can in that respect. This meeting is called for tomorrow. I will have an open discussion with the officers and then I will indicate to the State Government about the future action.

When I was there, several people met me and expressed different views. Everyone has different views. Somebody said that the Government has done the best and somebody said the Government has not done anything. So, on such an occasion when the tragedy has taken place, the whole aim of every one of us would be to find out the cause and take remedial measures. I assure the House that Government will not lag behind, Government will take utmost care to see that in future such incidents do not take place. We will also ask the State Government to hasten the Inquiry. There is no use conducting an inquiry for two or three years and not bringing the facts to the notice of the country. We will request the State Government to hasten the inquiry. Some of the hon. Members have made valuable suggestions today. I will pass them on to the State Government.

With these words, I once again assure the House that it is a tragedy and there is nothing where we differ and you agree or you differ and we agree. It is a tragedy for the whole country. We are not supporting anybody to whichever party he may belong. Our idea is to give justice to those families who have suffered. We will certainly cooperate in this and we will see that guilty persons are punished and action taken so that such tragedy does not take place in future.

13.03 hrs

#### ELECTION TO COMMITTEE

[English]

Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for  
Medical Sciences & Technology,  
Trivandrum

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE  
MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE  
DEPARTMENTS OF OCEAN DEVELOPMENT,  
ATOMIC ENERGY, ELECTRONICS AND SPACES  
(SHRI K.R. NARAYANAN) : I beg to move :

“That in pursuance of Section 5(j) of the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences & Technology, Trivandrum Act 1980, the members of this House do proceed to elect, in such manner as the Speaker may direct, one member from among themselves to serve as a Member of the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences & Technology, Trivandrum subject to the other provisions of the said Act, *vice* Dr. K.G. Adiyodi died.”

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : The question is :

“That in pursuance of Section 5(j) of the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences & Technology, Trivandrum Act 1980, the members of this House do proceed to elect, in such manner as the Speaker may direct, one member from among themselves to serve as a Member of the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences & Technology, Trivandrum subject to the other provisions of the said Act, *vice* Dr. K.G. Adiyodi died.”

The motion was adopted.

13.03-3/4 hrs.

#### BUSINESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

[English]

##### Fifty-Seventh Report

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI H.K.L. BHAGAT) : I beg to move :

“That this House do agree with the Fifty-seventh Report of the Business Advisory Committee presented to the House on the 16th August, 1988.”

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : The question is :

“That this House do agree with the Fifty-seventh Report of the Business Advisory Committee presented to the House on the 16th August, 1988.”

The motion was adopted.