

19.30 hrs

HALF-AN-HOUR DISCUSSION  
(Fires in Coalfield)

[Translation]

DR. LAXMINARAYAN PANDEYA (Mandsaur): Mr. Chairman, Sir, with reference to the question put by me on the 8th July, I would like to raise discussion. As the hon. Minister, while replying to my original questions at that time did not make proper reply and did not touch some of the points raised by me. His reply was, as a matter of fact, incomplete or distorted facts were presented by him. That is why the demand for half an hour discussion was made. I would like to submit that the hon. Minister would clarify the whole position while making his statement about the subject which was left incomplete by him.

My original question was related to the issue of rehabilitating about 25000 displaced persons and the same issue is still pending. Well, a reference about the loss of rupees one crore was made, but no reference has been made as to when this loss was occurred and to what extent. The hon. Minister did also inform that the coal worth Rs. 3 crore and 7 lakh has already turned into ashes and in spite of continuous efforts, there has been no control on the fire that is breaking inside the mines. Some efforts, were, however, made to gain control on the fire and at some places the Government succeeded in this job. The Government has, however, not fully succeeded in its efforts and the people are, therefore, in a State of gloom as I have also pointed out in the beginning. While replying to the original question the hon. Minister told that nearly 13,350 houses are in danger zone due to fire and they need to be shifted somewhere else. It has been informed that 2550 families have been shifted from the danger zone. Now, I would like to know whether there is any time bound scheme to

shift the rest of the families to a safer place. I would also like an assurance from the Government whether it would be able to gain a total control on fire breaking in different mines, particularly in Jharia Coal field.

There are at least, 70 places which are on fire for the last so many years and you have not been able to control the fire till now then how you are going to control it in the next two years. I would like to know about your detailed plan in this regard. I would like to draw the hon. Minister's attention towards a statement given by him, while answering a question. He had stated that a team of World bank visited Jharia coal fields in order to know about the measures to control the fire. A U.S. team also visited this place. Even the scientists and the technologists have also visited Jharia coalfields. A discussion was also held with the United nations Development Programme and we are going to get necessary funds from them also for this purpose. I would like to know as to what have you done so far in this regard?

This is the annual report of Ministry of coal for 1991-92 regarding different coal companies and their subsidiaries:

[English]

"The Ministry has under its administrative control the Coal India Limited, a Public Sector Undertaking, with its 7 subsidiary companies, viz.

- (i) Bharat Coking Coal Limited, Dhanbad (Bihar).
- (ii) Central Coalfields Limited, Ranchi (Bihar).
- (iii) Eastern Coalfields Limited, Santoria (West Bengal).
- (iv) Northern Coalfields Limited, Bilaspur (M.P)

[Dr. Laxminarain Pandeya]

*(Interruptions)*

- (v) South Eastern Coalfields Limited, Nagpur (Maharashtra).
- (vi) Western Coalfields Limited, Nagpur (Maharashtra).
- (vii) Central Mine Planning and Design Institute Limited, Ranchi (Bihar).

[Translation]

I have just now referred to the Jharia Coal fields and now along with it I would like to make mention about South Eastern coal field Limited, Bilaspur, Madhya Pradesh because the fire problem is also there and the Government has no plan to control the fire problem in the South Eastern Coal fields, Bilaspur. Forest Act is Central Act but it is not possible to take any measure under this Act. I would like to draw your attention towards a report published in Jansatta, "Due to lack of farsightedness of officers and employees of the Coal fields and also due to ineffectiveness of the Forest Act, the coal of good quality worth 1200 crores of Rupees is turning into ashes due to fire in the collieries at Chirmari." You did mention about Jharia only during the course of your reply but you did not mention anything about South Eastern Coals field Limited for which I am referring to. It should not be treated as an ordinary point where a sum of Rs. 1200 crores is involved.

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please conclude.

DR. LAXMINARAYAN PANDEYA: I have taken only five minutes.

*(Interruptions)*

MR. CHAIRMAN: Four more Members are there.

[Translation]

DR. LAXMINARAYAN PANDEYA: Sir, the fire is blazing underground and the smoke is coming out because of rain water which penetrates the crust of the soil. Since the new Forest Act was enforced in 1980, there are many hurdles in the transfer of forest land. There is a provision of the punishment of imprisonment for the staff and officers who do not implement the Act. That is why the Madhya Pradesh Government is not able to give the land to the Department of coal and the coal is burnt to ashes underground. I want that if the Government has taken any action in this regard, it should inform the House, because an area of 200 hectares in the sarjuga near Baikunthpur in Madhya Pradesh from where I hail is affected by it. Madhya Pradesh is also a leading coal producing area along with West Bengal and Maharashtra. It is next to Bihar in coal production.

Now I would like to draw your attention for a while to other questions also. There is neither well-planned effort on the part of the Government to prevent the adverse affect on health caused by fire nor there is any proper management for it. As a result, it is not known whether there is any suitable preventive measure, plan or any management by the Government in this regard. Safety measures are also being taken in this regard, I would like to quote from a news item which appeared in the daily "Statesman" on 21st June:

[English]

"Apart from causing a huge loss of prime cooking coal, the fires pose serious health hazards to local inhabitants through emissions of steam, smoke and noxious gases. About 17.32 sq. km. of the Jharia Coal Field area."

[*Translation*]

I would like to know from the hon. Minister in particular what has been done in this connection. What type of the latest devices or measures are going to be adopted, in the light of the dialogue between the Government and the United Nations Development Programme, regarding Raniganj and Jharia Coal-fields, because new technique has been developed for extinguishing fire in the mines. Now what action does the Government contemplate to take regarding that technique? Is the Government going to adopt such type of technique? Moreover, what is the action plan of the Government regarding its commitment that it will take action on it by 1994? Here coal is being burnt to ashes and the Government is importing coking coal from foreign countries.

Sir, I would conclude by pointing out one thing more. The Coal Board has been abolished and there is no arrangement to discuss the coal-producing areas in one forum.

[*English*]

"Coal Board was abolished after the nationalisation of the coal industry in the early 1970s and thereafter the single line responsibility for conversion of coal, prevention of fires, competing of fires got dissipated to the coal companies and gradually to the companies, divisions and areas."

[*Translation*]

Therefore, I want to know the arrangements made by the Governments made by the Government in this regard. Today we are not getting sufficient coal from the big coal-mines in Madhya Pradesh. Will the hon. Minister point out the action being taken in this connection and the action taken on other coal-mines? Will he reply to the other questions also especially regarding rehabilitation of thousands of displaced

families. Will they get some benefit and relief. Otherwise, if no suitable solution is evolved and the fire in the mines continue and there is no improvement in the situation, more families might be displaced. We will suffer loss of crores of rupees. Would the hon. Minister like to point out his package for solving this problem.

[*English*]

MR. CHAIRMAN: How long will you take to reply?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRIP.A. SANGMA): Fifteen minutes.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, you have five minutes, amongst four of you, to ask questions. Shrimati Malini Bhattacharya.

SHRIMATI MALINI BHATTACHARAYA (Jadavpur): The first question that I want to ask is regarding the progress in controlling the fires. Seventy fires have been raging in Jharia Coalfields since a long time before the nationalisation of coalmines. In 1972 there was nationalisation. Now it is 1992. In these 20 years with 22 schemes and with a total sanctioned amount of Rs. 114.57 crores, the BCCL has been only able to control or extinguish five fires. In three sites protective measures have been completed and in another 13 sites the fire has been contained. That means that in only 21 places some progress has been made, out of 70. Ans in the rest, nothing has been done. So, does it stand to reason that in one-third you have taken measures and two-thirds remain? You will need another 40 years to completely extinguish all these fires! That is the first question I want to ask.

Then, it is not just a question of Jharia. The question of Bilaspur has been raised by Dr. Laxminarayan Pandeya I would like to point out that in Raniganj as well the problem

[Smt. Malini Bhattacharya]

is there. Six hundred hectares are damaged by fire in Raniganj as well. In all these adjoining coalfields what kind of measures are being taken? While the hon. Minister is answering the questions on Jharia, I think these questions also could be answered.

Then, the hon. Minister has stated that about 2550 families have been shifted so far and even now 13,350 families remain. I would like to know, why is it that in the course of all these 20 years, while these people have been living in these endangered conditions, why has there been so much tardiness in shifting the families? This shifting of families does not require any new technology. So, this could have been done in 20 years but in 20 days!

The third question is that in these areas where there is fire atmospheric pollution is being caused by the gases released by the fire. So, this widespread atmospheric pollution has to be combated and we want to know what measures are being taken for it. It has been said that these fires were caused by unscientific mining in the past. I would like to know, to what extent, these unscientific modes of mining have been completely done away with today, and how far mining has become scientific and safe.

And finally, there is another question, namely, it has been said that in search of a suitable technology a team of four mining engineers was deputed to visit the United States and you are also consulting the World Bank. There are certain Mines Safety Research Institutes and also several research institutes there. Does the Government mean to say that the measures which have been taken so far to control the fires are not adequate, that today more measures are being contemplated?

To what extent the indigenous meas-

ures which have been used in the past have been successful? To what extent have they failed? This is another question that I would like to ask.

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA (Bankura): Sir, the question was of a general type. But what the Minister has stated in his statement is only about Jharia Coalfield. Sir, you know that the underground fire in Jharia Coalfield is more than the other subsidiaries of BCCL. There is underground fire in Raniganj Coalfield. (Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please put your questions.

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA: I am preparing the ground for putting the questions. I am coming to the questions.

Raniganj Coalfield is one of the oldest coalfields in our country. And because of unscientific mining prior to nationalisation and slaughter mining, unscientific mining after nationalisation also, proper steps have not been taken although a number of Committees like Bakshi Committee, Chari Committee, Banerjee Committee, recommended that proper scientific steps have to be taken to control fire. The Committees were appointed and submitted their reports. Even after that, for so many years, the Government have not taken any action except in one thirds of the coal mining areas of Jharia coalfield.

There was a proposal to shift Raniganj town to an alternative site and this proposal was sent to the Government of India. May I know from the Minister as to what steps the Government have taken to implement the recommendations of the various Committees in regard to controlling the fire? Subsidence is also related with fire. I had visited a number of coal mines in the Eastern Coalfield. And even just behind the head-quarter of BCCL in Sancturia itself, I had

seen the smoke emitting from the ground. So, fire is also there in the underground.

There was a proposal to set up a Stabilisation Committee. The proposal such as 'Operation Subsidence' was made by the Government of West Bengal. Fire and subsidence are to be tackled on war footing. That was the proposal made by the Government of West Bengal. May I know the hon. Minister what steps the Government is contemplating on the proposal of the West Bengal Government to have a Stabilisation Committee? The Committee has to be constituted with the representatives from various organisations representatives from the State Governments, representatives from the subsidiaries and some other organisations. May I know from the Minister what steps the Government proposes to take in this regard?

Then, there is a Research and Development Organisation under Coal India and that is CMPDIL. The CMPDIL has developed a mechanism to tackle this fire and subsidence. This has been implemented also one or two mines in eastern coal fields. May I know from the hon. Minister whether the Government is contemplating to implement the mechanism which has been developed by CMPDIL in Jharia coal fields, in eastern coal fields particularly in Raniganj coal mining area and in Chirimiri coal mining area?

The World Bank has also submitted a report in regard to controlling the fire in Jharia coal fields. May I know what is there in that report and what the World Bank has suggested to control the fire in Jharia coal fields?

When I asked a supplementary the other day, the hon. Minister did not reply to that question because that question did not pertain to the original question. I asked about the Mukunda project. (*Interruptions*). Rs. 20 crores was spent on that project. The project was to be taken up by controlling fire. (*Interruptions*) May I know from the hon.

Minister why this amount was spent; whether that project has been abandoned and before the project was taken up whether this was visualized or not?

I would request the hon. Minister to reply to all these questions particularly the proposals submitted by the Government of West Bengal to contain the fire in Raniganj coal fields.

[*Translation*]

SHRI SANOTSH KUMAR GANGWAR (Bareilly): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would like to point out a few things. The basic question was related to coal production in the entire country but the reply was given regarding Jharia Coal-field only. I would like to know from the hon. Minister the condition of other coal mines besides the Jharia Coal-field in the country. The hon. Minister has pointed out that during the last 20 years the Government has been able to extinguish fire in 50 mines out of 70 mines. It is not known how much time will be required to extinguish fire in Jharia alone. He said that there are 13 thousand families which have to be rehabilitated in Jharia immediately. I presume that this number will be more. No doubt the Government is deeply concerned about it but I would like to know about the progress made in this regard to the development of the new technique and the suggestions which have been received from Defence Research and Development Organisation and expert teams from abroad. Will this process be prolonged in this manner? What is the total number of coal-mines in the country where fire is raging and has the Government any time-bound programme to check the fire within a stipulated time?

While concluding I would like to ask from the hon. Minister about the steps being taken to rehabilitate and provide other facilities to those families which have been displaced?

19.53 hrs

**BUSINESS ADVISORY COMMITTEE****Twenty- first Report***[English]*

MR. CHAIRMAN: Before we come back to the subject, Shri Saifuddin Choudhury will present the Report of the Business Advisory Committee.

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOUDHURY (Katwa): Sir, I beg to present the Twenty-first Report of the Business Advisory Committee.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now we come back to the subject. Shri Haradhan Roy.

19.54 hrs

**HALF-AN-HOUR DISCUSSION****Fires In Coalfields***[Translation]*

\*SHRI HARADHAN ROY (Asansol): Mr. Chairman, Sir, fires in the coal mines of Raniganj, Jharia, East West Bokharo (18289 hectare land) are continuing 43 monzas and 4 towns in Raniganji have been declared unsafe and more than 10 to 12 lakhs people live in that area. There is a proposal from West Bengal Government for the formation of a Statutory Body and introduction of a Bill in Parliament. This Bill should seek to form the proposed Statutory Authority. It should be the obligation of Department of Coal to provide necessary finance and the said Statutory Body shall have the sole responsibility to Plan and Design all aspects of the project and for restoration of environment

and ecological balance to pre-mining days. The Statute shall also provide for rehabilitation of all affected or displaced persons as per the provisions Rehabilitation package accepted for Sonepur Bazar Package. Since the Government has not come out with any plan of action, the task of their rehabilitation is to be included into the provision of the Bill.

The scheme of rehabilitation is there in Sonepur Bazar Package. This should be passed as an Act so that the displaced people are rehabilitated. Further provision for environmental measures and subsidence control should be included in the VIIIth Five Year Plan. CMPDI a unit of the Apex Body of West Bengal has submitted a report that Rs. 806 crores are needed for Raniganj Coal Field only for stabilization and rehabilitation.

Out of 850 hectare land in Raniganj town 90 hectares are affected by fire and subsidence. Rs. 806 crores were to be sanctioned. But only 54 lakhs have been spent so far since 1990. If this is the pace of progress then the fires in the vast area cannot be extinguished even in 100 years resulting in the destruction of huge reserves of coal. I can provide the estimate of loss of coal in Bihar itself. After the controlling of fire huge reserves of coal were saved.

Now I would like to know explicitly from the Hon'ble Minister what measures the Government are going to take for the subsidence controlling of fire and atmospheric pollution, whether the Government intends to introduce a Bill and pass an Act for this purpose. My suggestion is that there should be an authority for planning, implementing and overseeing environmental and subsidence control measures.

Financial input may be collected through a cess or provided by the Central Government through its agencies like CIL, ECL etc. There is no reason why the constitution of the

\* Translation of the speech originally delivered in Bengali

proposed Authority would be delayed. This is in brief I want to submit.

20.00 hrs

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will continue to sit till the reply by the hon. Minister. I hope the House agrees to this. The hon. Minister may reply now.

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRIP.A. SANGMA): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am grateful to Dr. Pandeya for having brought this issue before the House. The underground fire in coal fields has been a national concern. We treat it as a national disaster. It is because the coal reserves in Jharia area are of cooking coal. It will take some time for our country to achieve self-sufficiency in the requirement of cooking coal in our country.

Sir, the hon. Minister of Steel is sitting beside me. (*Interruptions*)

If we take into account the new exchange rate, we have to import the cooking coal to the tune of 4 to 5 million tonnes. It comes to Rs. 750 crores. Therefore, in order to make the production of cooking coal self-sufficient in our country, it is very important that the underground fire in Jharia is controlled.

The fire was detected in 1916. It is almost 80 years now that the underground fire is going on in Jharia area. It spreads over an area of 17.32 square kilometers. It is a vast area. Now the Government of India had applied a technology called 'thermal energy' and they take photographs with the camera fitted to the place. They take photographs of the underground fire. I had myself gone with them. They are very interesting photographs. We had discovered that there are 70 active

fires in Jharia area. The number of mines are about 14. So far we have estimated that 37 million tonnes of coal has already been burnt. It is because the fire has been there for the past 80 years. It is going on. The value of the coal which has already been damaged comes to Rs. 1,000 crores.

We have tried all sorts of indigenous technology to control that fire. I am not very familiar with the technology. I can only read out whatever technology that has been adopted. They are:

- (i) Trench cutting and its filling with non-combustible matly;
- (ii) Water circulation under pressure and cementation;
- (iii) Digging out completely and isolation; and
- (iv) Inert gas infusion with a view to keep oxygen out."

We have tried this sort of indigenous technologies, but as Prof. Bhattacharya has rightly pointed out, in spite of this money of Rs. 114 crores earmarked, and launching 22 projects, we have been able to extinguish fire from 5 places, we have been able to take protective measures only in three places and we have contained the fire in 13 places. Of course, the fire controlled is in about six places - in five places fire is extinguished completely and one is in the process of being controlled. This is not much, this achievement is not much, I quite agree and I agree with Prof. Bhattacharya that it has not been done completely. But we have made a serious attempt to contain that fire and extinguish that fire. Now, as a result of all the steps that we have taken, the figure which is given to me says that in six places where we have extinguished the fire completely, we have been able to save 85 million tonnes of coal at an estimated value of Rs. 2,125

[Sh. P.A. Sangma]

crores - I mean, where fire has been controlled, it is not extinguished- whereas we have extinguished fire completely in five places and our saving has been 95 million tonnes and the value is Rs. 2,256 crores. Therefore, it is not correct to say that we have done nothing.

SHRI ANIL BASU (Arambagh): How much expenditure you have incurred?

SHRIP.A. SANGMA: Rs. 70 crores. An expenditure of Rs. 70 crores has been incurred out of Rs. 114 crores originally sanctioned.

SHRI SYED MASUDAL HOSSAIN (Murshidabad): What about Raniganj?

SHRIP.A. SANGMA: Raniganj...*(Interruptions)*

Why are you bringing in the question of Raniganju here? Why are you mentioning it?

*(Interruptions)*

But the fact remains that today we have an estimated reserve of 1,864 million tonnes of coking coal. It is a huge deposit and if we are able to control that fire and we are able mine it, then the country can perhaps in the near future become self-sufficient and the value of these 1864 million tonnes of coal is Rs. 45,000 crores. Therefore, from a national angle it is very important that we control this fire. Sir, there are two aspects of it. It is not the mere extinguishing of the fire or controlling the fire that is going to help us. Perhaps with the indigenous technology we may be able to extinguish the fire, but then that does not automatically mean that we will be able to mine that reserve because from the time of extinguishing and from the time you are able to mine it, the minimum period is 10

years to 15 years to even 25 years because the coal reserve has to cool down. In spite of the extinguishing of the fire the heat continues and as long as the heat continues, you cannot mine it. Therefore, our technology did not work because in our technology if we extinguish the fire, we have to close that mine and keep it for 15 years to 20 years to 25 years. After that only we will have to open it an mine it. Therefore, what is required is that two technologies are required, I mean, the technology we require should be of that nature where it will not only extinguish the fire, but it will also extinguish the heat so that mining becomes possible, say, within a couple of years or two or three years or so. That is the reason why we have been searching for an appropriate technology. That answers the question which Madam Bhattacharya has raised, whether it is necessary for us to go abroad and find point out the technology. Yes, it was necessary because of this problem.

SHRIMATI MALINI BHATTACHARYA: What is the harm in making it for ten years or 15 years?

SHRI P.A. SANGMA: Madam, you know, as I said, Rs. 750 crores of coking coal import every year is a huge bill for us. We would like to go in for mining was as far as possible.

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA (Bankura): You can mine in other areas where we have abundant reserves of coking coal...*(Interruptions)*.

SHRIP.A. SANGMA: The other reserves of cooking coal are available in the North Eastern region. It is difficult to bring it to other areas till the transport bottleneck is overcome. The metre gauge line between Guwahati and Dibrugarh which was constructed in 1982 is being converted into broad gauge only this year. Unless this railway line is converted into broad gauge,



we cannot exploit the cooking coal reserves of North Eastern States, which are found in abundance in Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. So, we are taking it up that also.

As soon as I took over the charge, I thought we must give a special thrust to control this fire. I have consulted many experts on this issue and I was informed that in some parts of the United States of America, they also have a fire of this nature, even though not exactly like the one we have here. In fact, the scientists all over the world have told that the underground fires in India are peculiar. It is not there anywhere in the world. We were told that the United States has some technology for it and we must go for it. We have immediately got in touch with the United States Embassy here and they were very kind and responsive, as a result of which, we have sent four engineers to United States of America in the month of November, 1991. They spent two weeks there and they came back on 25th of November, 1991. They had submitted a very detailed report to the Ministry and the first thing that we did was in BCCL, we had established a separate department exclusively to deal with underground fires. Earlier, there was no authority designated specifically to look after it. We have involved all these four engineers who had to the United States of America and they will be the responsible people to implement this project. So, a separate department had been established.

Now, they have come back with four types of technologies which can be applied in India and these four technologies are:

- 1) Use of hydro monitors for quenching the fire followed by excavation of heated debris and coal;
- 2) Drilling under high temperature conditions;

- 3) Infusion of foams through bore-holes; and
- 4) Use of expanded cement-slurry mix for sealing of the cracks and stabilising the area.

These are the four technologies which have been offered by the United States of America and we are told that either all of these technologies or one or two technologies depending on the nature of underground fire will be applicable and useful or effective in India.

Then comes the question of money, because it involves a huge expenditure to control this fire and therefore, we have been looking for external funding. We had approached the World Bank. We have also approached the Ministry of External Affairs to help us to go to UNDP and as the position stands today, a team of World Bank experts had visited India, they had gone to the underground fire areas, made an extensive study of the situation and they have now given us a proposal which they say that it has to be done in two stages. The first thing that has to be done is a diagnostic study and the World Bank has promised that they will be able to fund for the diagnostic study. They have estimated the cost of the diagnostic study at 15.4 million dollars which is again a very huge amount. They said they will be able to give 90 per cent of the money as a long term loan and the remaining 10 per cent has to be given by the Government of India for which we are ready. That is only for diagnostic study. After having done the diagnostic study, the actual implementation of the Project will start.

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA: Is the diagnostic study being done?

SHRIP.A. SANGMA: I am speaking the truth. If you do not agree, I cannot help it. But I am telling you what we are doing.

After diagnostic study, the actual implementation will start. Where will the money come from? There again the sources are we request the World Bank. We continue to try. And as I said, we will also try UNDP etc.

Many hon. Members have pointed out that underground fire means causing lot of damage to environment. It pollutes water and air and much smoke comes out and it is an environmental hazard. Today the whole world is so much concerned about the protection of environment and fighting the things which are against the policy of environment. There are multi-national agencies who are willing to fund as long as the project helps to keep the environment. Therefore, we are hopeful. I am not able to definitely say whether we will be able to get the money. But I am quite hopeful.

I want to assure the House that whether we get the external funding or not, this is a problem which Government of India is prepared to take up, even at our own cost and we will not like money to stand in the way of controlling this fire because in the long-term national interest, this has to be done and we are quite aware of our responsibilities.

SHRIMATI MALINI BHATTACHARYA: Is there any time-frame?

SHRI P.A. SANGMA: After the diagnostic study is done by the World Bank, we will be able to indicate how much time it will require. It will be very difficult for me because it is an opinion of the experts which will be more valid. I am of the opinion that it may not be possible to tell the time-frame. But our intention is to do it as early as possible.

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA: How you

came to the conclusion that you would be able to extinguish the fire by 1994-95?

SHRI P.A. SANGMA: I have not said so. I am saying I cannot say the time-frame.

Then a few points. Dr. Laxminarayan Pandeya spoke about Chirimiri and Shri Haradhan Roy Babu or somebody has also mentioned about that. I could not have detailed information about Chirimiri. But what I recollect is that Chirimiri problem is not problem of underground fire. It is an open cast fire and we have not been able to control the fire because the area does not belong to us and it was under the control of the Department of Forests and Environment. We have taken up with the Ministry of Environment and Forests to hand over that land to us. Then we will be able to control the fire. I do not think it is difficult. It is an open cast fire. I am informed just now that the Ministry of Environment and Forests have agreed to hand over that area to us an, therefore, we can now start the process of extinguishing that fire in Chirimiri area.

SHRI ANIL BASU: What about Raniganj area?

SHRI P.A. SANGMA: Raniganj problem is not a very much of an underground fire. I think Raniganj problem is a problem of subsidence. Fire is also there but not much but mainly it is a subsidence problem. Well, this problem has been going on as to who should do that. The Government of India has always been saying that "We will try to fund it. But Government of West Bengal should execute the Project." Bengal Government says "No. We do not have the expertise to do it. You do it by yourself." So, this dialogue was going on with the Government of West Bengal for a long time. I have written quite a number of letters to the Chief Minister and recently ——— I do not remember the day-very recently, I had a meeting with Chief Minister of West Bengal

at New Delhi. I am happy to inform the hon. Members from West Bengal that we have resolved the issue and we have now decided that the problem of subsidence in Raniganj will now be looked into and the project executed by the Asansol-Durgapur Development Authority. The Asansol-Durgapur Development Authority will have a separate wing exclusively meant to implement this project. That Wing will be helped by the experts from the ECL and CMPDI. The technology, the technical know-how and the technical assistance which is required will be given by the Coal India and the agency for execution is going to be the Asansol-Durgapur Development Authority. I think the House has already been informed on many occasions that a sum of Rs. 5 crores is still lying with the Ministry of Coal. So, we can start the work. I am grateful to the West Bengal Government and particularly to the Chief Minister who has kindly agreed to our suggestion. I am sure that I will be visiting Raniganj very soon. (*Interruptions*)

AN. HON. MEMBER: But this has not been reflected here by Shri Basudeb Acharia and the others. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI P.A. SANGMA: Shri Basudeb Acharia is very happy about it. Unfortunately, what their Chief Minister does, they do not know about it. That is why they asked the question today. Otherwise, it was not necessary to raise this question.

Shri Basudeb Acharia has raised about the Mukunda Project. Here again, I do not

have the details. I think you are very right in saying that the Mukunda Project is not making progress because there are six underground fires there and unless and until the fires are extinguished first, our collaborators are not able to start this project. I do not remember exactly whether it is Poland or the USSR. You say it is Poland. I am told that it is the USSR. I will have to check it up. Whoever it may be, they are not agreeable to start this project unless and until we have extinguished those six underground fires in the Mukunda area. We are taking steps.

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA: Already, Rs. 20 crores has been spent.

SHRI P.A. SANGMA: I think that is the most important point that has been raised. Other points are all general in nature. I have also mentioned about the UNDP, which Dr. Pandeya has raised. This is the information available with me. I can assure the House that we will do everything possible to see that the fire is successfully fought.

Sir, I thank all the Members for giving good suggestions and good information.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, the House stands adjourned to meet again tomorrow, Thursday, the 20th August, 1992 at 11 A.M.

**20.23 hrs**

*The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Thursday, August 20, 1992/Sravana 29, 1914 (Saka)*