

Shri R.V. Swanathan, I beg to lay on the Table a copy of the Coconut Development Board Rules, 1981 (Hindi and English versions) published in Notification No G.S.R. 34(E) in Gazette of India dated the 28th January, 1981, under section 21 of the Coconut Development Board Act, 1979 [Placed in Library See No. LT-2105/81.).

12.04 hrs.

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC UNDERTAKINGS

TWENTY-EIGHTH REPORT

SHRI BANSI LAL (Bhiwani): I beg to present the Tenth Report (Hindi and English versions) of the Committee on Public Undertakings on Action taken by Government on the recommendations contained in the Twenty-eighth Report of Committee on Public Undertakings (Sixth Lok Sabha) on Public Undertakings-Delays in commencement of Production/Business, Under-utilisation of capacity and related matters.

12 05 hrs.

CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

EXPLOSION IN BOKARO STEEL PLANT

SHRI R. K. MHALGI (Thaine): I call the attention of the Minister of Commerce and Steel and Mines to the following matter of urgent public importance and request that he may make a statement thereon:

“Reported explosion in Bokaro Steel Plant on 11 March, 1981 causing death of several persons and injuries to many others.

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND STEEL AND MINES (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE) Sir, I report to the House with grief that an explosion place at 11.08 hours

on Wednesday, the 11th March, 1981 at Bokaro Steel Plant in the gas pipe-line between Blast Furnace No. 3 and 4 which resulted in the death of 9 workers and injuries to 23 others. There were also damages to some installations on the gas line.

2. I have personally been to Bokaro on the 14th instant to acquaint myself with the conditions of the injured persons and to ascertain the details of the damages caused by the explosion.

3. Naturally, our immediate concern was for the unfortunate victims of the explosions who lost their lives and of those who had suffered injuries. The Plant Authorities had taken all steps to give urgent medical aid to the injured and to provide relief to the bereaved families. The amount of compensation has already been deposited with the Workmen Compensation Authorities at Dhanbad for deceased employees of the Company and will be deposited shortly for others. It has been decided that the Steel Plants will offer employment to one dependent of each of the deceased employees. I may assure the House that the relief and assistance has been provided to the families most expeditiously.

4. Out of 23 injured, who were admitted to the hospital at Bokaro, 15 persons have since been discharged after necessary medical aid and 8 are presently in the hospital undergoing treatment. More are expected to be discharged from the hospital within 2 or 3 days. However, the condition of one injured person is stated to be serious.

5. I visited the hospital personally and have met the injured persons and the best is being done for them.

6. Sir, the explosion had occurred at two places of the gas main between the valves located at Blast Furnace No. 3 and Blast Furnace No. 4 and as a result. 5 Nos of the gas valves and a portion of the pipeline had been damaged.

[Shri Pranab Mukherjee]

7. Contrary to what has appeared in a section of the Press, the Plant as a whole has not been crossed down. Blast Furnaces No. 1 and 2, which had been isolated soon after the explosion as a preliminary measure, have been connected back to the gas cleaning plant on the evening of the 12th March, 1981 and are operating normally. Blast Furnace No. 3 will be brought on line on 17th March after repair of the damaged portion of the pipeline and also the valve. All other production units of the Plant have been restored to normal operating capacities. The Slabbing and the hot strip mills are also operating normally from the 13th March.

8. The new Blast Furnace No. 4 will be commissioned after restoration of the pipeline and change of valves which are likely to take six weeks. The two main valves have been rushed from Bharat Steel Plant. The remaining three valves are available at Bokaro and will be installed. Blast Furnace No. 4 is expected to be commissioned by the end of May, 1981.

9. SAIL has already set up a fact finding committee to enquire into the causes of accident and fix responsibility. The committee is expected to submit its report within 15 days. However, in order to bring greater degree of objectivity, Government have decided to set up a high level technical committee consisting of experts of steel and safety to enquire into the causes of accident, fix responsibility and also suggest measures which could avert recurrence of such incidents in future. The committee will consist of the following persons:—

- (i) Dr. S. R. Pramanik, Chief Metallurgical Adviser MECON Chairman.
- (ii) Shri E. F. Shruti, Chief Energy Engineer, Tata Iron and Steel Co. Jamshedpur—Member
- (iii) Shri K. K. Chopra, Chief Expert (Coke Oven and By-Product), SAIL—Member

(iv) Shri A. N. Singh Retd. Chief Inspector of Factories, Government of Bihar—Member

12.97 hrs.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair].

10 Sir, I am sure that this House shares with me the sense of distress and grief on account of the untimely death of 9 valuable workers and injuries to 23 workers. Our hearts go out to bereaved families on their hour of distress to bring solace and support at the loss of their beloved and earning members. I have asked SAIL and Bokaro Steel Plant Authorities to provide unstinted help to the affected families. I assure the House that no effort will be spared to prevent recurrence of such incidents in the Steel Plants. The Government deeply regret the loss of lives and injuries caused in the accident and I am sure the House will join me in expressing heartfelt sympathy to the members of the bereaved families.

SHRI R. K. MHALGI: Sir, I have a few questions to put to the Hon. Minister.

The Managing Director, Mr. T. T. Joseph, had already appointed a five man Committee to report the causes of this explosion without a period of four days. And the fourth day was yesterday. So, I would like to know whether that Committee had gone into the causes of the accident and reported the matter to the concerned authorities. If so, what are the findings of that Committee?

The Second Committee under the SAIL has been appointed. That Committee has to submit its report within a span of fifteen days. Has that Committee been asked to give certain solutions to prevent such accidents to take place?

It is true that that Committee is giving certain findings but has that Committee been asked to give solutions and remedial measures? I am asking

this because this Committee consists of important persons.

Thirdly, it has been stated in the statement that the amount of compensation has already been deposited with the Workmen Compensation Authority at Dhanbad. May I know the amount which has been deposited with the Workmen Compensation Authority at Dhanbad? I want to know one thing more. Have any instructions been issued to inspect and examine regularly the overhead pipeline carrying poisonous carbon monoxide gas? If so, does this concern the pipelines which has exploded at three places? Was it inspected or examined during the last one month? If not, what action is going to be taken against the persons who are expected to visit, inspect and examine that pipeline? So, these are the set of questions I would like to ask.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: I would like to clarify the position regarding the appointment of the Committee.

As the hon. Member is aware, when the accident took place in Bokaro, then the Officer in-Charge of the Plant was Mr Joseph who has been shown at No. 3. As per rules, immediately a Committee was appointed. Naturally it was appointed with the persons who are in the Plant itself. Chairman SAIL was there on the 13th. He thought it would not be proper only to have a Committee consisting of those persons who are under the administrative control of the Plant Management. Subsequently, when I went there on 14th, I had a discussion with the Trade Union representatives. They suggested to me that there should be a Committee which could inspire confidence in the mind of the workers and that those persons should be technically competent and not be subjected to administrative control and supervision of the local management. That is why I decided to appoint the Committee which I have announced right now.

So far as the Committee appointed by the Chairman SAIL is concerned, I

have asked them to give a preliminary report within fifteen days, on the basis of which we can also proceed further. The job of the Committee would be to determine the causes of accident, to find out the responsibility and also to recommend certain measures which are to be taken to prevent such accidents in future.

In regard to compensation, the amount has been deposited with the authorities at Dhanbad under the Workmen Compensation Act, in the case of one employee the amount payable would be Rs. 27,000 and in the case of other five the amount payable would be Rs. 30,000/-. The amount was deposited with the Workmen Compensation Commission by 14-8-1981 by the Management, Bokaro Steel Plant.

The hon. Members are aware, so far as the steel sector is concerned, apart from compensation prescribed under the Workmen Compensation Rules, certain other schemes are also available. The benefit of it will be extended to heirs of the deceased employees. The total amount, taking all the benefits of provident fund and other things, would be roughly between Rs. 85,000 to Rs. 90,000 per employee. Of course, this is in respect of the employees of the Steel Plant. The hon. Member is aware that there are certain other employees also. Out of 9 employees, 6 are Steel Plant employees and 3 are contractor's employees. So far as contractor's employees are concerned, as the hon. Member is aware, they have a different scheme. According to that scheme, I think, they will get roughly about Rs. 18,000. But as the hon. Members would appreciate, in a situation like this, we shall have to take a compassionate view and that is why I have asked the Steel Plant authorities to find out certain modalities through which we can help those employees who are not the Steel Plant employees. But, at the same time, perhaps all of you will agree with me, that we cannot form a blanket rule. One decision that we have taken on the spot is that one member of each

[Shri R. K. Mhalgi]

of the deceased families would be provided with a job irrespective of whether they were the employees of the Steel Plant or of the contractor. That decision we have already taken and I have instructed the authorities to do it as quickly as possible.

SHRI R. K. MHALGI: My third query has not been replied to, whether there are any standing instructions.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: This is being regularly inspected. As the hon. Member is aware, this accident took place when we were connecting the third blast furnace gasline with the fourth blast furnace which was to be commissioned on 27th March. The Russian experts are also involved there who are commissioning the Plant. I personally had a discussion with them and some of the Russian experts visited the place along with our people also even a couple of hours before the accident took place. So, the necessary supervision and inspection took place and it was a regular job. The hon. Member is aware that practically the work started from 1st week of March, a few gas valves were burnt on 5th March, the work of supplying gas started from 7th March and the accident took place on 11th March.

SHRI SUSHIL BHATTACHARYA (Burdwan): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, the Bokaro Steel Plant produces carbonised steel and, therefore, there is every likelihood of carbon monoxide being produced in the gas pipes. Naturally, some safety measures are required to be taken. He has already given a reply that some steps have been taken. But, I think, they are not sufficient. I would like to ask a few questions.

May I know from the hon. Minister who supplied the pipes for the plant, whether the pipes were tested that they can withstand necessary tension, (b) whether the pipes are overhauled over a specified period and whether preventive measures, including supplying of gas masks were taken and what was the inspection report prior

to accident and (c) whether the Government will see that necessary precautionary measures will be taken so that such accidents do not occur in future. Of course, the hon. Minister in his reply has said that a fact finding committee has been instituted and they will see to it that such accidents do not occur in future.

Lastly, I would like to know how many permanent Steel Plant workers and how many contractor's workers were working and whether contractor's workers were engaged in perennial jobs.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: As regards the last question of the hon. Member, I have given the break-up. Out of 9 persons who died, 6 were the employees of the Steel Plant and 3 were the employees of contractor and a few of them were appointed by the ISL also which is a public sector organisation meant for construction of the steel plants.

In regard to the testing of the pipes, it is being done regularly. Whether there is any defect and whether the materials were of not upto the specifications, all these technical points would be answered when we will get the report and after making a thorough investigation into the causes of the accident which led to it. All the necessary precautions—because we are not new to the job, we have done this earlier also in Bokaro we have done the same job—were taken. As I have mentioned, when a new work is initiated, a protocol is signed as to who will supervise and what type of action is to be taken. When the detailed reports are available to us, we will be in a position to ascertain the causes of the accident. But, as it may appear, it is open, as the hon. Member would appreciate, the pipelines are going about eight to ten metres above the ground, therefore, gas mask or other things are not necessary there. Those people who were working there were working in different areas, and when the explosion took place, as a result, and as an impact, of the explosion,

the persons died. It is not because of poisonous gas that the people died. Quite a number of injuries took place when the people just started jumping in panic from the high altitude. These pipes are made here, indigenously. The pipes are tested regularly before they are put to commission. The gas is, by and large, under very low pressure and, therefore, it is not necessary to have anything. But how it took place, whether the necessary steam was not there, whether the atmospheric pressure was more, all this technical information I just cannot supply right now—unless I get detailed reports. But from preliminary observations it appears that it was an accident; whether the accident was caused by human failure or by mechanical difficulties or technical lapses, that is yet to be determined.

SHRI NAWAL KISHORE SHARMA (Dausa): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, whatever has happened in Bokaro is a grim tragedy wherein many lives have been lost and so many have been injured. It was good of the Minister to have personally visited the place of occurrence and instructed the authorities to take a lenient view about compensation and other matters. Though the preliminary inquiry report has yet to come, from the reply of the hon. Minister as he has stated before the House it appears that the Russian experts had been to the place of occurrence two hours ago, and according to him, all precautions were taken. Besides the employees, there were some labourers or persons of the contractor engaged in the job. It has been reported in a section of the press that, out of the persons who were dead, at least two of them have not been identified. Therefore, I would like to put to the hon. Minister two or three important questions. He has said that, in all these cases, a protocol has to be signed. My first question is whether it is a fact that, in this case, a protocol was not signed. Secondly, were the employees of the contractor the right type of skilled persons to do the job? Thirdly, does he not suspect a case of

sabotage in this? Because, Bokaro is a very important Steel Plant, the biggest in India, and with the production of steel going up, it is not possible that some interested persons might have thought of seeing to it that the Steel Plant did not work? Because had the gas not been burnt, probably the damage would have been much wider.

I would also like the Minister to state whether he considers this practice of engaging contractors labour in such a delicate job desirable, because anybody who comes as an employee of the contractor is likely to commit any mischief.

These are the questions which I would like the Minister to reply.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: So far as the identification of the persons is concerned, everybody has been identified and as I have already mentioned, out of the 9 persons dead, 6 are employees of the Bokaro Steel Plant and 3 are employees of the contractors.

In regard to the second question whether the protocol was signed, yes, the protocol was signed. (*Interruptions*) I am told it was signed. If they have given me any wrong information on the basis of which I am giving you this information, then they have to account for it. (*Interruptions*) I tried and I wanted to talk to you, Shastriji, but you had just left before I reached there. I talked to your people also and they did not make the complaint that the protocol was not signed. . . .

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: How is it that Mr. Shastri who is the President of the biggest Union there had left that place?

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: I do not know. But he left. Not only had he left but he also took his important comrade, Mr. Bhagat Singh with him. (*Interruptions*) He was not there I was told that he was accompanying you. Your people did not tell me that

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the protocol had not been signed. I asked the Chairman to ascertain and verify it—whether the protocol was signed and I was informed that it had been signed and I do not think they will give wrong information on a matter like this.

In regard to the point whether it is a case of sabotage or not, I do not think it will be possible for me to indicate right at this stage unless the investigation takes place....

SHRI NAWAL KISHORE SHARMA: I only said 'Is it suspected?' not that it was a case of sabotage.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Certain newspaper people have made certain comments but even the persons with whom I talked there, the officers and the trade union representatives, did not indicate such things but they insisted, 'You must have an inquiry', and that the inquiry body should be independent of the local management so that the things may come out. That is why I have appointed a Committee like that and let us wait till we get the report.

In regard to the appointment of the contractor's labour, this is the practice. This job was given to HSCL. HSCL is a public sector organisation. Sometimes they also give their work to the sub-contractors and they were working in different parts. Actually, the accident did not take place out of any work done by them....

SHRI NAWAL KISHORE SHARMA: Were these contractor's men employees of the HSCL or they were only contractor's men?

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: They were the contractor's men contractor appointed by the HSCL.

What I was trying to point out is that the incident did not take place out of certain work being done by these employees. They became the victims of the explosion that took place at 2 or 3 points. They were

working in the nearby areas—in the neighbourhood and they became the victims of the explosion. That is the point I wanted to make.

श्री हरीश चन्द्र सिंह रावत (अल्मोड़ा):
उपाध्य जी, मैं मंत्री जी को घन्यवाद देता हूँ कि उन्होंने इस दुःखद दुर्घटना के सम्बन्ध में सहानुभूति व्यक्त की और उनके विभाग ने काफी तत्परता दिखाई। मैं मंत्री महोदय से एक बात जानना चाहता हूँ कि कट्टेक्टर्स के श्रमिकों और बोकारो स्टील प्लांट के श्रमिकों को मिलने वाले मुद्दावजे में जो अन्तर है, उसको ध्यान में रखते हुए क्या कट्टेक्टर्स के श्रमिकों के मुद्दावजे की राशि में बढ़ोतरी की जाएगी और उनके आश्रित जो लायक हैं, उनको रोजगार देने की कृपा की जाएगी?

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, as I mentioned, in so far as the steel workers are concerned various schemes are operating there. As a result of these schemes, naturally, a steel worker gets much more compared to the contractor's worker. Here, unfortunately, we are placed in a situation which is really a tragic one where many have lost their lives and it would not be possible for me to just over-rule the existing laws and practice at the moment. I cannot also ignore this fact that the persons have lost their lives. That is why one decision we have taken already. That is that jobs will be provided to the dependents of every deceased irrespective of whether they are contractor's employees or ours—steel plant employees.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: You mean providing of jobs in the steel plant itself.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: In the steel plant itself.

In regard to the amount of compensation, what they are normally entitled to, they will get according to the Workmen's Compensation Act. We

can compensate them by providing something more than that. That is a matter in which I have asked them to evolve a scheme. But, that should not be treated as a precedent because this precedent will be quoted in other cases also. That is why I am examining the possibility without making any commitment. I would like to say what best can be done by them.

12.34 hrs.

STATEMENT RE: INTENSIVE TICKET CHECKING DRIVE ON NORTHERN RAILWAY

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Now the statement by Shri Kedar Pandey.

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI KEDAR PANDEY): rose
(Interruptions)

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE (New Delhi): Sir, you remember that this question was raised by some Opposition Members and the hon. Speaker had promised that the Members would be given opportunities to discuss the matter. Now you are calling upon the Minister to make a statement.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: He is making a statement. That is all.

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE: You will allow us to seek some clarifications. The statement is being made in response to our demand made on the floor of the House.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: The statement made by the Minister cannot be discussed afterwards.

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE: What do you mean by that? Every statement can be discussed.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: He is making a *suo motu* statement. It cannot be discussed. I will not allow that under the rule, I have given my ruling.

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE: You can change the rule. You are all-powerful when you are in the Chair.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Now, the statement by the hon. Minister.

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE: It will not be fair.

श्री रामावतार शास्त्री (पटना) :
यह बहुत ही महत्वपूर्ण सवाल है।
क्लेरिफिकेशन मांगने का पीका मिलना
चाहिए।

श्री राम बिलास पासवान (हाजीपुर):
हम लोगों की डिमांड के ऊपर ही स्पीकर
साहब स्टेटमेंट दिलवा रहे हैं। इसके
बाद मैम्बरज का जो राइट हो जाता है
क्लेरिफिकेशन सीक करने का, उसको
आप कैसे रोक सकते हैं?

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: After the statement by the Minister, I won't allow anybody to seek any clarification or any discussion. Now the hon. Minister.

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI KEDAR PANDEY): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, they may do that at the time when the supplementary demands for the Railways are placed before the House. You will get an opportunity to discuss this. There is no hurry about it.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: You may now make a statement. (Interruptions)

श्री रामावतार शास्त्री : मंत्री जी
एक तरफ़ा बयान दे देंगे। उधर की बात
तो आ जाएगी लेकिन हम लोगों की बात
नहीं आ सकेगी। हमारी बात भी आनी
चाहिए।