

[Shri Manoranjan Bhakta]

The hon. Member opposite referred to seaman and asked what will happen if a cooperative society purchased a vessel.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think you would like to continue tomorrow.

SHRI MANORANJAN BHAKTA: Yes.

MR CHAIRMAN: You may continue tomorrow. The House will now take up the half-an-hour discussion.

17.30 hrs.

HALF-AN-HOUR DISCUSSION

LOOTING OF COMBINATION CARRIER 'VALLABHBHAI PATEL'

MR. CHAIRMAN: The House will now take up the Half-an-Hour Discussion.

SHRI BAPUSAHEB PARULEKAR (Ratnagiri): Mr. Chairman, this Half-an-Hour Discussion arises from the reply given to Starred Question No. 69 on 20th August 1981. The question reads

"(a) is it a fact that a combination carrier "Vallabhbhai Patel" going to Japan from Visakhapatnam, was looted by pirates when it was passing through the Philip channel, off Singapore;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) action taken by Government in the matter?"

The reply was given by way of a statement, which was laid on the Table of the House. As the question was not reached, no supplementaries could be asked at that particular time.

This statement, *inter alia*, mentions many things which I find something like a cock and bull story. The statement says:

"...a robbery took place on the vessel while she was transiting

about 9-10 miles away from Singapore Port through Philip Channel, Singapore Straits on 16-6-81 at 21.30 hrs Singapore time. The facts of the case are that three armed robbers boarded the vessel using lines with hooks while she was steaming at full speed. They came unnoticed straight on the Captain's Deck and entered the Captain's cabin. They demanded the keys of the safe and, on not finding the same, they took off the jewellery from the Master's wife and ransacked the cabin cupboard for money and valuables. They were armed with long knives and samurals. They took all the personal currency of the Master."

Leaving the details, the further statement is still more interesting:

"The loss in Indian rupees currency on account of the entire property taken away by robbers is estimated at about Rs. 12,000/-. Immediately on their leaving his cabin, the Chief Officer informed the Master on the Bridge. After taking necessary precautions, a thorough search was made but no one was found."

This is what surprises me more. We, hon. Members of Parliament, are asked to believe that when the ship was steaming at full speed off the Singapore port at 21.30 hours, these robbers came—we do not know whether they came by boats or they came swimming—they boarded the ship, not only that, they were not obstructed, they had full access to the Captain's cabin, they went there, they ransacked the cabin cupboard, looted the place, took some ornament and some gold and some currency, and they vanished.

When I read this particular statement, I thought I was reading stories from the Arabian Nights. Ultimately, when I read the story about this vanishing, I thought that this is the

story of the invisible man. If we were to believe the story, as stated by the hon. Minister, there is no doubt that these pirates or robbers are very competent, and we need such people in our defence forces in case of war. I would request the hon. Minister to recommend these people to the Defence Minister so that we can utilize them in times of war. In my respectful submission, it is very difficult to believe this story.

In view of the answer which has been given, some part of which I have read, I would like to ask some questions to the hon. Minister. The first question is whether these three pirates approached this particular ship, Vallabhbhai Patel by boat, whether they came swimming and, if they came swimming—I believe the hon. Minister may not say so, because when the ship was sailing at full speed, it is not possible for the robbers to come swimming, keeping pace with that speed—from which side they came.

Secondly, I do not know how many times the hon. Minister has travelled by ship, but it is common knowledge that when the ship is sailing at full steam and when it breaks through water, it is not possible for anyone to climb from the back side, where there is the propellor; it is also not possible from the front side when it is speeding, because when it is breaking water at full speed, waves are created and anyone who tries to go swimming near the ship is thrown 100 feet away from that particular ship.

So, I would like to know as to how these people approached and how did they board this particular ship and whether the inquiries to which we have referred to have revealed as to how they boarded this particular ship. One more statement has been made about using lines with hooks. I am not in a position to follow what exactly the hon. Minister means by this.

Unless they have a rope and they put that rope into the hooks...

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT (SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL): That is called rope.

SHRI BAPUSAHEB PARULEKAR: That is exactly what I say. They carried a rope and moved through the rope and the aim was so nice that the rope exactly fitted into the hook. When the ship was steaming in full speed, with that rope, we are told, they boarded this particular ship.

Another thing which I would like to know as far as my little knowledge goes is that a watch is kept in the ship and under the state of shipping, watch they must keep. I understand the incident took place at 9.30. It is not known whether any watch was kept on the Captain's cabin, and I believe that the Captain's cabin is on the top just near the bridge and it was impossible that any one can reach the Captain's cabin without being noticed because I have suggested in my statement that this is not a case of robbery as it is, but it is a stage-managed robbery probably committed by the crew themselves to loot the money of the Corporation because further we find that all these persons passed from one storey to the other and reached up to the Chief Officer's cabin, there they robbed his wife, and there were three persons, the Chief Officer, his wife and one more person and there are three robbers and when this robbery was taking place just near the bridge of the ship and in the Captain's cabin and the Chief Officer's cabin all the crew had no knowledge of it.

Sir, you may be having an idea that there is an alarm bell in the Captain's cabin and in the cabin of the Chief Officer. These people, leave aside any protests, did not think it wise to ring this particular alarm bell.

Sir, last but not the least, I do not know as to how did these gentlemen

[Shri Bapusaheb Parulekar]

vanish and what did they rob? They robbed the currency notes and with the currency notes they pumped into the ocean. We are led to believe that they are invisible men or they jumped into the ocean at midnight and they got this amount of Rs. 12,000/-. They jumped into the sea. It is strange, I am unable to believe this, I am unable to gulp the story. Therefore, the circumstances, in my respectful submission, forced me to conclude that this must have been stage-managed. What is the amount that is usually kept with the Captain, which the Shipping Corporation gives? With whom are the keys and what is the assumption? If that is the case with the Shipping Corporation of India which is a Government concern, it is very easy to loot the entire money or the entire property which is entrusted with the Captain of the ship if no proper watch is kept. Further, it is mentioned that immediately after the incident, some message was sent to Singapore police. May I know the text of the message? What was the immediate disclosure? Your answer also mentions that some message was sent to the Bombay office of the Shipping Corporation. What is the text of this message? And from 16th of June till this day, what is the inquiry made? As I said, the circumstances show that the incident must have taken place as is narrated here and the incident must be a fake one and the crew and officers must have a hand in it. They inquiry by the Shipping Corporation's officers itself is not sufficient. It would be necessary that investigation be made by a high power committee, a Parliamentary Committee, assisted and aided by the Director General of Shipping. Then alone the truth would come out. I would, therefore, request the hon. Minister to reply to the questions which I have raised for his consideration. Thank you.

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT (SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL): Hon. Parulekar is one

of our senior and experienced Members of this House. I am very sorry that he attributed motives to the offices and the crew of the Shipping Corporation of India on the ship where, unfortunately, the robbery took place. Unfortunately, on that day, the question could not reach. Otherwise, both the Member who has put the question and also myself would have had an ample opportunity to reply to all the questions put by the hon. Member Shri Parulekar and other hon. Members also.

In reply to the Starred Question No. 69, I placed on the Table of the House a Statement. The hon. Member Shri Parulekar may be in possession of that statement. But I do not think the other hon. Members who are present here, they are in possession of the statement that I had laid on the table of the Sabha on that day. Therefore, for the benefit of those hon. Members who have not read the statement, I want to give in brief the facts regarding robbery on that day.

According to the information received from the Shipping Corporation of India, a robbery took place on the vessel while she was transiting about 9-10 miles away from Singapore Port through Philip Channel, Singapore straits on 16-6-1981 at 21.30 hrs. Singapore time.

The facts of the case are that three armed robbers boarded the vessel using lines with hooks while she was steaming at full speed. They came un-noticed straight on the Captain's Deck and entered the Captain's cabin. They demanded the keys of the safe and, on not finding the same, they took off the jewellery from the Master's wife and ransacked the cabin cupboard for money and valuables. They were armed with long knives and samurals. They took all the personal currency of the Master.

Out of these three robbers, one of the robbers was standing in the

Master's Cabin Room and the other two robbers went to the Chief Officer's cabin where the Chief Officer, his wife and the Chief Steward were sitting. They threatened them and took off the wedding ring and wrist watch from the Chief Officer's wife. They ransacked their cubboards and took all their personal cash.

The following items were taken away by the robbers:

From Captain's Cabin

(A) Gold Jewellery	40 Gms.
(B) One wrist watch	
(C) Currency : U.S. Dollars	500
K. Dinar	30
D. Marks	150
D. Guilders	310
Indian Rupees	200

From Chief Officers's Cabin

(A) Gold Ring	10 Gms.
(B) Seiko Quartz Wrist Watch	
(C) Currency U.S. Dollars	200
Indian Rupees	200

These are the articles which have been robbed by the robbers. According to the estimate in Indian currency the estimated cost of these articles which have been robbed is Rs. 12,000/-. Immediately after that they searched on the Board and immediately after that the Master of the ship reported to our Agent in Singapore and also he reported to the Shipping Corporation of India Office. Our agent in Singapore in turn contacted the Ministry of Home Affairs in Singapore and also the marine police. He tried his best. This is the position.

Now, the hon. Member feels that it is a cock and bull story. He wanted to know how these robbers boarded the ship...

SHRI BAPUSAHEB PARULEKAR:
And vanished.

SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL: I am coming to that.

When we received this information, we from the Ministry have already asked the Shipping Corporation of India to investigate into the whole matter and make a detailed report to the Government. So far as these matters are concerned, it is for the Shipping Corporation of India to investigate and then submit a report to the Government. After getting the report, I would have no hesitation in making available a copy of the report if the hon. Member wants. I will have no hesitation in placing a copy of the report on the Table of the House because we do not want to suppress anything. But I was very much pained when the hon. Member said that this is a cock and bull story, that this was connived at and that this was conspired with by the officers in order to misappropriate the money of the Shipping Corporation of India.

According to the rules and regulations of the Shipping Corporation of India, the Master of the ship is permitted to carry only Rs. 500/- to meet emergency expenditure while he is on the voyage. So, he was having only Rs. 500/-. Whatever the property is lost, it is not the property of the Shipping Corporation of India. It is the property of the Captain's wife; it is the property of the Chief Officer's wife. It is the personal property of these two officers. It is not the property of the Shipping Corporation of India. So, when the Shipping Corporation of India has not suffered any loss, I do not know how the hon. Member is imagining that this has been done only to misappropriate the funds of the Shipping Corporation of India. Where is the question of misappropriating the funds of the Shipping Corporation of India? The Captain of the ship was carrying only Rs 500/-. You know that the Shipping Corporation of

[Shri Veerendra Patil]

India have got their offices all over the world. Wherever the ships of the Shipping Corporation of India go, the representatives of the Shipping Corporation of India are there. When the Captain of the ship belonging to the Shipping Corporation of India requires anything, he will ask the agent to supply all the material and he will ask the agent to give whatever he needs. Therefore, he need not carry anything with him. Therefore, I am very sorry when the hon. Member says that this is a cock and bull story, that this has been connived at and that there is a conspiracy in order to misappropriate the amount of the Shipping Corporation of India.

I may tell for the information of the hon. Member that, after this robbery took place, the ship first went to Tokyo, to Japan, and from there, the ship went to USA. It is still in USA. The officers are drawing a salary of Rs. 6000 to Rs. 8000 per month. I want to know from the hon. Member: Will an officer who is drawing a salary of Rs. 6000 to Rs. 8000 per month stoop down to the level of stage-managing a conspiracy or a drama in order to misappropriate only Rs. 500/- which the Captain of the ship was carrying with himself? Even that money was not looted. Even that money was not misappropriated. Even that money was not lost by the Captain of the ship. The amount that was lost, the jewellery that was lost, it was the personal property of the captain's wife, it was the personal property of the Chief Officer and his wife and, there is no question of compensating it. We are not compensating, nor have they asked for any compensation. There is no question of giving compensation at all.

Now the question arises: What action was taken? There is no question of taking any legal action because this robbery took place when

the ship was sailing on the high sea. (Interruptions).

It was sailing in international waters. So when the ship was sailing in international waters, then, where is the question of taking action against whom? The culprits were not apprehended. They disappeared. When they disappeared, there is no question of taking action. Against whom they take action?

MR. CHAIRMAN: How they boarded?

SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL: I am coming to that. We can only presume because nobody has seen how they boarded. Nobody knows, even; the Hon. Member agrees with me, that nobody knows how they have boarded. The Hon. Member's presumption is that they might have come by swimming. It is impossible to come by swimming because the ship cruises at the speed of 12 nautical miles per hour. I think, according to my assessment, according to my guess, they might have come by a speeding boat. You know the speeding boat has got, the boat they came by, a speed of 15 to 20 nautical miles. They might have come by speeding boat and their *modus operandi*, according to me it seems, because I have to receive a report and then only will I be in a position to give details to whatever the Hon. Member has asked and is going to ask. But, according to our assessment, the *modus operandi* normally is that they come alongside on to the ship's railings and they throw a rope with the hook, line with the hook means they throw a rope with a hook, attach it to; the ship's railings, this hook gets tagged on to the railing and one of the persons can climb to the ship using the rope and after going on board the other colleagues in the boat will throw another rope to him which he ties up to the railing of the ship. With the help of this rope, the other members climb the ship, keeping one or two to stay; back in the boat. This is the *modus operandi*.

I am presuming this because when the robbers left the cabin, when they left and then disappeared, after ten minutes these officers came out and then they raised a hue and cry, they shouted and they collected all the crew. They searched the ship and when they searched the ship, they saw a rope which was tied to the railings and it was trailing in the waters. So, the presumption is that they might have come by boat and they might have used the rope in order to board the ship and after looting the property, again by the same rope they might have gone into the boat. It is possible because the speed of the ship is 12 nautical miles and the speed of the boat is 18 to 20 nautical miles and I agree with the Hon. Member that they were all professionals. It is not possible for ordinary pirate to do this job. They must be professionals and I am told, according to the report that we have received, that they were not wearing any; shirt or anything. They were only wearing half-pant, that was also coloured pant and their body was fully oiled. So they came and only three people had come. Now the question is why did they not prevent them. Why they did not obstruct? But they had come with all arms, with big knives and with *samurais* which are used at the time of robbery. When they came with these arms, thrashed and threatened our officers, our officers naturally had to keep quiet. Only when they left, they came out and shouted, collected the people and searched the whole ship but they could not find them, as by that time they had disappeared..

SHRI SUNIL MAITRA (Calcutta North East): What about watch? Do the ships not keep a watch?

SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL: I agree with the hon. Member. In every ship there is a watchman.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You please conclude by 6 p.m.

SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL: I do not know whether it is possible because he has raised so many points. If I do not answer all the point raised by the hon. Member, then they may feel that whatever I have not answered may be correct.

श्री राजेश कुमार सिंह (फिरोजाबाद):
भाप कोई नई बात नहीं कह रहे हैं, उस
बयान को दोहरा रहे हैं।

SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL: I said that the watchman in the ship is generally posted in the front part of the ship to look after any approaching ship. But it appears to me that these robbers have boarded the ship from the rear side and not from the front side. ...

SHRI BAPUSAHEB PARULEKAR: Even the boat coming could not be seen by the watchman?

SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL: I come to that point also. ...

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think the report has not come to you.

SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL: That is all right. But whatever information I have got, I can give that information.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Perhaps Mr. Parulekar goes in to the seas sometimes.

SHRI BAPUSAHEB PARULEKAR: I always go, Sir.

SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL: The hon. Member asked the question how these robbers could go straight to the Captain's cabin unnoticed. I want to inform the hon. Member the procedure and also the practice which is that after sunset, only five navigational lights are required to be switched on as per international regulations for prevention of collision at sea and all other lights are switched off. During night time there is complete darkness on the ship except five lights. Therefore, there was complete darkness that day. The ship is an air-conditioned ship. When the air-conditioning plant is running there is a substantial amount of noise which makes it difficult or any person moving in the da-

[Shri Veerendra Patil]

rkness barefoot to be observed. There fore, it is not correct to say, how could they come unnoticed. That is how they have come and they went straight to the Captain's cabin.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I hope you have replied to all the points.

SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL: No, Sir. ...

Now, coming to the last point, the hon. Member suggests that we should appoint a high-power committee and, if possible, a Committee of the Parliament. I do not know what purpose is going to be served by appointing such a high power committee. Because, here, the property was lost by the officer. It was not the property of the Shipping Corporation of India.

18 hrs.

SHRI BAPUSAHAB PARULEKAR: It is not a question of money. You are repeatedly saying this. I am very sorry. What is the *modus operandi* of this that is important.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Let him conclude.

SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL: The hon. Member has made a charge that it is a faked story managed by the crew members of the Shipping Corporation of India. This is the charge you made. That is why I say where is the question of misappropriation of funds.

SHRI BAPUSAHEB PARULEKAR: I did say that. What I said was that if this story of boarding the ship and then vanishing is an impossibility, then somebody on board/must have done this. What is the logical inference that can be drawn? You are not considering this aspect but you are diverting from that. You are taking the middle path.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You will kindly conclude.

SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL: Sir, I want to assure the hon. Member that we are expecting a detailed report

from the Shipping Corporation of India. After getting a detailed report, if he wants, I shall make available a copy of that report to him. Or, if you so desire, I am prepared to place a copy of that report on the table of the House. I want to say that in the history of the Shipping Corporation of India, this is the first robbery on a ship on high sea that has taken place. No such incident was brought to our notice so far in the history of the Shipping Corporation of India. So, there is no question of any cock and bull story being built up or any concocted story being put up in this case. Nobody is interested as it is the property of these officers which has been lost.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Rajesh Kumar Sing: Please be brief. Kindly pur your questions.

श्री राजेश कुमार सिंह : सभापति
दय, माननीय मंत्री जी ने पहले जो
स्टाई क्वेश्चन में उत्तर दिया था, उसी
को पुनः दोहरा दिया है। मैं उसी संदर्भ
में पूछना चाहता हूँ—माननीय मंत्री जी
को इंटरनेशनल सी-लाज की पूरी जान-
कारी होगी, किसी नेशन की, जो समुद्र
के किनारे पड़ते हैं, सी-वाटर में टेरिटो-
रियल लिमिट कितनी होती है, उस की
सीमा क्या है ? माननीय मंत्री जी ने
अभी कहा कि यह जहाज 8-9 मील की
दूरी पर था, यदि यह सही है तो क्या
वह इंटरनेशनल वाटर लिमिट में था ?
क्या 8-9 मील की दूरी सिंगापुर की
टेरिटोरियल वाटर लिमिट में नहीं आती
है, यदि आती है तो मैं जानना चाहूंगा
कि सिंगापुर सरकार का इस सम्बन्ध
में क्या कहना है ? मैं आप को बतलाना
चाहता हूँ कि 1958 तक यह परम्परा
रही है कि वाटर लिमिट 3 मील की
होती थी, लेकिन आज यह सीमा 12
मील की है, ऐसी स्थिति में सिंगापुर
सरकार के होम-अफेयर्स ने कैसे यह उत्तर
दिया कि वह उन की जुरिसडिक्शन में

नहीं था। मेरे ख्याल में आप का यह वक्तव्य शिपिंग कारपोरेशन आफ इण्डिया ने भेज दिया है, जिस को आप ने पढ़ कर सुना दिया, बिना यह जानकारी हासिल किये हुए कि जो वास्तव में वाटर टेरि-टोरियल लिमिटेड है वह कहां तक थी और यह जहाज उस सीमा में आता था या नहीं। क्या आप ने यह जानकारी हासिल की है, यदि नहीं की है तो क्या आप सिंगापुर सरकार से यह जानकारी हासिल करेंगे ?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shri Ramavatar Shastri—not here. Shri Kamla Mishra Madhukar—not here. Now, the Minister. Do you want to add anything?

श्री बीरेन्द्र पाटिल: सभापति जी, माननीय सदस्य ने यह पूछा है कि सिंगापुर गवर्नमेंट को आप ने इन्फार्म किया या नहीं। अगर इन्फार्म किया है तो उन्होंने क्या कार्यवाही की है। मैंने पहले कहा है कि ज्यों ही राबरी हुई और वे लोग निकल गये, उस के बाद शिप के मास्टर ने हमारे सिंगापुर में जो शिपिंग एजेंट हैं...

श्री राजेश कुमार सिंह: मैंने 8-9 मील की दूरी के बारे में पूछा है।

श्री बीरेन्द्र पाटिल—शिपिंग कारपोरेशन आफ इण्डिया के जो एजेंट हैं, उन को उन्होंने मेसेज भेजा था। शिपिंग कारपोरेशन आफ इण्डिया के जो

एजेंट सिंगापुर में हैं, मेसेज मिलने के साथ ही उन्होंने होम मिनिस्ट्री को कन्टेक्ट किया और मेरिटाइम पुलिस को भी कांटेक्ट किया। होम मिनिस्ट्री ने यह कहा कि यह जो रोबरी हुई है, वह हमारी टेरिटरी में नहीं हुई है, हमारे जो टेरि-टोरियल वाटर्स हैं, उन के बाहर हुई है और इन्टरनेशनल वाटर्स में यह बात हुई है। इसलिए हम कुछ कार्यवाही नहीं कर सकते। मेरिटाइम पुलिस ने कहा कि हारबर में कुछ होता तो हम कार्यवाही करते लेकिन यह रोबरी हाई सीज में हुई है, इसलिए हम कार्यवाही नहीं कर सकते।

मैं आप को यह जानकारी भी देना चाहता हूँ कि यह जो रोबरी हुई है, वह सिंगापुर से 8-10 किलोमीटर के फासले पर हुई है, यह सिंगापुर वाटर्स में भी नहीं हुई है बल्कि इन्डोनेशियन वाटर्स की टेरिटरी के बाहर हुई है और इन्टर-नेशनल वाटर्स में यह हुई है।

MR. CHAIRMAN: The House stands adjourned till 11 O'clock on Tuesday, the 1st September, 1981.

18.07 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the clock on Tuesday, September 1, 1981/Bhadra 10, 1903 (Saka).