

12.48 hrs.

**CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER
OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE****REPORTED DEATH OF 40 PILGRIMS NEAR
JUNAGADH**

SHRI P. M. MEHTA (Bhavnagar): I call the attention of the Minister of Home Affairs to the following matter of urgent public importance and request that he may make a statement thereon:

"The reported death of 40 pilgrims near Junagadh on the occasion of Mahashivratri fair on the 11th March, 1975."

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI K. BRAHMANANDA REDDY): Sir, according to preliminary reports received from the Government of Gujarat, the tragedy occurred at 10-15 A.M. on 11th March, 1975. There was a heavy rush of pilgrims going up the Mount Girnar on the occasion of Mahashivratri. A 16 feet long portion of the protective parapet wall above Maliparab gave way when the pilgrims were going up the mount. They fell down the mountain side involving a steep fall of about 200 feet resulting in the death of 26 persons and injuries to 10.2 of the injured are reported to be in a serious condition. 20 bodies have been identified and handed over to relations. On receiving the news the Deputy Inspector General of Police, Rajkot Range, and the Superintendent of Police, Junagadh rushed to the spot with medical relief, police re-inforcements as well as some prominent Sadhus and arranged for first aid as well. They also shifted the dead and injured and supervised safe passage for other pilgrims. The State Government have sanctioned a sum of Rs. 500 to the family of every male earning member deceased and Rs. 250 in every other case subject to a maximum of Rs. 1,500 per family.

It is a matter of deep grief that a number of persons got killed or injured

in the accident and the Government of India express their deepest sympathy with the bereaved families and the injured persons. Investigation is in progress. It has been decided to appoint the District Magistrate, Junagadh, to conduct an inquiry into the matter.

SHRI P. M. MEHTA: A very sad, sorrowful and tragic incident occurred on the auspicious day of Maha Shivaratri on the mountain Girnar at Junagadh, which is a medium-sized city at the foot of the Mountain Girnar. Nature has gifted this mountain with charming natural beauty. It has a health-giving climate and sweet water flowing from its rocks. Girnar has its own historical significance. It has witnessed many historical events but never a tragedy like this.

26 persons were killed and 10 injured according to the Minister's statement. We express our grief and sympathy with the near and dear of the deceased. Non-official reports locally say that many more have been killed and injured. This tragedy occurred near a point called Ranakdevi between Maliparab and Jain temples atop. In Saurashtra region, three mountains are famous for pilgrimage—Girnar, Shetrunjay and Taluja.

More than two lakhs people had collected for the famous Maha Shivaratri fair at the foot of the mountain on 11th March. Many of them were trekking the mountain when this tragedy occurred. This tragedy could have been avoided if the State Government had acted with some intelligence and a little imagination. Everybody in Saurashtra knows that lakhs of people assembled at the foot of the Mountain Girnar on the auspicious day of Maha Shivaratri every year. When people in such large numbers gather in a place, it goes without saying that on such-like occasions the authorities must have made necessary arrangements to overcome such type of eventualities. This should have been done with some imagination and some intelligence, which we do not

[Shri P. M. Mehta]

expect from this type of administration by the President's Rule. It could be done only by a popular government. Had they arranged traffic control, that is to say, regularising pedestrian traffic at a reasonable distance on the slow slopes of the mountains, this tragedy could have been avoided. Was any temporary communication system installed on the mountain on the occasion of the Mahashivratri at Girnar?

According to the statement, the incident took place at 10.15 A.M. on the 11th March. When did the local authorities of Junagadh receive the news? Who informed the local about these tragic incidents? Were any police or any other arrangements made to regularise the pedestrian traffic on the mountain? Was any help sought from the voluntary organisations? Were the home guards asked to control the pedestrian traffic? Whenever CRP is called on such occasions, it looks after the protection of the police force rather than the protection of the people. When did the Collector of Junagadh and the DIG receive the news? When did the rescue operations start? Are the rescue operations over or are they still continuing? What is the latest figure of casualties? According to the latest information, after the statement, how many are killed and injured? How many have been admitted in the hospital?

Now the maximum relief that is provided is Rs. 1,500 to a family. This is totally inadequate. Is this the value of a human life, according to the State Government? I want to know whether the Government of India will increase this amount and give due relief to the families of the deceased.

SHRI K. BRAHMANANDA REDDY:

As the hon. Member has said rightly, it is an unfortunate tragedy and we express our sorrow to the members of the bereaved family as well as the injured. According to the preliminary information, as I mentioned in the statement, 26 persons have died. I do

not think the number is more than that. If, ultimately, one or two more have died, I will supply that information, because there is nothing to hide.

As you know, there is a protective wall going up the hill, which is about two miles long. For the entire hill there are roughly about 3,600 steps. This accident occurred about 2,000 steps above when the parapet wall to a length of 16 ft. gave way. This wall was at a point near Malliparab leading to the Bhavnath temple.

So far as bandobust is concerned, I think sufficient bandobust has been made. Because, according to my information, about 500 policemen had been deployed to look to the law and order, security etc. at the festival site.

Now, as is rightly pointed out, the estimate given to us is that there were about 2 lakh people attending this festival. So far as relief is concerned, as I have just now mentioned in my statement, Rs. 500 will be given to every male earning member deceased and Rs. 250 in every other case subject to a maximum of Rs. 1500 per family. It is a case where possibly the Administration of Gujarat can take it up again and see if more help could be given to them.

SHRI P. M. MEHTA: Whether any temporary communication system was installed on this occasion, during this fair, on that mountain. I also asked, when the tragedy took place at 10.15 A.M., when were the local authorities informed about it?

SHRI K. BRAHMANANDA REDDY: According to a report, the rescue operations had begun at about noon. The accident occurred at about 10.15 A.M. and the rescue operations had begun at about noon.

MR. SPEAKER: He is asking whether some temporary communication system was installed all along the route.

SHRI P. M. MEHTA: Whether any temporary communication system was installed on this mountain.

SHRI K. BRAHMANANDA REDDY:
 I have to get the information.

SHRI DHAMANKAR (Bhiwandi):
 Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a very gruesome and horrible tragedy. Everybody in this House was shocked to read about it in the newspapers. While the people were trekking to reach the Bhavnath temple and to have a holy dip in the lake there, a wall collapsed resulting in the death about 20 persons as per the Government statement. The newspapers say that the death toll was about 40 persons. Whatever it is, it is a very sad tragedy.

The religious sentiments of the people play an important role in the life of the people in this country. Whenever there are any religious days, the people go to the lakes or tanks or temples in Hardwar or other places and have big *melas* and *yatras*. Normally, the Government, whether it is State Government or Central Government, makes arrangements to regulate traffic in the fairs and *melas* and they see that no untoward incident happens there. I have had the fortune of visiting this temple and climbing the Gurnar mountain at its highest peak. There is a small Dattatraya temple. There are about 7800 steps that you have to climb to have a *darshan*. On the route, there are some beautiful Jain temples. At about 1000 steps, there is the Bhavnath mandir.

The people cover all these 7800 steps by walking and climbing only. Normally, the accidents do not occur, because the crowds are not so huge. But at this time of Mahashivratri festival, more than 2 lakhs people went to have a *darshan*. I feel, whether it is State Government or Central Government, it is the duty of the Government to see that all the fairs are regulated and that no risk is involved.

As the Home Minister rightly said, a 15-ft. wall collapsed. I would like to know whether the PWD Engineers periodically check this wall. Every

year, Mahashivratri comes and the fair is there. I feel, it is the duty of the PWD Engineers to see that the barricades and walls which are constructed for the safety of pilgrims are checked periodically and see that they are in proper condition.

One girl fell down and when people found that a girl had fallen down, naturally, they rushed to find out what had happened. There was a great pressure on the wall and the wall collapsed resulting in the death of about 20 persons. They fell down 100 ft where was a big boulder and along with the boulder, they were rushed down in the valley resulting in the death of about 20 persons and injury to many others.

I would like to know from the Government whether any police were there to regulate the traffic. On hearing the information, the DIG and the DSP rushed there and made all the arrangements. We give compliments to them for that. But I want to know whether any police were regulating the traffic there, whether there were any check-posts, whether there were any first-aid posts, along the route to give assistance, to send information, whether there was any First Aid outpost because the hospital is four miles away in Junagadh City. When the bodies were recovered when the wounded were recovered, they had to be rushed to Junagadh which is four miles away. Then there was a stampede. Much time was lost in taking the wounded people to the hospital. I would like to know whether, at the foot of Girinar mountain from where the steps start—one place is called Taletti—was there any temporary arrangement for medical aid, whether any temporary hospital was erected at Taletti? Naturally, on such occasions, we expect the Government to make certain arrangement for medical aid, for regulation of traffic and so on.

Besides this, I would like to know whether there was any scheme of having a ropeway to reach the Giri-

[Shri Dhamankar] near Peak. I have information that, when the Saurashtra Government was there, one philanthropist offered some Rs. 5 lakhs to construct a ropeway; the Gujarat Government also processed the scheme; there were questions in the Gujarat Assembly. I want to know what has happened to that scheme.

Thirdly, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether there is any scheme to construct a *pucca* road whereby people will reach there very safely without taking any risk. Of course, there is a feeling among our Jain brethren not to go there by car or any other conveyance but to go there only on foot. They get more *punya* by that way. But for ordinary people there should be some safety measures. From that point of view, I want to know whether the Government has any scheme to have a permanent road or ropeway, whether the Government will ensure that on such occasions they will make arrangement for first aid, and have a temporary hospital there, and have arrangement for regulation of traffic and for proper communication system from Taletti?

SHRI K. BRAHMANANDA REDDY: In every State, I suppose, there are instructions as to what should be done with regard to fairs and festivals, especially important fairs and festivals. Generally, all health arrangements and police bandobust, etc., are done. Subject to correction, I may say that I am told that this is a trust property and that the State FWD is not in charge of this. As I have said, the relief operations were started immediately; I am told that, by noon, these people were removed to the hospital.

Regarding the ropeway, my submission is that it is a very costly affair—we had, in my State, in Tirupati, a proposal to have a ropeway to go to the temple costing over Rs. 80 or 90 lakhs, and prices, as you know,

are escalating. I do not know anything about that. I have no information.

Regarding construction of a *pucca* road also, it is a matter for the State administration to consider. After all, whether it is justifiable in a case of this type when once in a way large number of people gather or whether there may be usual traffic always, that is a matter which has to be seen and properly assessed.

Therefore, in this case, I do not, *prima facie*, see any negligence on anybody's part. It was in the mouth of the hon. Member himself when he said that it was an accident. According to press reports—I have no information—a child fell down. With the number of people going up the hill being large—they must have rushed and made an impact on the wall which is said to be about 3-1/2 ft high and about 1-1/2 ft wide—perhaps there was a large impact on the parapet wall and that would have given way. That is only from the press reports that I am saying.

My submission is that, for such fairs and festivals, not only in the State of Gujarat but in every other place, regular health arrangements, police bandobust and other arrangements are made. And, as I have submitted earlier, about 500 policemen were deployed for bandobust duties.

SHRI DHAMANKAR: I have asked one point. It may be a trust property. But is it not the duty of the government to check all these parapet walls when such a big fair was to take place? Whose responsibility is it?

SHRI P. M. MEHTA: How can a mountain be a trust property?

SHRI P. G. MAVALANKAR (Ahmedabad): Misfortunes and miseries seem to descend on the people and the State of Gujarat from various directions and it is particularly tragic

that the people of Gujarat who are already enveloped with natural calamities and political uncertainties should now have this great and terrible experience of the tragedy that has occurred at Girnar.

You, Mr. Speaker, will pardon my saying so. But this is my maiden performance in a call attention discussion, although it is exactly 28 months since I entered into this august House and I feel somewhat sorry, more than sorry, that my first effort to speak on a call attention should have been on a subject so tragic and so sad as the Girnar tragedy. I do offer my heartfelt condolences and I convey my deep sympathies, to all those who have been bereaved and who have been injured.

Now, before I go into the particular background, and put a few specific questions, Sir, with your permission, to the hon. Minister, may I very briefly invite his attention to two questions which he has already answered. He said that, according to his information, the area, particularly, the temples and the surrounding several other temples and the main temple the Bhavnath temple of Lord Siva, and the Jain temples and other temples, are all managed by some sort of public religious trusts. That could be. Granted that his information is hundred per cent correct, I would like him to tell us whether it is not advisable, and indeed, whether it is not imperative, for the public authorities to put certain regulations on the managers and the managements of these trusts that although they are the owners and they are the persons responsible for having these historic festivals at religious places, they must fulfil certain basic requirements. After all, here people gather in lakhs and even in the cinema houses where only some people gather, you have some regulations about hygiene, etc. But, here is a place like a fair where so many people gather, assuming that it is all under the auspices of a hundred per cent religious trust, should not the government, at

least from now onwards, put not only in Girnar but, in all such places, regulations and restrictions, and ensure that unless they are fulfilled, the authorities will not allow such public fairs to take place. That is my first point.

Then the hon. Minister referred to the question of financial relief in his answer:

"The State Government have sanctioned a sum of Rs. 500 to the family of every male earning member deceased and Rs. 250 in every other case subject to a maximum of Rs. 1,500 per family."

I want some clarifications. He said Rs. 500 to the family of every male earning member deceased and Rs. 250 in every other case. Apparently, a person who was not employed would get Rs. 250, like a minor child or an old man, i.e. his relation will be given Rs. 250. I want to know whether it is fair and whether this amount is adequate. In railway accidents, the other day we passed a Bill, the amount was Rs. 50,000. Now, if a person dies in a railway accident his family gets Rs. 50,000 but when a person dies in an unfortunate accident as it happened in Girnar, his family will get only Rs. 500! Is there justice in this country? Is there any sense of equity? The other day in the disturbances at the time of Nav Nirmalan Samiti or at the time of the disturbances of Harijans vs. Caste Hindus, the amount sanctioned was Rs. 3000 or Rs. 5000. So, this sum of Rs. 500 or so is an absurd amount and I think it is adding salt to the injury. This is inflicting further humiliations on those who are bereaved, who have suffered so much. The Minister should give a clear assurance in this regard. The families of those who lost their lives and those who suffered because of the injuries should get a better share of justice, of equity from the Government of Gujarat and from the Government of India. I say, Government of India, because at the moment Gujarat happens to be under the Mi-

[Shri P. G. Mavalankar]
 sister's care and attention. The *mela* takes place every year on the occasion of Mahashivaratri. It is a very historic occasion. This is an old and ancient thing and as the legend goes even in times of Mahabharata the Pandavas and the Kauravas used to go on Mahashivaratri day to this place and participate in this *mela*. That is the historical significance. Not only people from Saurashtra and Gujarat go there, but people from all over the country go there, in tens of thousands, to have the *punya* and a feeling of satisfaction that they get on that particular day. When lakhs gather on an occasion like this, why is it that adequate arrangements have not been made? Why is it that some kind of permanent facilities and comforts were not provided for? It is a fact that lakhs and lakhs of pilgrims go there on this occasion to this part of the country. Is it not the duty of the authorities to provide such arrangements? Further, will the Government of India tell us whether rescue operations are still in progress or not or whether they have been abandoned? I don't think the situation is so bad that rescue operations need be abandoned. But I want them to tell us whether they are in progress; of course, he may come to the House tomorrow or during the course of next week to tell us more about the exact number of people who died and those injured, etc.

And then, what is the arrangement made with regard to the protective walls? Will the steps be taken in this regard on a permanent basis? Now, Sir, I got this information on telephone this morning, that several representations had been made to Government authorities to protect and strengthen these walls but nothing happened; unfortunately bureaucracy moves slowly. I only hope that the unfortunate deaths of 27 people should at least make them awake and do the needful. They should see to it that permanent arrangements are made in this regard. The arrangements should be perfect

by the time the next fair is held next year. What about medical facilities and other arrangements? That also should be made on a permanent basis wherever such fairs take place. I would like to know whether special medical teams were sent from Rajkot or Ahmedabad to go to the area of the tragedy, to see that timely help is given? In Saurashtra, only a couple of days back, if I remember, exactly on 7th of March, there was about to be a fatal accident with regard to Avro aeroplane, and lives of 51 people were saved because of the miraculous skill shown by the pilot. While 51 lives were saved at that time, it is unfortunate that this kind of accident should take place so soon thereafter in Saurashtra itself. Miseries never come singly; they come in battalions. That is what we see here. What are the specific steps which the Government are going to take, to see that such tragic occurrences will not be repeated in future? These are my questions. Thank you.

'SHRI K BRAHMANANDA REDDY: Sir, my information just now is that a public trust Act exists in the State of Gujarat. Whether this particular temple is covered by that act or not is a matter to be considered.

Of course, it should have been a very holy place. Otherwise lakhs of pilgrims do not go there. So far as relief is concerned, I have read in my statement that Rs 500 to the family of each earning male member (deceased) and Rs 250 in the other cases subject to a maximum of Rs. 1500 per family is given. As I have said earlier even, this is a matter which the State Government will have to consider. I shall ask them also to consider whether any enhancement in this can be made.

SHRI P. G. MAVALANKAR: You are now the final authority. Why should you recommend? You will kindly do it.

SHRI K. BRAHMANANDA REDDY: That is a matter which I shall put it up to the Administration who

will consider that sympathetically. There is no comparison between the railway accident and this thing. I am told by the Deputy Minister that to cover an expenditure of this kind, there is a tax on the general public.

Whether any permanent arrangements for medical relief on the spot just now exist or not and if not, whether the State Administration will consider putting up any dispensary or some hospital kind of thing also will have to be considered by them. As I have submitted earlier, walls seem to have been in repair measuring $22\frac{1}{2}' \times 1\frac{1}{2}'$. As I have submitted earlier, they do not seem to be in disrepair. However, we can ask the Administration, because it is an important place of pilgrimage where lakhs of people visit either on Maha Shivarathri day (or for some other reason) to see under the public trust act or otherwise that proper precautions are taken before Maha Shivarathri.

श्री रामरत्न शर्मा (बांबा) : यह बहुत ही शायपूर्ण दुर्घटना है। मंत्री महोदय ने जो अग्रजी में स्टेटमेंट दिया है उसकी प्रति मुझ का मिल गई है। मेरे बहुत बार आग्रह करने पर श्रीर मांग करने पर भी मुझे बताया गया कि—इसका हिन्दी अनुवाद अभी तैयार नहीं है। अभी अभी जब मंत्री महोदय बाल रहे थे तो मुझ को इसका हिन्दी अनुवाद मिला। मैं आग्रह करूंगा कि जैसे पहले कई बार यहां कहा जा चुका है अग्रजी के माथ माथ उसका हिन्दी अनुवाद भी मदस्यों को उपलब्ध कराने की कृपा की जाए तो बहुत अच्छा होगा।

मंत्री महोदय ने कहा है कि इस दुर्घटना से 27 व्यक्ति मारे गए हैं। लेकिन प्रत्यक्ष-बन्धियों के अनुसार लगभग सौ व्यक्ति मारे गए हैं। मुझ से पहले वक्तव्यों ने सम्पूर्ण तथ्य आपके सामने रख ही दिए हैं। यह इतनी बड़ी दुर्घटना होने लगी है। गुजरात में राष्ट्रपति शासन है और राष्ट्रपति शासन होते हुए श्रीर यह जानते हुए भी कि महाशिवरात्रि के अवसर पर गिर-

नार के ऊपर जो मंचरि स्थिति है वहां वर्मनों के लिए हर वर्ष लाखों यात्री मारते हैं क्यों कोई प्रिकारण नहीं लिए गये? क्या मंत्री महोदय को पता है कि बहा के स्थानीय अधिकारियों ने इस दोबाल को इसके गिरने में पहले देखा था? मंत्री महोदय ने कहा है कि उस बी बार का रि-पेयर हो रहा था, उसका निर्माण हो रहा था। यदि ऐसी बात है तो क्या इस बात की व्यवस्था की गई थी ताकि यात्री उस दीवार के पास न जाएं यदि हां तो क्या स्टेट गवर्नमेंट ने या बहा के स्थानीय अधिकारियों ने यात्रियों के जीवन के साथ यह खिलवाड़ किम तरह से की, इस पर प्रकाश डालने की कृपा की जाए। अगर इसका निर्माण हो रहा था तो कौन इंजीनियर था, कौन से लोग थे, कौन से अधिकारी थे जिन की देख रेख में यह नव-निर्माण हो रहा था और जिन की किमनल नेगलिजेंस की वजह से आपके ही कथनानुसार कम से कम 26-27 प्रादमियों की जान गई?

आपने कहा है कि पांच सौ रूपया श्रीर ढाई सौ रूपया आपने उन लोगों को राहत के तौर पर देने की व्यवस्था की है। सभी माननीय सदस्यों से आग्रह किया है कि इस रकम को बढ़ाया जाए। मैं मंत्री महोदय से स्पष्ट रूप से जानना चाहता हूँ कि क्या वे इस राशि को बढ़ाने वाले हैं? मेरा उनसे आग्रह है कि कम से कम हर मंनक के परिवार को पांच-पाच हजार रूपया देने का वह प्रावधान करे।

मंत्री महोदय ने कहा है कि जिना मजिस्ट्रेट इस दुर्घटना की जांच करेंगे। मजिस्ट्रेट द्वारा जो इनक्वायरी होती है उस में न्याय नहीं होता है, वह फेयर नहीं होता है। मैं जानना चाहता हूँ कि डिस्ट्रिक्ट जज या किसी इस तरह के दूसरे जज द्वारा इपकी जांच कराने के लिए आप तैयार हैं ताकि भविष्य में इस तरह की दुर्घटना न हो?

दीवार मजबूत हो जाए और अग्रजी छतरह बनाई जाए इसके लिए मंत्री महोदय क्या निदेश देने वाले हैं?

SHRI K. BRAHMANANDA REDDY: Sir, I would only submit that the parapet wall does not seem to have been in disrepair. But, in any case, the investigation is being made and the District Magistrate is assisted by the Superintending Engineer. There is no need, in matters of this type, to appoint a judge or anybody. It is a case of fact finding to see what is wanting there, what should be done later and what assistance should be given to these unfortunate families of those people who died and to the other injured persons. So far as the request of the hon. Member is concerned that this amount should be raised, I have already submitted that this will be sympathetically considered.

SHRI VASANT SATHE (Akola): Sir, the first question that I have to ask is, who are the beneficiaries from this large yearly mela, where, about one lakh or two lakh yatris, pilgrims go to the temple at the top of Girnar. I think the temple at the top is called Bhavnath Mandir. I am only interested in the human beings. I am not interested in the deity at the top. The question is, who gets the benefits from these pilgrims? I would like to know, why can't you have authority (a) in regard to the supervision and maintenance of walls properly? Who has to pay for that wall? Who keeps it in repair? Is there any body like in Tirupati where they have the Tirupati Temple Trust which is a very rich trust, which can maintain even a beautiful road right up to the top, which is responsible for maintenance here? A 1½ feet wall cannot by any stretch of imagination be a strong wall which can stand the pressure when lakhs of people are going up. Therefore, what steps/measures are taken to compel this trust to keep these walls in repair?

13.00 hrs

Secondly, if these trusts make such huge profits, which these Mutts, trusts and *Wasthanoms* always do, why can not you compel them—because acci-

dents do not happen every year; there may be a few persons involved—to give proper compensation and not only this paltry sum of Rs. 500 and Rs. 250? Out of the lakhs and lakhs of rupees that they have earned, can they not give a sum of Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 5,000? Is Rs. 10,000 too much for a life? Is there any difficulty in this respect?

SHRI K. BRAHMANANDA REDDY: We have just now no information whether it is under the State or under public trust, whether it is managed by the public trust properly or not who is the beneficiary from this temple etc. All that will be gone into by the District Magistrate who is inquiring into it. If it is a trust or if the beneficiary is somebody else, some obligation can be put on the management to see that the steps are kept in repair and the parapet wall is strong enough to meet any sudden rush like this. All these questions will be gone into. After the investigation is complete and findings are available, we can advise the State Government to take proper steps in this regard.

SHRI VASANT SATHE: Why are you not in a position to compel the trust or other people in charge of management of this to pay adequate compensation? The inquiry cannot do this

SHRI K. BRAHMANANDA REDDY: What obligation they have under the trust, if they have any obligation at all

SHRI VASANT SATHE: Under the Trust Act, there is no obligation. You and I know that It is not the Workmen's Compensation Act or something like that that is applicable. You will have to find a method of doing it

SHRI K. BRAHMANANDA REDDY: That is a long-term affair. In any case, as for the families of these who died and for these injured, I have said again and again that certainly it will be sympathetically considered.