

be held on some date in the near future on which it might be possible for the outstanding members of the Standing Committee, too, to be present. The Chairman, however, desired that some tentative dates might be suggested by the Secretary of the Staff Side so that a meeting could be arranged accordingly. No reply to this letter has been received from the Secretary of the Staff Side so far. Appropriate action would be taken as soon as the Staff Side intimate a few convenient dates on one of which the meeting could be called to discuss the outstanding matters.

12 00 hrs.

**CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER
OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**UNDERGROUND EXPLOSIONS IN JITPUR
COAL MINES NEAR DHANBAD RESULTING
IN THE DEATH OF ABOUT 50 WORKERS**

DR. RANEN SEN (Barasat). Sir, I call the attention of the Minister of Steel and Mines to the following matter of urgent public importance and request that he may make a statement thereon:

"The reported underground explosions in the Jitpur coal mine, near Dhanbad resulting in the death of about 50 workers and injuries to several others."

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINES (SHRI S. MOHAN KUMARA-MAGALAM): Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is with great sorrow .

SHRI PILOO MODY (Godhra). Is he reading his letter of resignation or what?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINES (SHRI S. MOHAN KUMARA-MANGALAM): It is with great sorrow that I have to inform the House of a major accident at Noonudih-Jitpur colliery of M/s. Indian Iron and Steel Co. Ltd., now under management of Government of India, on

March 18, 1973, at about 20.00 hours which has resulted in the loss of life to 47 workers and injuries to about another 20.

Noonudih-Jitpur colliery of M/s. Indian Iron and Steel Co. Ltd., is situated in the district of Dhanbad in Bihar. It is about 14½ kms. from Dhanbad. The management of this company (comprising *inter alia* of the coal mines) was taken over by the Government of India in July, 1972

The mine is worked in three shifts commencing at 08.00, 16.00 and 24.00 hours and Sunday is the rest day at the mine. However, maintenance work and other special works are carried out on Sundays

The accident occurred in the second shift of Sunday the 18th March, 1973 at about 20.00 hours. Underground works relating to maintenance, repair and stowing etc., were going on during this shift, 102 persons were working in this shift. The accident occurred in the working in Seam No 14 of the mine situated at a depth of about 450 metres.

Information about the accident reached the Director-General of Mines Safety, Dhanbad, at 20.30 hours. The Deputy Director-General of Mines Safety, immediately proceeded to the place of accident accompanied by the Director of Mines Safety, (Northern Zone) and other officers of the Directorate-General of Mines Safety. Rescue teams from the Dhanbad Mines Rescue Station were also immediately rushed to the mine and the first rescue team went down the mine by 21.30 hours. This rescue work was continued round the clock and by 8.00 A.M. of March 20, 1973, 47 dead bodies were recovered. 13 of the persons rescued were admitted in the colliery hospital, Tata's hospital and Central Hospital of Coal Mines welfare Organisation for medical observation and treatment.

The accident is being enquired into by the Director of Mines Safety Northern zone, Dhanbad, under whose

jurisdiction the mine falls He is assisted by other officers of the Directorate

From evidence so far available the accident would appear to have been caused by an explosion of inflammable gas but the actual cause of ignition is under investigation

The mine employs about 2,700 persons and raises about 35000 tonnes of coal per month Production is likely to be partially restored in two or three days in most seams, and in seam 14 as soon as the rescue and recovery operations are completed The damage to machinery and other equipment has yet to be assessed.

Management have made an initial *ex gratia* payment of Rs 500 per family of deceased workers, and full compensation under the law will be paid In addition it is proposed to provide employment wherever possible for one person from the family of each deceased worker so as to alleviate the sufferings of those deprived of their principal wage earners

Along with Shri K V Raghunatha Reddy, Minister of Labour Shri M A Wadud Khan, Chairman of the Steel Authority of India Limited, and Shri Arabinda Ray, Custodian of Indian Iron and Steel Co Ltd, I visited the mine on 20.3.1973 and met the concerned officials of the Department of Mines Safety the manager and other senior officers of the mine as well as the leaders of different trade unions Shri Reddy and I also went underground to seam No 14 of the mine and some of the galleries affected by the explosion were inspected by us

Meanwhile the management of the Indian Iron and Steel Co Ltd have informed Government that Shri R K Chowdhury, who was acting as the Manager of the mine at the time of the accident, is being suspended from service

The accident is clearly a major one that has led to heavy loss of life Gov-

ernment has therefore decided to appoint under Section 24 of the Mines Act a Court of Enquiry to investigate the causes of the accident and fix responsibility The court will be assisted by technical and specialist assessors.

I would like to express on behalf of Government my deep sympathy for the families of those who lost their lives in this most unfortunate accident and to state that the Prime Minister has asked me to inform the House that a grant of Rs 1000 to each affected family is being made from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund

DR RANEN SEN Sir, this is another incident which shows how our mines are run Certain newspaper report from Calcutta, the *Hindustan Standard* and the *Amrit Bazar Patrika* have given the figure of deaths at 47 and 50 It is now known that out of 102 persons, 50 persons were lucky enough to come out earlier and the rest were trapped in the gas or inside Anyway, there will be no difficulty in finding out the actual number of deaths Secondly, such accidents also go to show that our mines are not properly looked after It must be known to the hon Minister that it is a gassy mine and, if it was known to the Minister, does he know that the Director-General of Mines (Safety) who has started the inquiry and his Department never looked into these mines, not only the IISCO mines but other mines also? No regular inspections are made So many of these mines are gassy and this particular one was also a gassy one It was a highly mechanized colliery, according to the government report So there was no dearth of fund to spend on this mine to remove the gasses My first question is whether the Government has made any assessment of the role and activities of the Mines Safety Organisation Secondly, is it known to the Minister that industrial regulations in that particular mine were not good and one Mr. Lufhra has been

[Dr. Ranen Sen]

most responsible for these bad industrial relations in that particular mine? Thirdly, I want to know how far these reports are correct—what has appeared in all the newspapers, the reports given by PTI and UNI, and specially in *Amrit Bazar Patrika* and *Hindustan Standard*; I will quote a few of these things:

"The reports attributed the explosion to a possible concentration of gas in the mine caused by the stoppage of mines ventilation fan..."

102 persons were sent underground which was a gassy one, and all the fans were stopped; This is a criminal negligence on the part of the management.

It is also reported by the newspapers that it is a practice, or it is under the Act, that the Assistant Manager must be present when the maintenance is done, and before that, the Assistant Manager will have to go into the condition of the mines and all that. The Assistant Manager was not present when these unfortunate people were sent underground. This is the newspaper report, to know how far these things are correct, I put this question because both the Ministers, Shri Mohan Kumaramangalam and Shri Raghunatha Reddy, went there and made some preliminary enquiries as is quite evident from the statement that the hon. Minister has made that he met the officers concerned and all that.

Further, a very astonishing report has appeared in the newspapers, in the two Calcutta newspapers because they sent special messengers from Calcutta. The report is that oxygen cylinders were rushed from the mines rescue station situated at Sitarampur, a distance of about 50 miles. I am really astonished. If this is a fact, then the whole Mines Department, lack, stock and barrel, should be dismissed and punished. After all an incident takes place in Bihar which is 15 kilometres from Dhanbad, and oxygen cylinders are brought from Sitaran-

pur, 50 or even 60 miles away! This is the newspaper report. We are very much perturbed. That is why the trade union leaders—one of them is Mr. R. N. Sharma—and all the trade union organisations called it a callous and deliberate negligence on the part of the management. I want to remind the Minister of the speech he made the other day in connection with the Take-over of the Mines Bill where he said that there should be no blanket denunciation of the management and all that. I said there should be no blanket approbation as was done by Mr. Kumaramangalam the other day.

Therefore, I want to know whether it is sufficient, whether the Minister considers it sufficient to hold an inquiry or to set up a court of inquiry by the same persons who are responsible for this thing. The Director-General of Mines Safety—the Calcutta newspaper has pointed an accusing finger at this person. It is no good shrugging your shoulders, Mr. Mohan Kumaramangalam. I am putting this question, a serious question. There has been loss of life of fifty persons. I do not know what will be the ultimate death toll. Therefore, I want to know whether, apart from the court of inquiry run by the Director-General of Mines Safety, because an accusing finger has been pointed at all of them, the Government consider setting up a separate court of inquiry and whether the Minister is thinking on those lines and whether in that court of inquiry, representatives of the trade unions, at least one each from the two trade unions that exist there viz., the INTUC and the AITUC, will be taken.

Then, not only the suspension of Mr. Chowdhury, will do, some other top managing officers also have to be suspended, because in the report of the Calcutta newspapers, again an accusing finger had been pointed at certain Chief Engineers of that particular mine and other Assistants. Therefore, I want to know whether, in order to have an impartial, complete and a thorough inquiry, without fear of any

interference from any quarter, the Government and the Minister think of removing or suspending the top management so that a proper inquiry can be held.

Last point—why is there this delay on the part of the Government to declare adequate compensation to the families of the dead?

SHRI S. MOHAN KUMARAMAN-GALAM: The hon. Member made certain statements regarding the conduct of the Director General of Mines Safety. I do not want to enter into a detailed argument on that point because the hon. Member is under a certain misconception regarding the character of the court of inquiry. If he had read the statement which I made, with a little care, he would have noticed that I had mentioned two things. One is that the accident is being inquired into by the Director of Mines Safety and secondly, that the Government intend to appoint under Sec. 24 of the Mines Act a court of inquiry. It is the duty of the Director-General of Mines Safety to inquire into any accident which is more of the character of a departmental inquiry. That has nothing to do with a court of inquiry appointed under Sec. 24 of the Mines Act which is an independent court of inquiry in which the Director of Mines Safety naturally will not be represented and which will not be in any way influenced by the Director-General of Mines Safety.

It will naturally be the duty of that court of inquiry to apportion responsibility in relation to all those who are connected with the proper working of the mine and whose responsibility it was to see that it was properly worked. So I do not think the hon. Member and the House need have any apprehensions that the inquiry that is conducted into the causes of the accident and to fix the responsibility will be conducted in a non impartial manner and will be subject to outside influences.

Secondly, the hon. Member made a statement—the allegation as I understood it—is that the Director-General of Mines Safety—I think I am quoting him correctly—"never looked into these mines". I think, these are the expressions he used... (*Interruptions*) I am afraid, I do not want to go into the matter. The Court of Inquiry will examine all the details of the working of the Director-General of Mines Safety so far as it is concerned with the working of this mine. To my knowledge, as late as 22nd February and 13th March 1973, the Director-General of Mines Safety wrote to the mine regarding certain defects that were found there.

So it is not correct to say that they never looked into the mines. On the point whether they fulfilled their responsibility in the manner in which they should have done it, I think, it is not proper for me to enter into that controversy because there is the court of enquiry which will go into these matters and give its finding.

Regarding his other point, I would like to tell him that the mine safety organisation in this area has been paying substantial attention for the provision of safety with which it is charged. About the other matters certainly we should await the finding of the court of enquiry.

Regarding industrial relations, I had a discussion with the trade union leaders yesterday at the mines and they did not raise this point about bad industrial relations. I had a talk with them, including the representatives of the union with which the hon. Member is associated.

He asked whether the concentration of gas which led to the explosion was not due to the stoppage of mine ventilation, etc. No doubt this has been reported in the Press. When I was in Dhanbad I heard about this. But again this is clearly something which falls within the sphere of the court of en-

[Shri S. Mohan Kumaramangalam] quiry to determine. It is not proper for me to anticipate their finding.

About the after-effects, proper steps have been taken to clean up atmosphere in the mines, to see that ventilation is proper and gas is removed. The fact that I and the Labour Minister went there and visited the scene of accident and have come here to stand before you is sufficient guarantee that things would be safer now. We have not yet started working in seam No. 14 and will not do so until we are sure that everything is safe there. So, that is taking some time.

The hon. Member charged some officers with criminal negligence and he said that the Assistant Manager who should have been present was not present. He made certain other statements of that nature. These are matters which also fall within the sphere of the court of enquiry. Indian Iron and Steel Company has taken action against the person who was directly in charge of the mine on that day. Regarding other officers, I am sure this will also be examined, and whatever action is called for for the safety and proper working and proper conduct of the mines, will be taken.

He said that the oxygen rescue cylinder came from 56 miles away. I would like to inform him that this oxygen rescue cylinder was obtained from Dhanisar rescue station at Jharia, about 4 miles away, and not 56 miles away as he has stated. There should be no blanket approbation of officers whether in the public sector or private sector or any other sector. Whenever there is a mistake we should condemn them, but blanket disapprobation is also to be avoided. Hon. Members will appreciate that we have not finalised the composition of the Court of Enquiry and we will finalise it in a day or so, and the point made by the hon. Member about association of trade union and other interests will be considered. We hope that we will get the cooperation of everybody, as undoubtedly we did, when we were in Dhanbad yesterday.

DR. RANEN SEN: I had also raised the point about compensation. Why is there delay in announcing the compensation to the bereaved families? Secondly, it was stated that the fans had stopped for 8 hours. Will that also be inquired into by the Court of Enquiry? He must have gone there and made a preliminary enquiry—whether it was a gaseous mine or not. If an inspection was made by the Mine Safety Organisation they would have submitted the report to the Director-General, Mines Safety Organisation. What is his suggestion?

SHRI S. MOHAN KUMARAMANGALAM: So far as the delay in payment of compensation is concerned, I think, the hon. Member will appreciate that the accident took place on the night of Sunday and the whole of Monday was involved in rescue operations. A grant of Rs. 500 was made immediately. We were still bringing the things under control yesterday. I do not think we have been slow in this regard. So far as the allegations that the fans had stopped is concerned, no doubt, I did investigate. I looked into the record. But I do not think anything is gained by committing myself to any statement. I am not an enquiry officer. I do not think it helps. Action has been taken against the officer who is responsible—acting Manager and in charge of the mines and he has been suspended. That was done on the basis of evidence before us.

The Director of Mines Safety as well as the Deputy Director General were at the mine immediately after the accident and they have been taking the necessary precautions and drawing the necessary lessons from whatever material that was available to them, and I do not think it will be proper for me to enter into a controversy even in relation to what I think to be a fact, because it may not be found to be so after detailed investigations. If it is a question of my coming to a particular conclusion which requires action on my part, I think I have already arrived at those conclusions.

About my meeting the Director General of Safety Mines I may tell the hon Member that the Director General is on leave but we met the Deputy Director General who was at the mine and in charge of the rescue operations directly

SHRI BHOGENDRA JHA (Jainagar) This is a tragedy and has followed another incident some weeks ago. That was a firing incident when some workers were shot dead in the nearby Hazaribagh district. Now that has been followed by this ghastly accident. On that occasion also the Minister told this House that the contractor and the previous owner were also responsible in creating the background of the trouble, in organising the trouble for that firing. We had warned on that occasion that after the takeover of the collieries the former owners were not going to take it lying down and were conspiring in various ways to organise sabotage. We had also alleged—though it was repudiated by the Minister then—that many officers have been in league with, rather some have been in double payment of the private owners and they may not lag behind in sabotaging this public sector, thus giving another handle to those who say openly that the public sector has failed. Soon after that, we are faced with this disaster.

Accidents may take place. But here the accident has taken place right under the nose of the headquarters of the Director General of Mines Safety for the whole country, situated at Dhanbad at a distance of about 9 miles from the site of the accident. At that point of time, the Director General is on leave, the Manager is not there, someone acting is there, the day is not a normal working day, it is a Sunday. Some defects had been reported earlier. No action seems to have been taken on that basis. The person who happened to be acting as Manager on that particular day has been suspended. It is

not known—and the Minister will make it clear here—who was in charge of the management since that day when the defect was found out and reported and whether those persons responsible in the management since that day have been or are going to be suspended.

Here the Minister has stated that nothing will serve by holding an opinion at this point. He is leaving other things for the court of inquiry. But the particular point here is that according to us the management the top ones in the management there and in the office of the Director General at Dhanbad are responsible for this tragedy.

The Minister seems to be offended when it is said that this is criminal. If murder is not a crime what else can be called a crime? He can say it is not wilful. But at least it is criminal neglect. That cannot be denied. If he begins to believe in certain things, he can say it was ordained it was destined to happen it could not be prevented by human effort. Otherwise some neglect was responsible for this and that neglect seems to be a criminal neglect.

The Director General's office is inquiring into the matter. Our apprehension is that evidences will be interfered with so that nothing will remain for the court of inquiry to be gone into and the Directorate of Mines Safety and the top management will go scot-free. Some minor fry may be penalised for this. That is the pertinent point. Hence the demand for summary dismissal of the top officers in the Directorate General and in the management. Or at least they should be removed from the scene. They should not be there. If the Minister says everything has to be enquired into by the court of enquiry, what is the necessity of the officers going there who are responsible for this crime and this ghastly disaster? They must not be allowed to enter the mines. Let the court of enquiry investigate. Because our information is this. He says do

[Shri Bhogendra Jha]

not make sweeping remarks against the officers. On that day also he was very much offended, but in view of this ghastly murder on a large scale, does he want us and the House to wait for the murder of thousands of other persons and then to announce to the country and the world at large that the whole public sector has failed and only the previous owners would have to run them? Does he want the country to know like that, and then keep quiet just now. So, I say that the criminals who are responsible for this tragedy are enquiring into it and they are sitting at the helm of affairs. (Interruption) So, nothing will remain for the court of enquiry to be enquired into. This is the risk, and from the statement of the Minister it is clear.

MR. SPEAKER: Ask your question.

SHRI BHOGENDRA JHA: It is at a distance of nine miles from Dhanbad, and the accident took place at 8 p.m. Telephone connection is available and it is a fine road. But the rescue party reached the place after a lapse of one hour and 30 minutes. In such cases, the early arrival of the rescue team and the oxygen gas might have saved the lives of a few. So, this delay is a conscious one and the Mines Safety Department was not very prompt.

Then, again with regard to the stopping of fans, my hon. friend Dr. Ranen Sen made this point, and I think the Minister has tried to evade this point. He has not said whether he knows it or not. He can say he has no information.

MR. SPEAKER: Put your question please.

SHRI BHOGENDRA JHA: This is my question. I want to know whether he has got any information. Or, if he has got any information, whether he wants to withhold it from the House; whether the fans were stopped

or not; whether they were functioning at the time of the accident or not. Because, this a very pertinent point. Also, we want to know whether there is any conspiracy of sabotage behind it or not; whether this aspect also will be enquired into or not; whether it will be referred to the court of enquiry or not, so that the country may be saved from a chain of such accidents or incidents.

Thirdly, the question is whether any delay in the formal nationalisation of the IISCO is also partly reasonable for this, whether the previous management were hoping that if the Government take-over of the mines proves a failure, then again IISCO will be handed over to the previous owners. This point also must be clarified by the Minister. I want to know whether the Government has got this point in mind or not; and whether the top officers of the Directorate of Mines Safety and in the management who were in charge of the mines not only on that day but from before are going to be removed and suspended during the course of this enquiry.

Then, I want to know whether in the court of enquiry, representatives of the trade unions who are in a little distance from the mines are to be formally included in the court of enquiry or not. It is no question of suggestion and co-operation. The demand is whether in the court of enquiry itself, the representatives of those trade unions who are in a short distance from the mines, are to be formally included or not.

MR. SPEAKER: We have made this a debating hour. We have decided that not more than 45 minutes would be taken; but only two Members have taken 45 minutes among themselves.

SHRI S. MOHAN KUMARAMAN-GALAM: Firstly, regarding the Director-General, he is on leave because he has had a heart attack and I think people are permitted to be on leave on that ground. Therefore, the Deputy

Director-General who is the next seniormost officer arrived on the scene. If one has to give the exact time, information was received at 8.30 p.m. and gathering together all the people and necessary equipment, the rescue teams of the Directorate General of mines safety reached there at 9.15 p.m. and the first rescue party went down the mines by about 9.30 p.m. Speaking for myself, I think it is not unreasonable in view of the distances involved. The hon. Member is entitled to have whatever opinion he wants... (Interruptions).

The hon. Member has talked very strongly of the officers in the Directorate General of mines safety and I had already given my views in reply to the points raised by Dr. Ranen Sen. Inspection had been made even as late as the 13th March and certain inadequacies had already been brought to the attention of the management but one cannot now say that it was possible for the Directorate-General of mines safety to have acted in such manner as to have prevented this accident, because first of all one has to identify the reason for the accident and then fix responsibility on persons responsible. From whatever investigations of a *prima facie* character that I and the Minister of Labour were able to make yesterday, it does not appear to us—I say so with every caution—that the Directorate General of mines safety were involved. But it is quite impossible for me to give any finding on that score; it can only be done by the court of enquiry when they examine all the records. To the very limited extent to which the hon. Minister and I were able to examine the material there, it does not look as if they had made any default in their statutory duties. But again, I would not like to get into this controversy but unfortunately I had been dragged into it and I can only say that a final decision can come after an enquiry when all the available material is examined with the care, which I am sure, the court of enquiry will take.

The hon. Member was apprehensive that evidence would be interfered with. I am frankly surprised to hear that allegation from him because none of the trade union leaders with whom I had long discussions yesterday for nearly an hour, made this allegation and none of them asked that action should be taken to remove the records from the possession of the Directorate General of mines safety, who are not merely entitled but who have a duty under the Act to have possession of the records for this purpose. I myself looked at the records taken only from the Directorate.... (Interruptions). This is not an enquiry under section 24 and on the basis of the discussions that I had there, I do not think there was any ground for me or for the hon. Labour Minister to decide to take the records away from the authority to whom the statute entrusts the custody of those records, and to hand them over to somebody else. No allegation of this character was made yesterday. I have no doubt that all this evidence will be properly preserved and looked into by the court of inquiry when appointed.

About stoppage of fans, that allegation has been made. There is material there and I am sure the court will give a finding. But I do not think it advances the case for me to commit myself to any position as to what exactly happened and how it happened, because there is a certain controversy about it. I may have my own view on it, but I do not see how it helps in any way to come to a conclusion except to the extent that I had to come to a conclusion regarding what may be called the individual responsibility of anybody and whatever action should be taken against him.

He has been eloquent about the conspiracy of saboteurs. Up till now no material has come to the possession of government to say that there was any conspiracy. But undoubtedly if such a conspiracy did exist, will be located and identified by the court of inquiry

[Shri S. Mohan Kumaramangalam] and we shall get a finding on that question.

About the suspension of top officers of the Director-General of Mines Safety, I do not think at present the question arises because no material has been given to us of any description which will show that they had defaulted in the performance of their duties under the Act. As I said, what will be the final decision of the court of inquiry, I am not one to anticipate. My only duty yesterday was to satisfy myself in relation to whatever material was immediately available to me and on that basis, it is not possible for me to say that any one of the officers of the Director-General of Mines Safety was responsible for default in the performance of his duties and therefore contributed to this particular incident.

The hon. member feels that delay in formal nationalisation is partly responsible. I am afraid I have to disagree with him because certainly the conduct of the management of IISCO is today entirely under Government supervision and therefore to the extent mistakes are being committed, I myself as the minister in charge must take the responsibility. I do not think if formal nationalisation had been put through, there would have been any change from the position as it stands today.

SHRI BHOGENDRA JHA: What about the composition of the court of inquiry?

SHRI S. MOHAN KUMARAMANGALAM: Section 24 states:

"Government may, if it is of opinion that a formal inquiry be held, appoint a competent person to hold such an inquiry. . ."

It envisages an individual person being appointed as the court. We can appoint one or more persons possessing legal or special knowledge to act as assessor or assessors for holding the inquiry. In composing the court, we intend to do what is proper

and necessary in the circumstances of the case.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DAS MUNSHI (Calcutta South): The statement clearly shows that directly or indirectly the management was responsible partly for the disaster because the acting manager on that day has been suspended. Since independence till the taking over the mines, whether it is the fault of the Government or the management, we have not yet been able to assure the labour in coal mining areas of their safety by taking suitable precautionary measures. If we take the report of the Labour Manual, the minister in his wisdom will admit that we have totally failed in this regard. The report shows that during the period 1964-70, in spite of modernisation of safety measures, importing more equipments and putting additional Deputy or Assistant Director-Generals on mine safety work, the rate of accidents had increased. In 1969 the number of casualties was 232, in 1970 it was 212 and in 1971 it was 231

I know that the coal-miners were in the habit of exploiting the working class, without paying any attention to the safety measures of the working class. I am sure the radical Minister will admit that even after the taking over of these mines by the Government, the officials are adopting the same pattern of attitude towards the workers as the management showed prior to take over of these mines. Since the Minister has visited the spot, I will ask him three questions.

It is mentioned in the statement that being a Sunday, it was not a working day and some people went inside the mine for maintenance and other repair work out of which 47 were killed. The statement clearly mentions the number of workers who went inside the mine and the number killed. But it is not clear from the statement as to how many of the workers who went underground Seam No. 14 on that day belonged to the maintenance department.

Secondly, I quite agree with the views of Shri Bhogendra Jha and Dr. Ranen Sen about the Court of Inquiry, if it is within the provisions of section 24 of the Mines Safety Act. May be, the Minister does not want to embarrass the Director-General, who is entitled to go before the Court of Inquiry. But, considering the past events and the present position, may I request the ideal Minister to think in terms of definitely changing the Mines Safety Act in such a manner that the representatives of the working class will get an opportunity to appear before the Court of Inquiry without the interference of the management?

Here I would like to know whether the scheme of workmen inspectors to inspect the mines on behalf of the workers has been implemented. It was a long-standing demand of the trade unions that there must be some inspectors on behalf of the working class to be provided by the management, now by the government after the take over. This is necessary because it is a fact that the high officials of the Directorate-General have made a lobby within themselves and the inspectors do not function independently. That is why the number of such accidents is increasing day by day. I want to know whether the hon. Minister has got any report to the effect that after the take over of the mines, the Director-General of Coal Mines Safety and other officials have gone and visited the mines. What is the exact position? I think after the take over of the mines the Director-General of Mines Safety has not yet submitted any report to the government. This shows that even after the take over, there is no improvement in the conditions of service, so far as the safety aspect is concerned.

Lastly, whenever there is any air crash, all the dependents of passengers get a good amount as compensation under some insurance scheme. But in the case of coal mine workers, they

do not get even their legitimate provident fund money, what to speak of the medical and educational benefits. Will the progressive and dynamic Minister, who had been working for a long time in the working class movement, provide some such insurance scheme for the mine workers, so that their families can be provided for the future?

With these words, I would like to conclude by saying once again that the suggestions which I have made should not be taken in vague terms but in concrete terms. It will be better if he includes a representative from the working class in the Court of Inquiry to express their own views, before it.

SHRI S MOHAN KUMARAMAN-GALAM: With regard to the questions raised by the hon. Member, first of all, I would say that only maintenance people were underground on that day, no others. According to the books at present available, the figure is that 102 persons were underground, 55 came up and 47 died. This is the actual position. Out of those who are in Hospitals, one person is seriously injured. I hope, he will be able to survive. So far as the rest are concerned, they are not in danger any more.

The hon. Member must be aware that so far as the presentation of the case of workers before the Court of Inquiry is concerned, there is no problem. That has taken place even before the previous Courts of Inquiry. But regarding the question of membership, that cannot arise in terms of Section 24 as it stands. What we will try to do is to see that the workers get the maximum possibility of putting their case before the Court of Inquiry and of also helping the Court of Inquiry to come to a proper conclusion.

So far as the question of having inspectors from amongst workmen is

[Shri S. Mohan Kumaramangalam] concerned, we have not really discussed it in any depth. I am grateful to the hon. Member for bringing it to my notice. Certainly, the Minister of Labour and I will look into it and see whether any changes of this character that are possible can be made. I am not quite clear exactly how it should be put through. It is a question of trying to form an organisation and procedure. It is important that a safety organisation should command the confidence of the workers. Let us see how it is possible to organise something and change the present position, and to form an organisation which can really command the confidence of the workers.

Regarding the allegation of lobby of the highest officials, I am afraid, I am not in any position to comment on that. It is true that mistakes might be committed by some of them. I am not here to defend them. But I do say that so far as what has happened in the last three days is concerned, and on the basis of my personal investigation and that of the Minister of Labour in Dhanbad yesterday, when we went to the mine, not merely did we feel that the Directorate-General of Mines Safety had really done its best in a very difficult position, immediately after the major explosion, but this was also a statement made by the trade union people and other people to us. Therefore, I am not speaking just for myself and just for the sake of defending them. To get into the mine just immediately after a major explosion like this shows a certain amount of anxiety on their part to try to do whatever is possible. The persons who work round the clock, for 24 hours, for 36 hours, exerting themselves to the utmost have also to be given a little credit. If they have made mistakes and they are found guilty, action will be taken against them. But those who work hard deserve the approbation, not merely of the Government but of this House also.

Then, the hon. Member raised a question about proper protection so far as workers are concerned who have to work under such dangerous conditions, and suggested that there should be a type of insurance scheme which will see that the compensation is much greater than what it is today. I am grateful to him for the suggestions and, certainly, we will examine it.

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Yamuna Prasad Mandal—absent;

Shri Mukhtiar Singh Malik—absent.

13.00 hrs.

RE-ABSENCE FROM THE HOUSE
 OF THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

MR. SPEAKER: Now, papers to be laid on the Table...

SHRI S. M. BANERJEE (Kanpur): The working journalists are on strike; there has been no newspaper today. The Minister should make a statement. (Interruptions).

MR. SPEAKER: I am told, the Minister will make a statement during the day.

SHRI H. N. MUKERJEE (Calcutta-North-East): Mr. Speaker I had asked for your permission, and you were very kindly disposed to give it to me, to raise a matter in relation to the absence from the House of the Minister of Finance. What has happened is very, very extraordinary. This is the height of the Budget Session, and the Minister of Finance chooses to go out of the country for a period of nearly three weeks. It may be that the presence of the Minister of Finance at some international meeting in the United States is quite important. I can appreciate the fact of the Finance Minister having to go just in order to add some im-