

12.04 hrs.

STATEMENT RE. ACCIDENT TO A
TUG IN RIVER HOOGHLY

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Transport and Communications (Shri Raj Bahadur): Sir, it is with deep regret that I have to inform the House of a serious accident involving loss of several lives which took place yesterday morning on the river Hooghly about 9 miles downstream of Calcutta. The Port Commissioners' tug *Empire Oberon* towing a lighter loaded with engineering equipment left Taktaghat for Haldia soon after 8 O'clock in the morning and when it was negotiating a bend near the Akra Spur, both the craft apparently got involved in an eddy, with the result that the lighter got tilted. With the lighter, the tug also got tilted on the same side and before the tug could be disconnected from the lighter by cutting the rope with which the two were tied to each other, both the tug and the lighter capsized and sank. All told, there were 45 persons on them, including 6 officers, viz, the Port Commissioners' Deputy Chief Engineer, Shri H C Bose, Commander of the tug, Shri Preston, Chief Officer of the tug, Shri Das Gupta, an Executive Engineer, Shri Chatterjee, Engineer-in-Charge of the tug and a Civil Assistant Engineer. Forty of them were able to save themselves and managed to reach the river bank. The first-mentioned four officers and one of the crew are missing. The dead body of Shri Bose has since been recovered and the river police is searching for the bodies of the others.

Since the two sunken craft partially blocked the navigable channel, the movement of incoming ships was completely stopped for the day and that of outgoing ships considerably delayed. Incoming traffic is being restored today, but until the channel is completely cleared of the wrecks, the outward movement of deep drafted vessels will be restricted and in some cases, draft allowed to them may have to be reduced.

The Port Authorities are considering how best and quickly the wrecks can be removed and the navigable channel restored to normal working. The tug was purchased second-hand in 1949 at a cost of Rs. 3.6 lakhs. The total loss has been estimated at about Rs. 5.5 lakhs.

The tug had a tonnage of 500 and the lighter 100.

The Port Authorities are immediately instituting a departmental enquiry into the cause of the accident and also taking steps regarding grant of relief and compensation to the bereaved families.

Fuller details of the accident have been asked for and should be available in a couple of days.

Shri Tangamani (Madurai): This is a case of accident to a survey vessel where five officers are missing. I would like to know whether there will be a full-dress, not necessarily departmental, inquiry into this because in this river more and more of such accidents are likely to happen since survey parties will have to operate there. There are hydraulic surveyors specially posted here and daily survey is conducted. In view of the fact that this is a serious accident involving six officers, one of them killed and five missing, may I know whether a different type of inquiry will be conducted because, over and above the particular inquiry, it is the reputation of the port authorities which is at stake?

Shri Raj Bahadur: It was a tug and not a survey vessel, it was being used for towing other vessels. It was carrying engineering equipment in a lighter attached to it for Haldia, the new anchorage port which we want to establish. An inquiry is instituted according to the law by the Port Commissioners. If necessary, the State Government will also take action because the tug, I am told, was registered under the Inland Vessels Act.

Shri A C. Guha (Barasat): May I know what steps the Port authorities

[Shri A. C. Guha]

are taking to trace the five missing officers? Are they alive or not?

Shri Raj Bahadur: Ever since yesterday, effort is continuing and people are at it. It is expected that by this noon or afternoon we might be able to send a diver down to trace the bodies because it is feared that the bodies might have been trapped in the unfortunate vessel

Shri Tangamani: Will a further statement be made?

Mr. Speaker: That will be after the inquiry

12.07 hrs

MOTION RE. VIVIAN BOSE BOARD OF INQUIRY'S REPORT OF LIFE INSURANCE CORPORATION INQUIRY—contd

Mr. Speaker: The House will now proceed with further consideration of the motion moved by Shri Harish Chandra Mathur on the 7th September, 1959 regarding the Vivian Bose Board of Inquiry's Report of the Life Insurance Corporation Inquiry, together with the two amendments moved thereon.

Shri S. M. Banerjee was on his legs yesterday. He has already taken 7 minutes. He may continue and have 8 minutes more.

Shri Khadilkar (Ahmednagar): You promised to extend the time by one hour.

Mr. Speaker: I understand the hon. Deputy-Speaker had said yesterday that after Shri S. M. Banerjee concluded, he would call upon the hon. Minister to reply.

Shri Braj Raj Singh (Ferozabad): So many hon. Members have yet to speak.

Sardar Hukam Singh (Bhatinda): I only looked at the allocation of time that had been given by you. You had

promised that there would be an extension by one hour. So I said that the hon. Minister would reply today. That was all I said, not that immediately after Shri S. M. Banerjee the Home Minister would be called. It is now for you to decide.

Mr. Speaker: Has it already been extended by one hour?

Shri Khadilkar: No, no.

Shri Tangamani (Madurai): Yesterday, we started only at 12.40. So even according to the original allocation, we have 40 minutes left.

Shri Khadilkar: 1 hour and 40 minutes

Mr. Speaker: According to my note here, 4 hours and 23 minutes have already been taken and 37, say, 40 minutes, remain. We shall extend it by one hour, that is, 1 hour and 40 minutes. That is, it will go up to 13.47 hours.

Shri Braj Raj Singh: Some more time should be allowed for spokesmen of parties who are desirous to speak.

Pandit K. C. Sharma (Hapur): It is not a party question.

Mr. Speaker: How long does the hon. Minister propose to take?

The Minister of Home Affairs (Shri G. B. Pant): As much time as you can spare.

Mr. Speaker: Normally, how much does he propose to take?

Shri G. B. Pant: I will try to restrict myself to 30 or 40 minutes. I cannot say I will make it as short as I can.

Mr. Speaker: Then we have 1 hour and 40 minutes of which 40 minutes will be taken by the hon. Minister.

Shri Khadilkar: 1 hour and 40 minutes are left. If it is extended by one hour, we will have 2 hours 40 minutes.