

A statement showing (i) prices of Sunn Hemp at Benaras (U.P.) and Guntur (Andhra Pradesh) during 1956 and 1957, and (ii) exports of Hemp raw from 1954-56 and January-July 1957 is placed on the Table of the Lok Sabha. [See Appendix IV, annexure No. 89.]

12 hrs.

POINT OF INFORMATION

Shri Hem Barua (Gauhati): I want to point out....

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member must resume his seat.

Shri Hem Barua: I am not referring to the Question.

Mr. Speaker: The point is this. I have said once twice or thrice that unless a matter comes in the Order Paper, I am not going to allow any sort of representation to be made in the House and thus the time of the House being taken away from the regular transaction of work. If any hon. Member wants any particular matter to be raised here, he should write to me or talk to me. If I admit it and put it in the Order Paper, he can raise it. If I refuse to do so, he should not stand up here. If he still disobeys, I will have to take very serious disciplinary action in the matter. If anything suddenly crops up like a stranger getting into the chamber, then, even without notice, he can raise it. That is all he could do.

MOTION FOR ADJOURNMENT

HAPPENINGS AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE ELECTRIC TRAIN SERVICES AT HOWRAH

Now we will take up the question of the adjournment motion.

Shri Sadhan Gupta (Calcutta-East): I was also present at the inauguration.

Mr. Speaker: I am now calling upon the Railway Minister.

The Minister of Railways (Shri Jagjivan Ram): I rise to make a statement on the happenings at the inauguration of the Electric train services at Howrah on the 14th of this month, when two persons were unfortunately killed and several were injured.

The police arrangements for the occasion had been settled at various meetings (between the Railway administration and the West Bengal Police representatives) and necessary personnel were drafted for the purpose by the police authorities.

The General Manager had issued invitations to 3,500 guests, out of which about 2,500 arrived and were seated in a portion of the main concourse which had been cordoned off for the purpose. 500 of these were invited to accompany the train and were seated in a special enclosure arranged in the concourse from which they alone could have direct access to the platform, where the special train had been berthed. The train consisted of 11 bogies and 2 electric engines, one leading and another in rear.

To ensure protection of the special inaugural train which was to leave from platform No. 8, this and platforms Nos. 6, 7 and 9 were closed for the reception and departure of trains for the afternoon and barricades were provided between platforms 9 and 10, 5 and 6 and 1 and 2, to prevent unauthorised persons infiltrating on to platform No. 8.

The Prime Minister was due to arrive at Howrah station at 3-30 P.M. Some time before this a crowd started collecting round the protected area. A portion climbed the barricades or circumvented them through the yard, thus gaining access to the platforms which had been closed. The Police and Railway staff on duty tried to clear them, but the crowd soon came back. By the time the Prime Minister left the concourse for the special train the crowd on all the platforms had increased considerably and had even gathered in large numbers on the tracks.

[Shri Jagjivan Ram]

As the Prime Minister proceeded along platform No. 8, towards the locomotive of the train, some of the crowd climbed over a gate and entered platform No. 8. Their example apparently led others to break the police cordons, climb over the barriers, and rush for the special train. Many of them boarded the train, keeping out the invitees, a majority of whom could not even reach the platform and were left behind along with a number of senior Railway officials. I was able to reach the locomotive but had difficulty in doing so.

The train started 4 minutes late. As it pulled out slowly, people from both sides jumped on to the footboards. Persistent efforts were made by the Railway staff and Police on the platforms as well as on the train to dissuade the footboard travellers, but as they left, others took their places and the numbers kept on increasing.

The Eastern Railway administration had been advertising in the press for some time about the hazards of standing on the footboards of Electric trains, but it is unfortunate that this warning was not heeded.

The train continued to proceed very slowly because of the crowd all along the tracks, with the engine hooter sounding continuously. It nearly came to a halt on several occasions to prevent people from being run over or to persuade the footplate travellers to get down. About a mile and a half from Howrah station, the train had to be stopped to detrain some persons who had got on to the front part of the engine. Thereafter it resumed its journey and picked up speed.

Apprehending danger to footboard travellers, from the raised platform at Lillooah, the guard applied the brakes, resulting in the stoppage of the train at Lillooah platform. Some of the footboard travellers appear to have fallen down or jumped off, as

the train was slowing down, and received injuries.

After the train had left Lillooah it was reported to the Howrah Control Office that 22 persons had fallen off the train and received injuries. Two fatal casualties were later reported from other stations between Lillooah and sheoraphulli. Of the injured, 9 were serious cases, of whom 8 are in the Howrah General Hospital and one in Serampore Hospital. The remaining 13 received minor injuries and were discharged from hospital after receiving medical attention.

It has been alleged in the press that the doors of the train were locked, preventing people on the footboards from getting into the compartments. This is incorrect. The doors were not locked. The unauthorised persons who had crowded into the compartments appear, however, to have barred the entry of others, who were on the footboards.

The incident is indeed most regrettable.

Shrimati Benn Chakravartty (Barrister): I would like to ask one question. Is it a fact that the West Bengal Government had stated that it was impossible to control the crowds and so this ceremony should take place in an open maidan?

The Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs (Shri Jawaharlal Nehru): As I am concerned with this matter, may I give my personal impression? First of all, whatever arrangements were made at Howrah to control the large crowds, nothing happened in Howrah station. These deaths and injuries, they did not take place in Howrah. What happened at Howrah, unfortunately, was that the invited guests were pushed out and others took their places in the train, which is not, of course, very satisfactory. This accident happened long after we moved from Howrah. When we left Howrah, there were large crowds on the track, on either side of

the track, very enthusiastic crowds, cordial crowds lining up the route. We stopped and my recollection is that many times we slowed down, moving, I think, at three miles an hour or four miles an hour. These people were clinging to the engine, in front of the engine. It is a long train with 5, 6 or 7 bogies. As soon as people jumped down, others came in. It was, therefore, before Lillooah, a little before Lillooah, that this unfortunate accident took place, that is after we started from Howrah. So, we must separate the two—what happened at the Howrah station and what happened afterwards.

Shrimati . Benu Chakravartty: Nobody was hanging on the train at Howrah?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: Of course. But they all came down. They were made to get down repeatedly. Twice at least everybody who was hanging on to the small footboard was made to come down. Then the train started and then others got in again. So, the crowd at Howrah had nothing to do with the accident. The fact is—I do not know, I am giving a vague estimate—a million people were at Howrah and all along the route up to Sheoraphulli. Vast numbers, overwhelming enthusiasm and all that was really something very cheering to see. But, it is rather very difficult to make arrangements for it.

The hon lady Member enquired about something that the West Bengal Government said about the arrangements made at Howrah station. I believe there was considerable discussion as to the place where this function should take place. There are a number of accounts. The West Bengal Government or the police did suggest that it should be held in some maidan. It may be that the railway people wanted it nearer to the station. Ultimately, the railway opinion prevailed. If I may say so, that may have been a wrong decision. I am personally of the opinion that no such major function should take place within the station. But, that has

nothing to do with the accident. That something apart from it, after the train left, miles after the Howrah station.

Shri H. N. Mukerjee (Calcutta-Central): We have seen reports in the papers and from what the Ministers have said it also appears that the start of the train was delayed by a certain number of minutes in order to get the people off the footboards either through persuasion or compulsion. I would like to know why the train was not delayed a little longer, and why if necessary even the starting of the train was not cancelled altogether so that danger to life on account of people travelling on footboards of the electric train could be avoided. Papers have alleged that the additional effort to get the people off the footboards either by persuasion or by compulsion was not made and that should have been made.

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: May I say, Sir, I am merely surprised at the hon. Member's persistence in error? Here I am, who was present there, telling him that the train was not stopped once, twice but three times, repeatedly people were taken off and others came on the scene a little later, and they were pushed off again and again. I took them off myself, many of them.

Raja Mahendra Pratap (Mathura): The hon. Prime Minister may give up going to such places.

Mr. Speaker: It is really unfortunate that on such an occasion like this there should have been an accident and there should be loss of two lives and serious injuries to 13 others, nine of whom are in the hospital. A few others have, fortunately, recovered. The hon. Prime Minister himself was present there at the Howrah station. It is admitted that the train was delayed even by four minutes and every attempt was made to clear the crowd or the people who were standing on the footboard, and the train moved on. A suggestion is made that the train ought not to have been started at all that day, that is,

[Mr. Speaker]

cancellation merely because some persons came and stood there improperly. It seems no function at all is possible hereafter.

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: That would be dangerous. There would have been trouble if the train had not started.

Mr. Speaker: Possibly the other trouble would have been more serious than this trouble. Sometimes such accidents occur beyond the control of anybody. The miscreants are responsible whoever they may have been. They too did not expect that they would come by this fatal accident. This is unfortunate. In these circumstances, I feel that there is nothing wrong either of the part of the railway authorities or others in the management. Therefore, I am not giving my consent to this adjournment motion.

Shrimati Beba Chakravarty: One point, Sir. You say that all arrangements were made in spite of what the hon. Prime Minister said, which is not right.

Mr. Speaker: He said everything was made properly.

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: I venture to point out that the arrangements were on paper, no doubt, very very excellent. I was much impressed by the beauty of the scene when I entered the Howrah station. But, the arrangements were obviously not adequate to meet a million people or half a million people or whatever the number.

An Hon. Member: Especially when you were going there.

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: Anyway, the point is that whether the arrangement was good or bad is not relevant to the accident. That is what I am pointing out. Because, the accident took place miles away from Howrah. The train started, it is said, four minutes later. It is true. After having moved for a few minutes, it

stepped again. After moving for another five minutes, it stopped again. Really it was half an hour late before we left the neighbourhood of the Howrah station. It was long after. After we had cleared the train several times, somebody else—it was going slowly—would climb up and hold on to it. Unfortunately many of these persons were, I take it. I do not know, railway workers themselves who felt a little confident, knowing how the train goes. But, they did not have enough experience of an electric train going. It was slightly different from an ordinary train. It gathers speed suddenly. There were a number of unfortunate occurrences and this accident happened.

Shri H. N. Mukerjee: May I suggest, in view of what has happened, that the Railway Ministry and other Ministries may consider the desirability of not dragging the Prime Minister unnecessarily to certain celebrations where his time is wasted and events occur which sometimes produce deleterious results?

Shri Jawaharlal Nehru: I heartily agree with the hon. Member.

PAPERS LAID ON THE TABLE

AMENDMENTS TO CENTRAL SILK BOARD RULES

The Minister of Commerce (Shri Kanungo): I beg to lay on the Table, under sub-section (3) of Section 13 of the Central Silk Board Act, 1942, a copy of each of the following Notifications, making certain amendments to the Central Silk Board Rules, 1955:—

(1) S.R.O. No. 598, dated the 10th March, 1956.

(2) S.R.O. No. 599, dated the 10th March, 1956.

(3) S.R.O. No. 600, dated the 10th March, 1956.