

12.40 hrs.

DEMANDS FOR SUPPLEMENTARY
GRANTS BUDGET (GENERAL)
1959-60

The Minister of Finance (Shri Morarji Desai): Sir, I beg to present a statement showing Supplementary Demands for Grants in respect of the Budget (General) for 1959-60.

12.40½ hrs.

DEMANDS FOR SUPPLEMENTARY
GRANTS BUDGET (RAILWAYS)
1959-60

The Minister of Railways (Shri Jagjivan Ram): Sir, I beg to present a statement showing Supplementary Demands for Grants in respect of the Budget (Railways) for 1959-60.

12.41 hrs.

STATEMENT RE. EXPLOSION IN
ORDNANCE FACTORY, KHAMARIA

The Minister of Defence (Shri Krishna Menon): Mr. Speaker, Sir, you were not satisfied with the answer given to a question relating to the recent explosion in an ammunition factory. Government have, therefore, further examined both the answer given and the facts relating to this matter. They have to submit to you that the answer contained all information relevant to losses suffered by Government. Any further elaboration of that answer could only have been done by disclosing the arrangements inside the factory and the contents thereof. The assessment of the damage in terms of money could not be included in the answer, as such assessment under the relevant rules is within the competence of the Court of Inquiry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has been the practice, if I may say so with respect, a necessary one, and one to which you have always given your considered support that the details of Defence Establishments or their working or processes of manufacture should not directly or indirectly be revealed.

However, in view of your observations and out of deference to your directive, Government have decided to depart from this practice in this instance and to explain the position, although it results in giving details about machinery and processes inside an Ordnance Factory.

In the present instance, the damage was to the roof of a building, which is an old wartime construction. The roof of the building was blown up by the explosion. The book value of this building is about Rs. 4,300/-. Its replacement today may cost approximately Rs. 27,000/-. Under established procedures, it is the function of the Court of Inquiry to assess the financial effect of the damage. Government requests, therefore, that the estimates now given should be taken by the House as a rough guess and subject to the findings of the Court of Inquiry.

Mr. Speaker, pointed questions were asked about damage to plant and machinery. This is the kind of detail which normally, in the public interest, Government would not like to reveal. Reticence in regard to such information is not necessary because the processes are secret or the machinery is on the secret list, but because it is considered undesirable to disclose directly or indirectly our potential, the state of our technical development, our methods and processes. Such disclosures may well be prejudicial to national interests. In this case, for example, the factory is a filling factory. There was little or no plant or machinery worth mentioning in it. While old shells were being dismantled, one shell exploded during the boiling process and the explosion spread to others and blew up the roof, killing one person and injuring four others. The operations in this case are of a pattern which we would ordinarily not have liked to be disclosed directly or by inference.

The terms of the Court of Inquiry are to collect all relevant evidence relating to technical questions, injury