

*Purchase of Railway  
Sleepers from  
Abroad at Higher  
Prices*

15-16 hrs.

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs (Shri Satya Narayan Sinha):** With your permission I want to announce a slight change in the order of Government business for tomorrow, Friday, the 24th April, 1959. The discussion on the report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for 1957-58 will be taken up before taking up the resolution regarding the recommendations of the Railway Convention Committee.

**Shri Braj Raj Singh:** Sir, may I submit one thing. The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs usually announces such changes. But the Members who are not present here now will not know that the report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes will come up tomorrow. Certain Members who might like to participate in the discussion of the report may not be available tomorrow. So, this aspect may be kept in view for the future.

**Shri Satya Narayan Sinha:** Tomorrow, if at all it comes, it will be discussed for an hour or so. Tomorrow, half the day is non-official day, and naturally, it will be carried over to Monday. Six hours are allotted to it. Unfortunately, it has become necessary to make this change, because the Railway Minister has got a very important conference tomorrow—the Railway Users' National Consultative Committee—and the Minister and the Deputy Ministers will not be free. Otherwise, we would not have inconvenienced the House that way. This is a very minor change. It does not matter. After all, in any case, the major portion of this discussion will take place on Monday.

16 hrs.

**Shri Easwara Iyer:** The hon. Minister must understand that it takes a lot of time to study the report and be prepared. So, suddenly putting it up tomorrow is rather inconvenient.

**Shri Satya Narayan Sinha:** It is a very minor change.

**Shri Easwara Iyer:** It is not a minor change.

**Mr. Deputy-Speaker:** The change itself is not minor. The discussion on the Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is very important and a very large number of Members are interested. They should have prior notice; so, a change made in that certainly is a matter of concern to the Members. But as has been explained, some necessity has arisen and then again, most of it would be discussed on Monday. Perhaps a Member or two might have chances tomorrow. Therefore, that explanation, I think, is enough and that should satisfy hon. Members.

**Shri Braj Raj Singh:** Did the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs not know about the Railway Users' Consultative Committee meeting to be held tomorrow formerly when he announced the order of business?

**Mr. Deputy-Speaker:** The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs might not have known it; it might have been known to the Railway Minister. That should not surprise hon. Members.

**DISCUSSION RE. PURCHASE OF  
RAILWAY SLEEPERS FROM  
ABROAD AT HIGHER PRICES**

**Shri Vidya Charan Shukla (Baloda Bazar):** Mr. Deputy-Speaker, ever since it became known to the House that we have been obliged to purchase and import large amounts of railway sleepers from abroad, the House has been very much interested to know how such a situation arose, because we have got a large amount of potential supply of timber at home. We are also equally anxious that henceforth we should not spend even a penny on the import of any railway sleeper from abroad. From the common sense

[Shri Vidya Charan Shukla]

point of view, it would appear that we should be not only self-sufficient in regard to wooden sleepers, but, on the other hand, we should have been exporting railway sleepers, because we have one of the largest forest wealth in the world.

Until recently, we never imported any railway sleeper from abroad for our use; all the requirements of our railways were met from indigenous sources. After the second Five Year Plan was initiated and was being implemented, a large amount was provided for the railways for expansion, because they were supposed to carry manufactured goods, raw materials, etc. The present difficulty whereby we have to import railway sleepers worth Rs. 15½ crores from abroad arose mainly because sufficient planning and forethought had not gone into this problem and because of which we were faced with an immediate problem. If we had not imported these railway sleepers, our railway expansion programme could not have gone through. It was mainly because of the needs of the railways for the Second Five Year Plan that we had to import sleepers worth Rs. 15½ crores. When I say sleepers, I include wooden as well as cast iron and steel sleepers. It is not hard to realise that if this money of Rs. 15½ crores was properly capitalised in a working plan to develop our forest resources, we could have not only met our requirements of railway sleepers in the Second Plan from this working plan on the development of forests, but we could have enough confidence to look to the third Plan, where the requirements of sleepers would be much larger than they have been now.

In the third Plan, we hope we will not again face such a difficulty, where because of immediate requirements, we will have to purchase sleepers at whatever price they are available all over the world. The railways' requirements are not so uncertain as say, requirements of food, where because of famine conditions

and other things, we have to rush for supplies to overcome immediate difficulties. The requirements of the railways are known fairly in advance. We have been facing the sleeper difficulty since 1950-51 and actually we have begun importing sleepers from 1955-56. If proper planning and thought had gone into it, we could have easily avoided this.

This question of import of sleepers from abroad has to be examined from three points of view: firstly, whether the import was necessary at all; secondly, what penalty we have to pay because of the lack of planning and the emergency under which we have to import these sleepers and thirdly whether these sleepers were purchased from the cheapest source or not. Several times it has been stated that sleepers were in short supply in our country. We have a very strong feeling that proper and intensive efforts have not been made in the country to procure the necessary supplies. Otherwise, all the quantities that the railways need could have been easily procured inside our country and we would not have been obliged to import sleepers from abroad. Proof is lent to this strong belief by the fact that the railways were able to step up their procurement of wooden sleepers in the country from 11 lakh sleepers in 1951-52 to 23 lakh sleepers in 1955-56. Surely, this was not the saturation point. If we had continued our efforts in right earnest, we would have been able to procure the sleepers very easily from our own sources.

As a matter of fact, in 1953, the Railway Minister addressed a letter to all the State Chief Ministers and solicited their fullest co-operation to maximise the supply of sleepers from their respective States. In the reply sent by the Chief Ministers and other Ministers of State Governments, they pointed out two factors which were generally responsible for railways not getting sleeper supplies from those States. The first reason given by the State Governments was that the supply

accessible areas of the forests have been worked already and they thought it was necessary to go into the interior remote and untapped forests for more supplies. The second reason is the present ceiling rates fixed by the railways are not enough, because if the timber is converted into other things, it fetches higher prices.

After getting these two reasons from the State Governments, the Railway Board did not take any action to remove those difficulties. They refused to revise their ceiling prices they have fixed for procuring sleepers from Indian suppliers and State Governments.

The attitude the railway adopted can easily be described as penny-wise and pound-foolish, because this mentality has very amply been demonstrated by the deal the railways had with the Kerala sleeper suppliers from west coast. While rejecting the offer of the sleeper suppliers of the west coast, the Deputy Minister, Mr. Ramaswamy, gave this reason that if those prices quoted by the west coast suppliers were accepted, that would have disturbed the equilibrium of prices obtaining in the country, because they demanded Rs 20.50 c.i.f. whereas the Kerala Government had fixed the rate at Rs. 18 and odd. So, they refused to purchase sleepers from west coast suppliers. But it is surprising that after one year, they placed huge orders for the supply of wooden sleepers from abroad, on which the railways had to pay Rs. 32 per sleeper at the Indian ports. This Rs. 32 c.i.f. cost does not include the port handling charges and the Indian customs duty. Because of this purchase we have been obliged to pay Rs. 9 extra per sleeper, and that too entirely in foreign exchange. It is absolutely impossible for us to understand why the Railway Board preferred to pay Rs. 9 extra to the foreign suppliers per sleeper and why did they not think of purchasing the sleepers offered by the west coast suppliers, even though they were slightly higher

than the agreement rate of the Railway Board with the Kerala Government. I have certain figures which I have taken from the Estimates Committee and, according to my calculations, if Rs. 9 extra has been paid for each sleeper the amount of loss would be at least Rs. 1½ crores to the Exchequer, and that too entirely in foreign exchange.

Even if our timber was not of a superior variety, even if it was not as good as the Australian timber, we should have gone for it, because we have not been importing Australian timber or Australian sleepers for ever. We have got to continue or proceed with our work with our own sleepers. The cast iron and steel sleepers which have been imported are more costly. Each cast iron sleeper costs Rs. 57 to Rs. 68 c.i.f.

The Deputy Minister of Railways (Shri Shah Nawaz Khan): They will last longer.

Shri Vidya Charan Shukla: These sleepers will last for 60 years, but they cannot be used in places where there is salinity. There are several places where these sleepers cannot be used. All over the world wooden sleepers are preferred to iron sleepers, because the trains run much better on the wooden sleepers than on cast iron sleepers. Cast iron sleepers have not been taken by preference; they have been taken by other countries because wooden sleepers are not available in the market.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: The trains would run on rails or on sleepers?

Shri Vidya Charan Shukla: Sleepers are the things on which the rails rest.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Trains run on the rails and not on the sleepers.

Shri Vidya Charan Shukla: The trains run on the rails and the rails run on the sleepers.

Sardar A. S. Saigal: Let us have technical opinion on this!

/Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Is it from Madhya Pradesh?

**Shri Vidya Charan Shakla:** My point is that if the railways had been paying competitive prices for wood and timber in the markets of our country, we would never have been required to import wooden sleepers from abroad.

The price of sleepers began rising from 1946 or 1948 and the railways had good control over the market till 1955. Their procurement was constantly increasing. After that their procurement began falling and, at the present day, their procurement of wooden sleepers is much less than what it was in 1956-57. All this prove that if the railways were willing to pay the market price which was obtaining then, that is to say, the price demanded by the suppliers, they could have easily avoided the import of sleepers by paying Rs 9 per sleeper extra

In this connection, it is relevant to quote the Estimates Committee's observations. They have observed:

"The Committee are not convinced that the country's forests cannot meet a major portion of the requirements of the railways"

This observation was made by the Estimates Committee while they examined the shortage of railway sleepers in their track renewal programme.

The second angle from which we have to view the import of sleepers is the amount of total loss we have suffered on account of these imports and whether part of it could not have been avoided. A statement laid on the Table of the House on 17th February regarding the programme of importing wooden and metal sleepers into the country for meeting the requirements of the railways for 1958 says that approximately five lakh wooden sleepers of various gauges are expected to be imported into India in 1958-59

from Australia and Burma. And the difference in price, as I have already said, is Rs. 9 per sleeper.

We are now anxious to know from the Railway Minister how much more wooden sleepers or cast iron or steel sleepers we are going to import whatever we have imported till now, is that all, or we are going to import more and, if so, how much more are we going to import and at what price.

The third angle from which we have to examine this question is whether we purchased the sleepers from the cheapest sources. Some questions were raised about the Brazilian offer but the Deputy Minister replied in a very short sentence that it had a very interesting and long story. Then he concluded by saying that a lot of allegations were made and they were found to be false. We have no knowledge of that story. We would like to know what that story was, what type of offer was made from Brazil and what happened to that offer. It was conceded that the offer made by the Brazilian suppliers was the lowest. It was lower than the Australian and other offers from countries from where we purchase the sleepers. Probably they were not found suitable for our purpose. We would like to know what happened to that offer.

Another important point is this. What attempts are we making to increase our own supply of sleepers from our own country. Generally, there are three or four measures which, the railways have been repeating, they are taking to increase the indigenous capacity from our country. The first thing that they often say is that they are trying the exploitation of inaccessible areas hitherto untapped. Secondly, they often say they have begun accepting a number of non-durable species of trees. The third measure is the relaxation of size specifications etc. Fourthly, they are increasing the cast iron sleeper manufacturing capacity in the country.

Now let us take these points one by one. Firstly, we would like to know how many square miles of hitherto inaccessible forest areas have been opened up by the efforts made by the Railway Ministry, where are these areas and how many wooden sleepers have been obtained from such areas which have been opened by the efforts made by the Railway Ministry. Secondly, we would like to know what has been the specific increase in the number of railway sleepers as a result of acceptance of non-durable varieties of woods for the railway sleepers and since when this has been introduced. When I was going through the report of the Estimates Committee, and also going through the proceedings of Lok Sabha, I came across a question in which it has been stated that after this order was passed to accept non-durable and softer wood for use as railway sleepers, the receipt of such wood by the railway treatment plants has actually been reduced. That means that the railways were getting a greater number of softer wood and non-durable quality woods for making railway sleepers four years back than they are getting now.

The main reason here again is that the Railways have not agreed to pay the competitive price in the market to obtain their supplies. Personally I do not feel that these efforts could have produced any tangible results mainly because they did not strike at the root of the problem. The whole base of the effort of the Railway Ministry is struck off when they refuse to pay reasonable prices which are demanded by the State Governments. The State Governments would be willing to undertake large-scale exploitation of their forest resources if the Railway Ministry were to enter into long-term contracts with them and pay them the price.

**The Minister of Railways (Shri Jagjivan Ram):** Which State Government?

**Shri Vidya Charan Shukla:** State Governments of the country.

**Mr. Deputy-Speaker:** Which one in particular?

**Shri Vidya Charan Shukla:** This Report of the Estimates Committee says that all the 20 State Governments, that is, before re-organisation, had a conference and they all indicated to the Railway Ministry that if proper long-term contracts were entered into with them and if they were given the prices they wanted, they could have increased their supplies. I shall come to a specific instance, that of Bombay Government, and shall try to show how the un-imaginative dealing of the Railway Board resulted in stopping supplies completely from Bombay State.

**Dr. M. S. Aney:** What price did they ask?

**Shri Vidya Charan Shukla:** All those figures have not been given in the Estimates Committee's Report.

The Railway Board also appointed a Timber Adviser, who is a very competent and a very experienced officer but the total receipt of wooden sleepers in our country, which was 60 lakh cft. in 1955-56, after these earlier mentioned steps were taken by the Railways and after all these earlier mentioned special efforts were initiated by the Railways the supplies went down to 50 lakh cft. Instead of increasing from 60 lakh cft. they have come down to 50 lakh cft. of timber in 1957-58. I do not know what is the present situation, whether the supplies are increasing or they are still decreasing.

The Estimates Committee again pinpointed this problem in its Twenty-seventh Report. They have observed thus—

“The Committee considers that the question of prices which seems to be a stumbling block in the way of getting, more sleepers should be amicably settled between the representatives of the Railways and of the State Governments. The Committee are not

(Shri Vidya Charan Shukla)

convinced that the forest resources of the country cannot meet a major portion of the requirements of the Railways"

I am sure every hon Member of this House will agree with the observations made by the Estimates Committee

I will now come to the instance of the dealing of the Railway Board with the Bombay Government An ad hoc committee was formed to go into the question of wooden sleepers' supply from Bombay State It was set up by the Railway Board under the chairmanship of Shri C R Ranganathan, the then Inspector-General of Forests, with the Chief Conservator of Forests, Bombay, and two other officials of the Central Government The Bombay Government earlier had informed the Railway Board that if the wood of the other variety were exploited and treated as suggested by the Bombay Government, the present target of 3,56,000 sleepers could be increased up to 6 lakh sleepers The House will note that these negotiations between the State Government of Bombay and Government of India broke down on the score of prices only These negotiations took place in May 1958 and the Railway Board did not agree to pay the price demanded by the Government of Bombay The Chairman of the ad hoc committee was compelled to drop the departmental supplies of wooden sleepers from Bombay It is, therefore, surprising that the very next year of the refusal by the Railway Board to pay slightly higher than the conventional price to the State Government of Bombay, the Railway Board placed a very big order at much higher prices with the foreign suppliers of wooden sleepers I have already said that the price that the Railway Board has paid at our port comes to Rs 32 I do not have the exact figure But, I suppose the price demanded by the Bombay Government was Rs 21 per sleeper

Here, I again emphasize that all efforts, however good-intentioned

they may be, are bound to fail unless the realities of the situation are taken into account, and the Railways agree to pay the reasonable and prevailing market price to the State Governments so that they can increase the exploitation of their own forest resources and increase the supply of wooden sleepers to the Railways

The expansion of the railways in the Third Plan has to be very immense to cope up with the economic growth that we are planning If the supply of the basic construction material is not ensured from now on, we will again face the same difficulty we have faced now It will be of much greater magnitude and we may have to pay a greater price for it

I will suggest a few correctives which could be taken up and it might save us future difficulties The first essential is that we must immediately try and approximately formulate our tentative requirements of railway sleepers up to 1967, that is, the remaining two years of the Second Plan and the five years of the Third Plan It is only after we have tentatively calculated our requirements, that we can prepare a big working plan which can be taken in hand with the co-operation of the State Governments which are interested in co-operation The Railway Board could put Rs 10 or 12 crores along with the investment made by the State Governments and they could develop the forest resources, make roads and open up inaccessible forest areas It may be calculated how much of railway sleepers this type of effort will yield

Moreover, the capacity in the Ordnance factories, other railway workshops and other factories in the country can be increased to produce more cast iron sleepers Previously, we had difficulty in obtaining supply of pig iron After the steel mills in the public sector have gone into production, we will have ample supply of pig iron A great deal of supply of cast iron railway sleepers can be obtained in this manner.

There has also been a suggestion that the Railways should examine the question of using cement sleepers. There is a great deal of difficulty in doing so. It has been pointed out that the Railways in France are using this. Here, we have got some climatic and temperature differences and it may not be possible to use the same type of sleepers as in France. If a different kind of mixture is made, may be, we may be able to use cement sleepers also. This might also help to obviate the difficulty.

The other thing that has been suggested is the creosoting plants, the number of which we must increase. These creosoting plants are used to treat inferior varieties of wood to make them usable and increase their life. If these plants are set up in each zone of the Railways, we will be able to utilise such timber which is not at present serviceable as far as sleepers are concerned.

The situation at present is not very satisfactory. I wonder, in spite of all that we have imported from foreign countries, what are the arrears in track renewal at present. According to the report of the Estimates Committee, 7,500 miles of track is in arrears of renewal at present. It has not been renewed. Eight hundred and ninety-eight miles of tract has been put under speed restriction for safety reasons. That is, it is dangerous to run trains on those railway lines at a high speed because the track may be damaged because of that. It is most distressing, Sir, to find that the position today has not improved in respect of sleepers' supply position. Various questions have been answered in Parliament by the hon. Minister and the hon. Deputy Minister of Railways. But we find that there has not been any fresh thinking in this regard. We would like to know as to what plans they have formulated to ensure adequate supply of sleepers for our railways in the future.

My last point is this. The purpose of my raising this discussion in the House will be fulfilled if the hon. Rail-

way Minister will give his categorical assurance that apart from whatever orders have already been placed for the supply of sleepers from abroad, henceforth not a single sleeper will be imported from any foreign country for use in Indian railways. If he is really earnest and serious about solving this problem, then, I am sure he will be able to give this categorical assurance.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: I find that there are six hon. Members who want to speak. I will allow 10 minutes each. The hon. Minister will require half an hour. Now, Mr. Kodiyaz.

Shri Kodiyaz (Quilon—Reserved—Sch. Castes): Whenever the question of supply of sleepers for our railways is raised in this House we are being told that the country is in short supply of wooden sleepers. Now, Sir, nobody denies the fact that the indigenous sources of supply would not meet the entire requirements of the railways in respect of wooden sleepers. But here the question is this. Are the Railways utilising the available resources in the country to the fullest extent possible? In reply to a question asked on the floor of the House, the hon. Deputy Minister of Railways stated the other day that they are taking all steps to increase the supply of indigenous sleepers. What do we find now? We find that in preference to indigenous sleepers, sleepers are imported from outside, from the foreign countries. As has already been pointed out by my hon. friend, Shri Vidya Charan Shukla, in preference to Kerala timbers Australian sleepers were imported. The reason for rejecting the offer of Kerala merchants, we were told by the hon. Deputy Minister of Railways last time, was that the price demanded by the merchants was slightly higher than the ceiling rate. Now, instead of purchasing those sleepers from Kerala, the Railway Ministry imported them from Australia. If the freight charge and also the transport charge from the landing port to take the sleepers to the various work-spots are added to

the f.o.b. price it will come to about 1½ times the cost of Kerala's timbers.

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** And what is the quality of the Kerala sleepers? Its life is only five years whereas the life of the Australian sleepers is about twenty years

**Shri Kadiyan:** As for the quality of the Kerala sleepers, the hon. Deputy Minister stated last time that that was inferior to the Australian sleepers.

**Shri Jangde (Balaspur):** Much inferior.

**Shri Kadiyan:** I cannot understand why there is this rush for foreign sleepers. When we are badly in need of foreign exchange and when we are facing difficulties in getting foreign exchange, why should we unnecessarily rush in for foreign sleepers and thus spend a considerable amount of foreign exchange?

The hon. Deputy Minister in reply to a question stated that the indigenous supply of wooden sleepers was declining. He has stated that the procurement of wooden sleepers in 1951-52 was 11 lakhs; in 1952-53, it was 16 lakhs, and it rose up to 23 lakhs in 1955-56, but from the next year onwards, it began to show a decline; in 1956-57 it was 20.6 lakhs, and in 1957-58 it was 19 lakhs. What are the real reasons for this decline? Have the Railway Ministry examined this problem and analysed the reasons for this decline?

Of course, the hon. Minister stated last time that the impact of the Second Five Year Plan and the increasing demand for timber for other construction works has its effect on the supply of wooden sleepers. That may be correct to a certain extent. At the same time, I would like to ask the hon. Minister what steps have been taken by the railways to increase the indigenous supply.

Apart from the question of steps being taken by the railways, I have to point out one other thing. We have

a considerably large area of forests in our country. Nearly 22 per cent of the land surface of the country is covered with forests. And our forests can be favourably compared with any other rich forests in any other foreign country. Even then, we have had to depend upon foreign countries for the import of timber. It is a pity that we have had to do that. If we want to become self-sufficient in the matter of timber, we have to develop our forests. And the State Governments are trying to develop their forests in their own way. But the development of forests is a very difficult problem. The regeneration, rejuvenation and renovation of the forests require a large number of trained technical personnel. Also, it requires a large amount of money. So, unless the Central Government come into the picture, unless the Central Government come forward with a co-ordinated and well-planned programme to help the State Governments to develop the forests in their areas and also to grow valuable timber like teak in new areas, this problem cannot be solved. Of course, this may not be the responsibility of the Railway Ministry. But I take this opportunity to urge the Central Government to understand the importance and urgency of the problem.

So far as the Railway Ministry are concerned, I would suggest that they must draw up a long-term plan; they must, in consultation with the State Governments, assess the real potential of forests in each of the States, and to what extent each State can supply or meet the requirements of the railways. If such a long-term plan is worked out, and if a long-term agreement is entered into with the State Governments concerned, I think most of these difficulties can be overcome. Unless such a long-term agreement is reached, there will be no coordinated, consistent exploitation of our resources. Therefore, I would request the hon. Railway Minister to consider this suggestion seriously.



The hon. Minister has rightly raised this question of the quality of the timber. I do not think that all our timber is inferior in quality compared to foreign timber. Of course, we have some inferior varieties also, but the question is how we can utilise the inferior varieties. There are inferior varieties of timber, but they can be made use of by properly treating them with proper preservatives. So, if we have enough number of creosoting plants in our country, the supply of wooden sleepers can be increased.

16.41 hrs.

[Mr. SPEAKER in the Chair]

So far as my own State is concerned, we have one creosoting plant now in Olavakot which is working to full capacity, and in two shifts. The requirements of that area itself cannot be met by that plant alone. One more plant is urgently needed in that area. Therefore I would request the hon. Minister to find some money to get a new creosoting plant, and to locate it somewhere near Calicut where there is a large number of timber yards.

Shri Jaganatha Rao (Koraput): For each State there should be one

Shri Kodyan: I agree that less each State must have such a plant.

It is stated that since the beginning of the Second Plan up to the end of February this year we have spent Rs. 15.5 crores on sleepers including steel sleepers. I do not have the break-up for wooden sleepers. It might be a considerable amount. If a small portion of the foreign exchange that we spend on importing sleepers is used for buying creosoting plants, I think we can increase the indigenous supply of wooden sleepers, and it will help to a great extent in achieving self-sufficiency in this respect.

The last point that I would like to stress is that the procedure in regard to the purchase must be made as simple as possible. On account of technical or procedural defects there

must not be any delay and the offer of sleepers should not be rejected on that account alone. Every single available sleeper must be made use of by the Railway Ministry because we are in such dire need of wooden sleepers and if we can increase the supply of wooden sleepers by taking corrective measures it will save valuable foreign exchange. It will not only be beneficial to the railways; the railways will be giving a fillip to the timber industry of the country also.

When the Kallai timber merchants' offer was rejected and when a slump was feared by the merchants, we took keen interest in the matter, and the M.Ps. from Kerala State belonging to all the parties approached the hon. Minister because it is a vital industry in our State. Thousands and thousands of workers are employed in that industry. About 5,000 workers are employed in the Kallai area alone, apart from the workers engaged in the forest department of Government. That was why we took keen interest on the subject. Therefore, I would earnestly appeal and request the hon. Minister to consider these suggestions seriously. I hope the hon. Minister would take corrective measures to save the situation.

Mr. Speaker: Shri Maniyangadan; and then I will give an opportunity to Shri Ramaswamy.

Shri Maniyangadan (Kottayam): Sir, I am glad to throw my weight with my hon. friend on the other side in demanding that the question of wooden sleepers, especially from Kerala, should be considered very seriously. My hon. friend referred to the recent refusal of the Railways to purchase sleepers from contractors in Malabar. Subsequently, all the Members from Kerala met the Railway Minister in a deputation and the Railway Minister was good enough to hear us and to accede to the demand. I take this opportunity to thank him for the kindness shown by him.

Now, the Kallai timber yard is reputed to be the second largest timber

{Shri Maniyangadan}

market in the world (*Interruption*). More than 25 per cent of Kerala is forest, and a large quantity of timber, both hard and soft, is available there. If properly exploited, the timber from that area would be sufficient at least for sleepers for that region.

There is objection that it is soft wood or inferior variety. It is for that purpose that one creosoting plant has been set up at Olavakkode. The capacity of that can be increased or another plant could be installed; and soft wood that is available ought to be made use of by proper treatment and by scientific treatment.

When we are very badly in need of foreign exchange, why should we go in for foreign sleepers when these things are available? The Minister might say, because the quality of the wooden sleepers in Malabar is inferior to those that we import. May be true. By creosoting treatment I do not know what will be the proportionate difference. Even if there is, still my submission is that indigenous sleepers should be made use of in preference to those imported from outside (*Interruption*).

No question of risk to life arises. The life of the sleepers may be a bit shorter than that of the imported variety. There is plenty of timber available and they can be replaced. There is no question of risk to life. Reports say that the railway sleepers have not been replaced due to want of sleepers. There we are having the risk of life. My suggestion does not involve any risk of life.

Moreover a large number of people live on this business. In the Malabar area of Kerala especially, it is a great business. My submission is that if this indigenous enterprise is supported it would be of great help to the unemployed there and it will also increase the wealth of the State. There are already large quantities of timber available in the forests. That should be exported and utilised.

I have to make one suggestion regarding the system now adopted by the Railways. They invite tenders, when they are in need of sleepers, for very large quantities of sleepers together in one lot. That means that only people who can afford to invest large capital can tender for the requirements of the Railways. If that system is changed and tenders are invited for smaller quantities—I do not say 1000 or 2000 sleepers—people who could not afford to invest a huge amount of capital can take advantage of it and the railways also can get sufficient number of sleepers. I believe that this method would be adopted by the railways.

There was a suggestion that each State should have a re-assorting plant. I do not object to that. But in places where larger quantities of timber are available and the capacity of the plant is not sufficient to meet the demand, some more plants should be installed. As far as Malabar is concerned, I am sure one more plant, if installed, would not be sufficient to meet the demand. That matter should be looked into so that all available timber may be utilised for this purpose.

The Deputy Minister of Railways (Shri S. V. Ramaswamy): Sir, Shri Shukla has raised very many points. The points were all mentioned in the 21st report of the Estimates Committee and the House will be pleased to note that detailed replies have been given to all the points raised therein, in the 27th report. Therefore, I believe that the answers given there are quite satisfactory.

With regard to the sleeper position, I wish to clear certain misconceptions. The idea seems to be that while we could get these sleepers in our own country, we rush to foreign countries, spend the money and waste it away. I am sorry the impression is very wrong. On the other hand we were put to the necessity of doing that because of the circumstances which I shall place before the House.

In the Second Plan, the total requirements were estimated at 315 lakhs of sleepers. On an average we require 63 lakhs of sleepers per year. In the first two years, we could procure only 99 lakhs, on an average less than 50 lakhs per annum. Therefore, we had to consider what would be the situation in the remaining three years. We assessed the requirements and what we can possibly get and what would be the short-fall. After working it out in great detail, we found out that we can at best get 164 lakhs of sleepers of all varieties—80 lakhs cast iron, 12 lakhs steel, 61 lakhs timber and five lakhs concrete and all-told 164 lakhs—in the remaining three years which makes up a total of 263 lakhs of sleepers for the whole of the Five Year Plan period.

**Mr. Speaker:** Are they all purchased together or from year to year so that the timber may be cut from year to year?

**Shri S. V. Ramaswamy:** It is spread over the remaining three years

**Shri Vidya Charan Shukla:** Our complaint is that these figures were worked out too late; they should have been done much earlier. It was done only when the whole necessity was forced upon us by the Second Plan

**Shri S. V. Ramaswamy:** I am sorry that argument is not correct. We assessed it and we found that we were able to procure only 99 lakhs of sleepers. We had to work out in great detail. In the remaining three years, we found that we could get only 164 lakhs of sleepers, the total being 263 lakhs for the whole of the five years, leaving a shortfall of 52 lakhs. We have to see what we should do to meet this shortfall.

An Indian railway purchasing mission was sent abroad to purchase fifty lakhs of steel sleepers at a cost of Rs. 16.5 crores. We could procure only 22 lakhs of sleepers at a cost of one crore of rupees. We surrendered Rs. 15.5 crores of foreign exchange. Then we found out it was cheaper to

import wooden sleepers than go in for steel sleepers.

**Mr. Speaker:** What is meant by cheapness?

**Shri S. V. Ramaswamy:** Relatively.

**Mr. Speaker:** Can we sell away our country also to some other country because it will be cheaper? The hon. Deputy Minister forgets that if the money remains in the country, after all, it flows from one hand to the other.

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** Sir, he did not make it clear. What he meant was that it was cheaper to purchase wooden sleepers in foreign market than to purchase steel sleepers. He is not comparing the indigenous market with foreign market.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Deputy Minister evidently wants to impress upon the House whether the cost is high or low. But if it is purchased here the money will roll here. Merely because the cost is less by a few pias there if we purchase things worth so much from outside, our money flows away to foreign countries.

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** I am sorry, Sir, you are not interpreting him correctly. What he was saying was that it would be cheaper from foreign exchange point of view to purchase wooden sleepers from foreign countries than to purchase steel sleepers. He was not comparing foreign market with indigenous market.

**Shri Vidya Charan Shukla:** What you have said, Sir, is absolutely correct.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, order. Let the hon. Deputy Minister continue. Even my interruption was wrong.

**Shri Vidya Charan Shukla:** May I point out, Sir,.....

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, order. Let him go on.

**Shri S. V. Ramaswamy:** Sir, the country was passing through a crisis in foreign exchange. We had to save

[Shri S. V. Ramaswamy]

that, and at the same time meet our requirements. Here, Sir, let me make one correction. It is not 20 lakh steel sleepers but only two lakh sleepers that we could procure at Rs. 1 crore. We gave up Rs. 15.5 crores and went in for this. We were able to place orders for a total of 12 lakhs B.G. sleepers from West Australia, East Australia and U.S.A.—all the three countries put together—and for metre gauge about eight lakhs from Australia making a total of 20 lakhs. The cost was only Rs. 4 crores. Even then we found that there was a shortfall of 32 lakhs. We thought it would be better to place some more orders on some other countries and reduce this gap. Therefore we placed an order on Burma State Timber Board for about 1½ lakh sleepers at a cost of Rs. 60 lakhs. Then, from Canada under the Colombo Plan we will be getting about 12 lakhs. We have placed exploratory orders with Australia.

Shri Vidya Charan Shukla: Sir, I would like to ask a question.

Mr. Speaker: He may note down the points, and when the hon. Deputy Minister has finished I will allow him to put the question.

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: Therefore, by the additional order we covered another 18 lakhs, making a total of 38 lakhs out of a shortfall of 52 lakhs still leaving a balance of 14 lakhs. That is the situation, Sir, in which we had to go in for this timber.

Mr. Speaker: What about other countries? There are railways everywhere, all over the world.

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: As regards the availability of timber in our own country, reply has been given at page 16 of the Twenty-seventh Report of the Estimates Committee. Sir, it is not a question of cutting down all trees in one day and supplying the sleepers immediately. The yield must be sustained so that forests are not denuded and other ill effects are not felt on the economic structure of the country

and the price structure. It is therefore that we think of the sustained yield. Remember also that based on that there is a limit to which wooden sleepers can be produced in the country. It has been assessed that the sustained yield in our country at the present rate would be of the order of 23 lakhs to 25 lakhs a year.

Mr. Speaker: How much will be the demand per year?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: The demand will be much more.

Shri Vidya Charan Shukla: 90 lakhs per year

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: About 75 lakhs to 80 lakhs per year, but we will be able to supply only this much on the sustained yield principle.

My hon. friend has been urging that the price today is too much. My friends from Kerala have spoken about the supply of timber. My friends urged that another creosoting plant should be set up. This plant itself is being worked two shifts. This is a new plant. To work a third shift, it would be difficult. Still, we have accepted more than 60,000 sleepers in addition, and it will have more than two shifts now. To set up a creosoting plant costing Rs. 30 lakhs to Rs. 40 lakhs, the yield must be so high and it should spread over 30 to 40 years of assured supply before we launch upon it.

I may submit that though four or five years ago we were treating only two lakhs sleepers we are at present treating over 18 lakh sleepers. We are making all efforts to increase the capacity. There is also another limiting factor, namely, the supply of creosote. It is not in free supply. Sir, I have done.

Shri Vidya Charan Shukla: The hon. Deputy Minister said that—

Mr. Speaker: He has taken as much as half an hour. Shall I give all the

time to him? This is a kind of too much intrusion. There are other hon. Members here who want to speak. Shri Mohammed Imam.

**Shri Mohammed Imam (Chitaldrug):** Mr. Speaker, I have listened with interest to the opening remarks of the Mover and also to the speech of the Deputy Minister of Railways. This subject has raised various issues, and I think it has to be viewed from various angles.

First of all, you must find out what is the extent of the renewal and the rehabilitation of our railway lines. Secondly, are we self-sufficient, or is the country self-sufficient regarding the materials that are needed for the rehabilitation of our railway lines? Thirdly, was there a genuine need to import these materials, especially these sleepers, from far off countries like Canada or Australia? Fourthly, granting that there was need for the import, were proper methods adopted by the railway administration in obtaining favourable quotations and in guarding against the leakage or wastage or malpractices?

The country owns nearly 35,000 miles of railway lines. All these were acquired from companies and from the States. When the Government of India become the owners of these railway lines, it must be admitted that a large portion of these railway tracks required renewal and rehabilitation and re-tracking. Nearly 8,000 miles of railway lines were in arrears. So, it was provided in the second Five Year Plan that at least Rs. 100 crores should be spent for rehabilitation because the responsibility of the railways has increased and they have to ensure safe travel for the public.

During the year 1956-57, I find from the report that nearly 42 lakhs of railway sleepers, of which 28 lakhs were wooden sleepers and 24 lakhs were iron sleepers, were used. During the next year, nearly 24 lakhs of iron and cast iron sleepers and about 72 L.S.D.—7.

20 lakhs of wooden sleepers were used. I agree with them over that as far as possible, we must depend upon our internal resources available to step up production in all our undertakings. But in cases where it is absolutely necessary to go out, where the internal supply is inadequate, it is quite necessary then to import from abroad, especially in concerns like railways, which are essential services.

It must be admitted that the condition of our tracks is not as satisfactory as it ought to be, as evidenced by a number of railway accidents we have been encountering every month. It is specially so on tracks where we have used wooden sleepers. I may give you the example of the line between Poona and Bangalore, where I am afraid almost every week we see derailments. Recently, I think during this month, they had had three derailments between Poona and Hubli. As I was returning from my place to Delhi, I witnessed two scenes where two goods trains had derailed. This is a positive evidence that the tracks are not maintained in proper order. Tracks which were constructed long ago require a thorough renovation.

The mover suggested that we must give preference to wooden sleepers. There I differ from him. I am for using cast iron and iron sleepers. But unfortunately on the metre gauge section, wooden sleepers are used more; I think there 70 per cent of the sleepers are wooden and only 30 per cent are iron, whereas on the broad gauge system, it is the other way about; 80 per cent are iron and 20 per cent wooden.

If we use wooden sleepers, it creates its own inconvenience. Its life is shorter. Of course, many have advocated that wooden sleepers should be used. The difficulty is, what kind of wood must be used, whether it should be teak, rose wood or *gurga* as we call it in Kannada. The life-time of the wooden sleeper is very limited; its longevity is very little and unless

[Shri Mohammed Imam]

it is subjected to creosoting, it cannot last long. These wooden sleepers are the source of many troubles and accidents. So, I would suggest that in future all wooden sleepers must be replaced by either cast iron or iron sleepers and I think wooden sleepers must be given up. But till then, I submit that even if wood is used, it must be of a superior quality. We cannot use every kind of wood for sleepers.

I sympathise with my Keraia friends that the money which ought to have gone to Kerala has not gone there. I also sympathise with myself, because I also come from Mysore, where there are extensive forests. But from my own experience, my own information is that every kind of wood cannot be used for sleepers. There are special varieties of wood that can be used as sleepers, and those special varieties, I think, are not available in abundance. So, I am only speaking, taking into consideration the urgent necessity for the renovation and renewal of the railway lines. Sleepers in many places have to be renewed. When we are dealing with such an important commodity of which we are hopelessly short, we should not be chary of going outside the country and getting the required materials.

But there is one thing. We import these sleepers from other countries just as we import many other materials. We have been importing rolling stock and various other materials. But the railway administration must be careful to see that in importing these things they get favourable terms and conditions. The entire system of placing orders by the railway administration seems rather confusing. There are four systems of getting things by the railways. Firstly, some materials are purchased through the Works, Housing and Supply Ministry; secondly, some materials are purchased through other Ministries; thirdly, the Railway Board purchases some materials

directly; fourthly, the railways themselves purchase materials locally. I think locally also the railways are the biggest purchaser because I find from the report for 1957-58 that they have purchased materials worth crores and crores of rupees. Previously, only the Railway Board used to purchase materials directly. But then the Railway Board thought it fit to delegate powers and purchases began to be made at the lower level. Now purchases are made through various sources and nobody seems to be responsible for them. So, I would suggest that these things should be looked into to see that there is no leakage.

Regarding this particular transaction of purchasing railway sleepers, I would request the Railway Minister to satisfy himself on whether proper quotations were called for, whether competitive rates were accepted, whether they were satisfied with the quality of the material and whether the supply was made in time. If the Minister is satisfied, or if he satisfies me, that they have obtained competitive rates and they have secured favourable terms and conditions, then I feel personally that the railways did well in importing these materials, taking into consideration the large-scale necessity that we have, taking into consideration our requirements to renovate and rehabilitate our railway lines, because it is a very important job, and a job which the railways have to do in the interest of the safety of the travelling public.

Shri D. C. Sharma (Gurdaspur): The problem of sleepers has been studied by the Estimates Committees. It has also come to us through the questions and answers on the floor of this House. It has also served as a subject for many reports. Several members have also given careful attention to this problem. But I want to look at this problem, not from any regional point of view or from any local point of view but from the point of view of the overall needs and the overall policy of the Railway Ministry.

13173 Discussion re. VAISAKHA 3, 1881 (SAKA) Purchase of Railway 13174  
Sleepers from Abroad  
at Higher Prices

So far as I know, ever since we attained independence the Railway Ministry has been aiming at self-sufficiency. We are making a big drive for self-sufficiency in the domain of locomotives, coaches, wagons etc. Now, if we have a target of self-sufficiency in these big things such as locomotives, I do not understand why the Railway Ministry should not have some plan for achieving self-sufficiency, so far as these sleepers are concerned. I feel that if the Railway Ministry has not been able to do that, it is because it has not applied its mind to it, and because there had been a lack of co-ordination between the railway Ministry and the other Ministries and also the State Governments. Therefore, I would urge upon the hon Railway Minister to call a conference of the Ministers of various States ...

**An Hon. Member:** One more conference?

**Shri D. C. Sharma:** who are in charge of forests and also a conference of the Managers of the various Railways who know as to what the needs of the Railways are going to be during the remaining years of the Five Year Plan. He should call a conference. He should assess the requirements and he should also ask them as to how far those requirements can be fulfilled through our local supplies. After it has been done, I think something can come out of it; otherwise the whole of this discussion will lead to nothing.

For instance, the hon Minister, who intervened in the debate, was talking about Burma, Canada and Australia. He was saying for how many sleepers we have placed an order in this country or in that country. Perhaps it may be necessary to place orders for sleepers on other countries in terms of other overall requirements, but I think that no scientific approach either in the matter of assessment of our needs or in the matter of the supply of those needs, has so far been

made by the Railway Ministry. The Railway Ministry has been living in this matter, if not in other matters, from hand to mouth, so to say. Therefore, I think that this is a matter of policy decision which has to be taken.

I do not want to enter into the question whether wooden sleepers are better than cast iron sleepers or cast iron sleepers are better than cement sleepers. I do not want to enter into that argument because these are technical matters and when one deals with these technical matters one has to take into account the climatic conditions and the topographical conditions of the various regions where these are to be placed. I do not want to enter into that. I am at present concerned with one thing and that is that this is one of the anomalies of our national life that a country which should have so many forests, and when a country should pride on its forests, should be in short supply so far as sleepers are concerned. This matter has got to be looked into.

At the same time I would request the hon Railway Minister to look at this problem from another point of view. I come from a constituency where timber trade is very brisk thing. This constituency adjoins timber-producing Jammu and Kashmir State of which we are all proud.

**Shri A. M. Tariq (Jammu and Kashmir):** You were born in Jammu and Kashmir?

**Shri D. C. Sharma:** Now, Sir, the people tell me—I do not know whether they are right or wrong; I am not in a position to go into the merits of the case, but they tell me—that the supply of timber to the various departments of Government, and among them is the Railway Ministry also, is full of procedural difficulties, that is to say, they find it very difficult to get payment on time for the work that they have done.

[Shri D C Sharma]

That is also one of the reasons why we do not get as many indents for the supply of this timber as is necessary. I would, therefore, ask the hon. Railway Minister to go into the procedural aspect also of this problem and make it as simple and as easy as possible. I think that will also lead us to this conclusion that we need not go to other countries for the sleepers.

My third point is that whereas we are suffering from shortage of foreign exchange we are also interested in stepping up of the consumption of our own products and the consumption of our own things. From that point of view, I find that every year, an appeal is made for grow more food and other things. Unless we also make a big drive for making use of these various forest products of whatever kind, timber or anything else, I think all these appeals will not bear as much fruit as possible. Therefore, in the interests of our national pride, in the interests of our economy, in the interests of our need, it is necessary that we should gradually and in as short a time as possible give up our dependence on other countries so far as sleepers are concerned. Sleepers are also acquired from the point of view of urgency. That point cannot be ignored.

The right kind of sleepers, the right replacement of sleepers, the renewal of track, all these things are bound up with safety of travel. Our country is more concerned about the safety of our travelling than anything else. At the same time, when you get consignments from abroad—I speak with a due sense of responsibility—when you get consignments from abroad, you are not always sure of the quality of the thing. We are getting wheat from other countries. We get so many other things. There is a great deal of complaint against the quality that we are getting. If you get timber from Australia or Canada or Burma or any other country, I can assure you, you cannot always be

sure of the quality. If you do not get the right kind of quality, it is not possible for you to make a hullabaloo about it because the country about which you are speaking is far far away. Therefore, I say, as this is a matter on which depends our safety of travelling, we have to be one hundred per cent self-sufficient. We have to be Swadeshi in spirit in this matter. Without that, we cannot improve matters.

शेठ अचल सिंह (भागरा) अध्यक्ष महोदय, यहाँ पर ये बताया गया कि हमारे रेलवे में लाखों स्लीपर्स की जरूरत होती है और वे ज्यादातर विदेशों से मगाये जाते थे। लेकिन अब वह समय आ गया है कि हम को विदेशों से उन को मगाने की जरूरत नहीं होगी क्योंकि हमारे यहाँ दो तीन नोहे के कागजाने खूब गये हैं। उन में लाखों टन आयरन होता है। लेकिन मैं देखता हूँ कि अभी हमारे रेलवे बोर्ड में ऐसी भावना नहीं है कि वह इस इंडस्ट्री को हमारे देश में पनपा कर तरक्की दे। मिमाल के तौर पर मैं बताऊँ कि भागरे में एक फर्म है। उस ने १०,००० लोहे के स्लीपर्स सप्लाय करने का ठेका लिया था। वह एक एजुकेशनल आइडर था जिस को कि उस ने हिम्मत कर के लिया। इस वक्त स्लीपर की इंडस्ट्री ज्यादातर कलकत्ते में है, शायद और भी कहीं होती हो। तो उस ने हिम्मत कर के इस काम को लिया। लेकिन जब उस ने इस काम को लिया तो उस को पिग आयरन भी नहीं मिला और कोल भी नहीं मिला। कलकत्ते की फर्म्स ने यह कोशिश की कि जो मिस्त्री वह कलकत्ते के लाया था उन को भगा दे। इस तरह उस के काम को खराब करने की कोशिश की। लेकिन वह अपने काम में लगा रहा और मिस्त्रियों को ला कर काम जारी रखा। उस ने ४००० स्लीपर्स तैयार कर दिये और सरकार द्वारा वे पास भी हो गये। लेकिन सप्लाय में १५ रोज की देर हो जाने की वजह से वह



जो बाकी ५००० स्लीपर तैयार कर रहा था वे उस से नहीं लिये गये और कहा गया कि ६०० रु० के बजाय ४०० रु० टन के दाम मिलेंगे। मैं निवेदन करना चाहता हूँ कि इस तरह से किसी इंडस्ट्री को भी एनकरेजमेंट नहीं होता है। जब कि कलकत्ते वाले ने ६०० रु० टन में रेलवे को स्लीपर्स दिये थे तो आज उन के दाम ४०० रु० टन रह गये हैं। ठीक है, पिग घायरन हमारे यहाँ होता है इस लिये उन के दाम गिर गये हैं, लेकिन मैं चाहूँगा कि इस इंडस्ट्री को ठीक ढंग से एनकरेज किया जाय। अगर ऐसा किया गया तो हम को बाहर से स्लीपर्स मंगाने की जरूरत नहीं पड़ेगी क्योंकि हमारे यहाँ मैटीरियल बहुत है, काम करने वाले आदमी भी हैं और वे काम को सीख भी गये हैं। मैं रेलवे मिनिस्टर से यह निवेदन करूँगा कि उन को इस इंडस्ट्री को एनकरेज करना चाहिये और प्रोत्साहन देना चाहिये। आज लाखों स्लीपर्स का उपयोग हो सकता है। आगरे में पहले एक कारखाना था आज ८ कारखाने हैं जिन्होंने टेन्डर्स दिये हैं। इस के अलावा उन्होंने जो टेन्डर्स दिये हैं वे ६०० रु० टन के हैं। मैं मंत्री जी से निवेदन करूँगा कि वे इस पर गौर करे और अगर वे इस इंडस्ट्री को एनकरेज करे तो हमारी आवश्यकता के स्लीपर हमारे देश में ही हो सकते हैं और हम को उन को बाहर से नहीं मगाना पड़ेगा। मैं चाहता हूँ कि इस पर पूरा ध्यान दिया जाय।

**Shri Supakar (Sambalpur):** Since there is not much time left, I would like to put a few questions to the hon. Minister so that he may furnish the answers. In the case of how many States was the offer of timber rejected on account of high price or inferior quality, and what is the amount of sleepers involved? Secondly, I want to know whether the economics of both these timbers have been worked out. The hon. Deputy Minister stated that the average price of the imported sleepers was Rs. 20 each. I want to know whether the economics of

transporting these sleepers from the ports to the works site where the tracks are renewed have been calculated and whether they were found to be cheaper than the timbers offered for sale by the State Governments concerned. Thirdly, I want to ask this question. We find that in some of the Centrally-administered Union Territories like Himachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar islands etc. there are huge forests. Some of them are worked by Government agencies. I would like to know what attempts have been made to procure the whole of that production and at what rates. I request the hon. Minister to kindly answer these points.

**Shri Basappa (Tiptur):** The hon. Minister sometime back said that some investigation is going on regarding the defective sleepers supplied by the Hanuman Foundry, Calcutta, What has happened to the investigation? Has it been completed or not? I would like to know that. I want to know whether our factories are able to produce such sleepers or not. I want to know whether it is inevitable to fetch these sleepers from outside the country. More than that, I would like to know, whether the capacity of the Bhadravati Iron and Steel Works to supply these sleepers has been fully utilised. I would like to know whether greater encouragement can be given so that they can produce more of cast iron sleepers. What is the rate at which Bhadravati sleeper will be available and what is the rate at which Hanuman Foundry sleeper will be supplied? Now, Bhadravati is the only sleeper manufacturing industry in the south. May I request the hon. Minister to see that the full capacity of the Bhadravati Iron and Steel Works is utilised?

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** It is utilised.

**Shri Narasimhan (Krishnagiri):** Since iron and steel production will be improving in the country, will it be necessary to resort to wooden sleepers to the extent visualised?

**Mr Speaker:** Shri Vidya Charan Shukla wants to ask one question. He wants clarification on some point.

**Shri Vidya Charan Shukla:** I want the hon. Minister to reply to this pointed question whether the wooden sleepers were offered at a price of Rs. 20.50 by the West Coast suppliers, and immediately after that offer was made, that offer was refused, because, as the Deputy Minister has stated here, to give that price which was slightly above the conventional price would disturb the equilibrium of the timber market in India. And then orders for wooden sleepers were placed abroad, and these sleepers were obtained at the rate of Rs. 32, that is Rs. 32 at our ports, which does not include Indian customs duty and the port handling charges. I would like to know the justification for doing this.

Secondly, the hon. Member from opposite was mentioning about the Andamans forests. Until recently, there has been a drive by the Government of India themselves to export wood from the Andamans forests to Sudan and UK where the Andamans wood is used for manufacturing Railway sleepers and other railway articles, whereas we were ourselves short of sleepers. The Andamans forests are directly under the administrative control of the Government of India. But we find that Government are having a drive to export the Andamans wood abroad for manufacture of wooden sleepers, whereas we do not have proper wood to manufacture our own sleepers.

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** As a matter of fact, I was expecting that some concrete suggestions would be made during this discussion. But the one tangible suggestion that has been made by my hon. friend Shri Vidya Charan Shukla is to increase the price of the indigenous wooden sleepers.

**Shri Vidya Charan Shukla:** I suggested a working plan, assessment and all that.

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** When I took over the Railway Ministry, I was myself under the impression, as most Members of the House are, that the country is more than self-sufficient in regard to its requirements of timber. But when I went into the question I found that the position was not so comfortable as we ordinarily imagined, the reason being that during the war years our forest wealth was highly denuded and depleted.

The exploitation of forests has to be done on certain scientific lines, on the basis of sustained exploitation of the forest wealth. If the available timber is exploited expeditiously during a year or two or three, it will mean depletion of the forests and in the years to come, perhaps, the timber that is anticipated will not be forthcoming.

On the basis of the anticipations worked out by the experts in this line, it is expected that our annual output from the forests of wooden sleepers will be to the extent of 23 to 25 lakhs. If we take up the exploitation of certain very remote and inaccessible areas, perhaps, it may be that we can increase the supply by a lakh or two more. More than that, it will not be possible to exploit the forests. Our requirement during the Second Plan period, as has been indicated is to the extent of 315 lakhs of sleepers.

**Mr Speaker:** Per annum?

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** No, for the Second Plan period.

**Mr Speaker:** And we are able to get only 25 lakhs per year as the maximum?

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** Yes.

**Mr Speaker:** That comes to 125 lakhs during the Second Plan period.

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** I have said that 23 to 25 lakhs is the maximum. But during the Second Five Year Plan, in the initial stages, as has been pointed out by Shri Vidya Charan Shukla

and other Members also, the actual supply was less, in 1957-58 it was only 19 lakhs, in 1958-59, our expectation is that the supply will be to the tune of 24 lakhs due to the special efforts that have been made

Questions have been asked as to what steps we are taking to increase the supply of indigenous timber for sleeper purposes. The country has to depend for its various works requiring timber on our indigenous supplies. Timber is required not only for the railway sleepers, we also need timber for our coach-building works and other purposes. Apart from the railways, there are other departments of the Government of India and the private sector where also timber is required, and all have to be drawn from the same source of the Indian forests.

Then there are certain species of timber which can be utilised only by the railways and nobody else, just like the *chir* and other species which can be used only for railway sleepers and which are not useful for any other purpose. Then there are certain species which had not been used in the past as they were regarded as inferior, soft especially the Kerala variety.

**Shri Kodiyan:** Is no other variety supplied from Kerala?

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** I am not talking of all the varieties from Kerala. I am mentioning the variety which was especially mentioned in this House. That is the special variety of Kerala, and I think most of the timber that is produced in Kerala is of that variety.

**An Hon. Member:** Soft?

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** Not only soft but also, if it is stored for three or four months, fungus growth takes place.

**An Hon. Member:** Even the people?

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** In recent years, during the last three or four years—I am also to some extent responsible for that—we have added to the number of species which we can utilise for railway sleeper purposes, and, as the hon. Deputy Minister has said, during

these two or three years the number of sleepers of these species which are regarded as soft and non-durable varieties, has increased from 2 lakhs to 13 lakhs. We have got a number of creosoting plants where we are treating but even after treatment, the life of these sleepers does not compare favourably with the hard wood that we get in our country or which we have imported from other countries.

The life expectancy of indigenous hard wood is 15 to 20 years, whereas in the case of the soft treated wood, that is of good variety, it may go up to 12 years, but if it is of that variety where there is much sap in the wood and fungus growth takes place, after storage for some time the life expectancy may be eight to ten years only, even after treatment.

So when we compare the price, we must take into consideration the life expectancy of the timber, untreated or treated. That is a very important consideration.

I may make another categorical statement. There is perhaps a misapprehension in certain quarters that indigenous timber was available, the Government or the railways did not accept that timber, and they started importing from foreign countries. That is not a fact. I may say again that whatever timber which can be used for sleeper purposes is available in the country at the price which has been fixed in consultation with the State Governments will be purchased.

Most of the hon. Members, especially my hon. friend Shri Sharma, said that perhaps there were delays, procedural delays in the payment of the price of the timber, and therefore tenders were not forthcoming.

As a matter of fact, except to a very small extent in the State of Kerala our dealings for the procurement of sleepers are not with private suppliers but with the State Governments only. We are purchasing from the State Governments, and, except with regard to Madhya Pradesh and Bombay, our procurement programme

[Shri Jagjivan Ram]

is with the State Governments themselves. Our timber Supply Officers and the Conservators of Forests of the State Governments come together and negotiate the price and fix the quantity to be supplied by the State Governments during a particular period. All that is done well in advance for the succeeding periods.

In Kerala also the Kerala Government is supplying. And, when this question arose, nobody has narrated the full story though they know the things.

An Hon. Member: They will not.

Shri Jagjivan Ram: When we invited the tenders, it is a strange coincidence that all the tenderers, the Kallai merchants, quoted the same price. All the merchants from that area tendered separately but the price quoted by them was the same price. And, the price was higher than the price which we had settled with the Kerala Government. The Kerala Government had undertaken to supply the sleepers to the Railways at a certain price; and legitimately the Railways said that they were not going to pay a higher price to the private suppliers—higher than what had been agreed to with the Kerala Government.

I have realised—after meeting the deputation of certain hon friends from this House and the other House—that the Railway Administration did very wisely in not accepting their tenders.

Shri Dasappa (Bangalore): But there were some others who did quote the low price and agreed to supply

Shri Jagjivan Ram: That was taken. The Railways did a very wise thing in not accepting the higher price because ultimately these suppliers came round and said that they were prepared to offer at the same price and at the same place. (Interruption). If we had delayed by some time, it made them supply at the agreed price.

Railways are one of the biggest operators in the timber market. And,

as I said more than once to some of the timber dealers, if I stop operation in the timber market for one year, I am sure the prices of timber will crash. That aspect should not be ignored when the demand is made for an increase in price or when comparison is made with the price offered by small purchasers. That makes a lot of difference. There may be even some Government department itself whose requirements may be a few thousand cft, which can afford to pay Rs 2 or Rs. 3 more than the price offered by the Railways.

Our requirement is enormous. If as I said, we stop operating in the timber market for one year, I do not know what the position of the timber market would be. But, we have to make every effort to become self-sufficient.

I will say here that if we have to meet our requirements of sleepers only by wooden sleepers it will not be possible to make the country self-sufficient in wooden sleepers, in the foreseeable future, whatever steps we may take. Of course, forests cannot grow in one, two or five years.

Shri Sharma suggested something and I have myself asked the Railway Board and the Railway Board have issued a circular that we should undertake the plantation of suitable trees—that variety of which grows in different regions of the country—on both sides of the railways where space permits, so that we can plant a few lakhs of suitable varieties of trees on the railways which in course of time, 20, 30 or 50 years, can supply a certain percentage of the railway's requirements.

The whole question is whether there was necessity for import of sleepers or not. Having explored the possibility of the availability of sleepers in this country, whether it is wooden, cast iron or steel, as has been said by the Deputy Minister, the Railways decided that we will have to import steel sleepers from the foreign countries and the foreign exchange set apart for that purpose was Rs. 15.5

crores. Two lakhs of steel sleepers were purchased and it was found that if we import wooden sleepers it will be cheaper in comparison to steel sleepers and there was necessity for the import of sleepers will become available. But he con-able in the country put together fell much short of the requirements of the Railways during the Second Plan. Even if we accepted the timber that is available in Kerala and other parts, taking everything together, we find that our country can give us sleepers much short of our requirements. My friend, Seth Achal Singh has said that if some foundries are started, sleepers will become available. But he conveniently forgot that we require pig iron for this purpose and unless there is pig iron, I do not know if Agra manufacturers can produce sleepers... (Interruptions.) Therefore, it becomes necessary to import sleepers and the Railways had to consider whether they were to import steel sleepers or wooden sleepers. Import of steel sleepers was costlier and would have cost us more foreign exchange than the import of wooden sleepers. Iron sleepers would have cost us Rs. 15.5 crores whereas the wooden sleepers have cost us nearly Rs. 4 crores.

Another aspect to be considered is whether we have paid a reasonable price to the imported sleepers or we have paid a higher price. Global tenders were invited and experts who can determine the quality of the various species and varieties of timber which can be used for the railways scrutinised those tenders and after scrutinising and comparing the price of those species in our own country, the tenders were accepted. I may inform the House that in no case the F.O.B. price is higher than the price paid in this country, species for species...

Mr. Speaker: Shri Shukula said that it was Rs. 22.

Shri Vidya Charan Shukula: That is the c.i.f. price, at port.

Shri Jagjivan Ram: Of course, c.i.f. price will be higher in certain cases.

When I say F.O.B. price, naturally the transportation charge will be there. My hon. friend, Shri Supakar wanted to know whether the transportation of the sleepers from ports to the work-site would not cost more money? But even in the case of the other sleepers it is there; it is a common factor whether it is imported sleeper or indigenous sleeper. The transportation of the sleeper from the source of supply or the port to work-site is more or less a common factor. Whether we take the sleeper from Orissa or from Assam, if it is to be transported to the work-site, the transport element is there in both cases.

Then, Sir, my hon. friend, Shri Shukla asked about some offer made about Brazilian sleepers. That is a very interesting story. Some enterprising foreign adventurer made an offer to supply sleepers at inconceivably low prices. The very fact that it was quoted so cheap naturally aroused the curiosity of the officers to go into its details, because they thought that perhaps no party or no country will be in a position to supply it at such a cheap price. In the first place, he did not give details of the species, the names of the species, and even after insistent demands they were not made available. But he came here and made all sorts of allegations against the railway officers. We thought that a thorough investigation should be made by the most reliable agency that the Government of India had possessed. After investigation it was found that these wild offers and these wild allegations were made by some adventurer who left the country before the investigations were completed.

An Hon. Member: Who was that?

Shri Jagjivan Ram: As I said, some foreigner.

An Hon. Member: A journalist.

Shri Jagjivan Ram: Some enterprising journalist who styled himself as a journalist and a writer. He wanted to see me. I refused to see him.

Shri Ferose Gandhi (Rai Bareilly): It pays the journalists more to sell sleepers now.

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** So I am personally satisfied and all the experts are satisfied that the price that we have paid for the imported sleepers has been very reasonable, and perhaps no other country has been able to strike such a good bargain. Ours is not the only country which uses imported sleepers. There are other countries which also have to depend on sleepers imported from other countries.

Sir, as far as the capacity for manufacturing cast iron sleepers is concerned, I might tell the House that during the last two years tremendous capacity has been created in the country, and depending upon the availability of pig iron even at present the capacity for manufacture of cast iron sleepers is to the extent of 40 lakhs sleepers annually. If we get more pig iron, as it is expected that we will get, we will be going in more and more for cast iron sleepers, of course, in addition to whatever wooden sleepers are available in the country.

**Mr. Speaker:** 40 lakh sleepers per year?

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** Capacity to manufacture 40 lakhs of cast iron sleepers every year.

**Shri Basappa:** May I know how the cost of imported cast iron sleepers compares with the cost of indigenous cast iron sleepers?

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** The cost of cast iron sleepers depends upon the cost of pig iron. What we have done at present is this, that for making one ton of cast iron sleepers we pay making charges, including of course soft coke and other materials which are required, of Rs 146 per ton—this is for conversion of one ton of pig iron into cast iron sleepers. That is the basis on which we invited tenders and they are manufacturing. My hon. friend Seth Achal Singh quoted one example where we had placed orders on a certain manufacturer of Agra. It was determined that he will supply so many tons of cast iron sleepers by such and such a date at such and such a price. He failed to supply by that

date. We were lenient to him. When he said that he will manufacture so many sleepers by such and such a date we accepted that. But after that the price of pig iron had fallen. And then we said that the price of pig iron plus the making charges would be the cost of the sleepers manufactured after the stipulated period and we would pay at that rate. Government cannot be expected to continue the higher price, paying to the party that much price even if the price of pig iron plus the making charges would be should not have made a grievance of that.

**Shri Tangamani (Madurai):** The capacity is 40 lakhs. How much is manufactured actually?

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** For the current year, we have been allotted 2.5 lakh tons of pig iron and 2.5 lakh tons of pig iron will give us nearly 32 lakhs of broad gauge sleepers. But we expect that we might get more pig iron and we can manufacture more. Of course, technical opinion is in favour of wooden sleepers.

Then about the planned development of our forests, as my friend Shri Vidya Charan Shukla or some other hon. Member quoted, my predecessors wrote to the State Governments. I sent the Timber Adviser to all the State Governments. I personally met the Chief Ministers twice in a conference and whenever I visit the States I emphasise the necessity of increasing the supply of sleepers as much as they can possibly do. But there are certain limitations, and it is not the price factor alone. With all the State Governments we have entered into agreements, and they have offered to supply sleepers. I can give the figures for the current year. Andhra Government, 45,000; Assam, 11,10,000; Bihar, 1,35,000; Himachal Pradesh, 50,000; Jammu and Kashmir, 9 lakhs; Kerala, 58,000; Madras, 15,000; Mysore, 5,25,000; Orissa, 1,67,000; Punjab, 25,000; Uttar Pradesh, 6,85,000; West Bengal, 31,000.

**Shri Vidya Charan Shukla:** Madhya Pradesh?

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** Madhya Pradesh and Bombay are the two solitary States where we operate in the private sector and purchase from the tenderers and not from the State Governments. All these commitments are through the State Governments and our agreement with the State Governments is that we will not purchase from private parties in those States. Whatever sleepers are to be purchased is through the State Governments and not from the private parties. What is what I wanted to emphasise: that we have price agreements with the State Governments.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is there not a Government Saw Mill in Chanda, Madhya Pradesh?

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** There is

**Mr. Speaker:** They refused to supply?

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** We are negotiating with them.

**Shri Vidya Charan Shukla:** They are not getting the price they want.

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** I do not know whether Shri Vidya Charan Shukla is speaking on behalf of the State Government. We have not heard from the State Government. I do not know whether he has been given the authority of the State Government.

**Shri Vidya Charan Shukla:** That is my information.

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** In inaccessible areas, if the forests are exploited, we give certain bonus to the State Governments per sleeper, varying from Re. 1 to Rs. 1-8-0 or some thing like that.

**Mr. Speaker:** What does it work out to for one cubic foot?

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** I cannot say, Sir. If the State Governments supply more than the quantity stipulated, then in that case also, we give certain increase in the price of the sleepers. So, we have been requesting all the States to increase the supply of sleepers. But, as I have said, it is a matter where we cannot afford to

exploit the forests quickly in a year or two or three, years so that we may become self-sufficient for three, four or five years or for the Third Plan.

18 hrs.

We have to take a long-range view of these things, so that our forests are not depleted and denuded and in years to come we have to depend more and more on other sources. It has been said that concrete sleepers should be used. We are also doing that. As a matter of fact, on the Hindustan Housing Factory, we have placed orders for 50,000 concrete sleepers. We are going to try them in our marshalling yards. If they prove successful, we will try them at other places.

**Mr. Speaker:** So much cement is surplus.

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** Yes, but that requires a certain skill to manufacture it.

I may assure the House that every effort will be made to meet our demands from indigenous sources of wooden sleepers, cast iron and concrete sleepers. Whatever orders have been placed have been placed. I have stopped it and said that no further orders should be placed for the import of sleepers from abroad. I am equally anxious that we should as far as possible, meet our demands from the indigenous sources.

**Mr. Speaker:** What about Andamans? He said something about Andamans.

**Shri Jagjivan Ram:** We are getting from there also. As a matter of fact, when certain forest areas in Andamans were settled with some private firms, they had some agreement that they will supply certain percentage of timber to Sudan. As a matter of fact, a very little has been supplied to Sudan; that was the agreement. We are taking from there also whatever is available.

18.02 hrs.

*The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Friday, April 24, 1959/Vaisakha 4, 1881 (Saka).*