

MR. CHAIRMAN : You cannot move Amendment number 20 as it has been moved by Mr. Banatwalla as Amendment number 15.

SHRI SHANKARLAL (Pali) : I beg to move :

Page 3, line 26,—

Omit "for a period of six years" (24)

MR. CHAIRMAN : Should I put all the amendments together? Now I put amendments number 14, 15, 18, 19 and 24 to Clause 8 to vote.

*Amendments Nos. 14, 15, 18, 19
and 24 were put and negatived.*

MR. CHAIRMAN : The question is :

"That Clause 8 stand part of the Bill."

The motion was adopted.

Clause 8 was added to the Bill.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Now Clause 9.

Shri D.B. Patil—Not present.

MR. CHAIRMAN : The question is :

"That Clause 9 stand part of the Bill."

The motion was adopted.

Clause 9 was added to the Bill.

MR. CHAIRMAN : The question is :

"That Clause 10 stand part of the Bill."

The motion was adopted.

Clause 10 was added to the Bill.

MR. CHAIRMAN : The question is :

"That Clause 1, the Enacting For-

mula and Long Title stand part of the Bill."

The motion was adopted.

*Clause 1, the Enacting Formula and
the Long Title were added to the
Bill.*

S. BUTA SINGH : I beg to move :

"That the Bill, as amended, be passed."

MR. CHAIRMAN : The question is :

"That the Bill, as amended, be passed."

The motion was adopted.

*Sarvashri Ebrahim Sulaiman Salt and
G.M. Banatwalla then left the House.*

16.10 hrs.

DISCUSSION UNDER RULE 193

[English]

Accident to 26 DN Bangalore-Trivandrum Express between Sasthankotta and Perinad stations of Southern Railway on 8th July, 1988.

MR. CHAIRMAN : The House will now take up discussion under Rule 193 regarding the accident to 26 DN. Bangalore-Trivandrum Express on 8th July, 1988. Shri Indrajit Gupta will initiate the debate.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA (Basirhat) : Mr. Chairman, it is my painful responsibility to have to initiate this debate which concerns one of the worst railway disasters in history. And what is more tragic is the fact that—I am not blaming anybody for it—after such a major disaster the Lok Sabha has got round to discuss it more than one month after the accident took place. During this one month the inquiry which has been set-up as usual by the Railway Administration—the statutory inquiry—must be proceeding. We do not get any news

about it and we will not get any news either because the findings of these inquiries are always treated as confidential. Why? I do not know. When disasters or accidents take place in the airlines and the inquiries are held the findings of the inquiries are made known to the country and the people but only in the case of the Railways the findings of such inquiries are treated as completely secret and confidential. This is something we have inherited from the British days and we do not want to give it up. I think this is a very anomolous position and an undesirable position and Government should consider changing it. What is there to be so hush hush about it. What led to this disaster should not be hidden from the country. People who have suffered in this accident most of them belong to Kerala State. I think on behalf of the whole House you will from the Chair also convey to them, their relatives and friends our wholehearted sympathies and condolences though it is a bit late in the day.

The other difficulty is that since this inquiry is going on, I presume, the Minister can avoid many questions and many problems by saying that since the inquiry is going on he does not want to say anything which may prejudice or influence that inquiry. Therefore, when we speak about this disaster we have per-force to deal with some general aspects of Railway safety without being able to accurately pinpoint what was the cause of the disaster on that day when these bogeys derailed and fell into the Ashtmudi lake. Unfortunately when the Commission comes to its findings we will not be able to know that also. So we are in a kind of a black-out about the number of casualties. The hon. Minister in his statement made here on 27th July had said that 105 persons lost their lives, 51 sustained grievous injuries and 150 sustained simple injuries. Judging from the different reports appearing in the Press—certainly this matter can be checked from the survivors and from the members of those families who have lost some of their relatives—and if a careful check up is done I apprehend the figures that he mentioned here will turn out to be very much on the low side.

Possibly, the figure will certainly be over

200. Now, Sir, we are supposed to discuss what this accident was caused by. We are not technical people, of course, on this side of the House nor for that matter, are they technical people on that side of the House. So, we have to adopt a common-sense point of view.

The other day, on the 8th of this month, in reply to a starred question 165, put by Shrimati Kishori Sinha, a reply was given by the hon. Minister for Railways. I am quoting two sentences from that reply :

“There is no railway bridge which is considered unsafe for the traffic carried.”

This is a very categorical statement which he has made. Of course, I don't mean to imply that in this particular accident it was the bridge which gave way or the bridge collapsed. There is no evidence of that. But the train was passing over this bridge when it was derailed. As you know, Sir, the engine and the coach behind this managed to get across the bridge in a derailed condition. But they were there and two coaches right at the back were also on the track or just off the track. They were there. But all the seven or eight coaches in between fell into this lake.

In reply to that question, the Minister also said :

“The majority of bridges on Indian Railways are over 25 years old and in sound condition.”

I have no way of challenging this. ‘Over 25 years’ may mean 40 years, 50 years also. In that case, if these statements of the Minister are to be accepted, I would like to begin by asking him a question. If no bridge is unsafe, if all bridges are in sound condition, then what is meant by the expression ‘distressed bridges’? We find in railway publications and journals also that there are a number of bridges which are considered to be distressed bridges. What are they distressed about? They are very safe. They are in sound condition. Nobody should be distressed about them.

I would like to know from him what exactly is the meaning of this ‘distressed

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bridges' and how it tallies with the reply which he gave to the question which I have just quoted.

I would also like to know whether this particular bridge—over which this Bangalore-Trivandrum Express was going—is one of the bridges which is included in this distressed category. This information, I am seeking.

Sir, in 25 years or more, everybody knows that the speed of trains has increased greatly. If you go back further than 25 years, trains were hauled in those days mainly by steam engines. Now they are being hauled either by diesel engines or electric engines. The speed has increased very much and the density of traffic has also increased very much. The bridges are the same old bridges. About the track, I am coming to that a little later. But I would like to know from the Minister whether there are any speed restrictions. When the train approaches the bridge or actually when it is crossing the bridge, are there any speed restrictions laid down? And in the case of this particular bridge, was there any speed restriction? I can't ask him whether the driver exceeded that restriction or not because he won't be able to reply. If he replies, then that poor driver will be hanged straight away. There won't be any commission of inquiry. But I am asking him whether there is any speed restriction or not. I cannot forget, Sir, that during the monsoon period, we have had a number of accidents, in the past, on the bridges.

On the 6th June, 1981, the Samastipur-Barabanki passenger train plunged off the bridge into the Kosi river killing 270 people. That was also off the bridge. On the 6th August, 1986, the Down Amritsar-Tata Express fell off the bridge in Palamau killing 52 people. In July, 1987 the Dakshin Express capsized on a flooded bridge; sixty people were killed. Then I may take you back a bit further in history to September, 1956. That was the accident at Mehboobnagar which led to the voluntary resignation of the late Lal Bahadur Shastri, who was then the Railway Minister and who took the

moral responsibility for that disaster. This was caused by a breach of the approach embankment to the bridge. Heavy rains had taken place, heavy rains had caused the breach of this embankment' and the bridge had collapsed. There was the same statutory railway inquiry. The long and short of its finding was that nobody is to blame. More or less, that is what they said. Why I am pointing this out is that after the statutory railway inquiry into the Mehboobnagar accident, another one-man Commission consisting of Justice S.L.T. Desai was set up to hold a judicial inquiry into that accident. It is not as though this railway inquiry cannot be supplemented or followed up, if necessary, by a proper judicial inquiry. I do not have very much confidence in the confidential inquiries by railway people for obvious reasons. The public at large feel that the whole thing will be hushed up and nothing will come out. Justice Desai who held that enquiry report held the Central Railway administrators and Chief Engineer to be responsible for their failure to provide a bridge opening which was adequate for discharging the flood waters caused by heavy rains. That was his finding. What happened after that? The Government of India disagreed with this finding on the ground that these are very highly technical things; a technical assessment is necessary which perhaps the Judge was not in a position to do, and so that was the end of that. The only casualty was Lal Bahadur Shastri, the upright man as he was, and he volunteered to resign and went out.

I do not have much to say. After all what can one say on this? The bridge No. 19 was not at fault. What about tracks? Before I go on to that, there is one question which I would like to ask. Is it not a very strange thing that the Commission of Railway Safety functions under the Ministry of Civil Aviation and not under the Ministry of Railways? What is the logic behind it? The Ministry of Civil Aviation does not follow the norms of this Commission. When the plane accidents take place, they do not hold this kind of confidential inquiries; that is done publicly. If in the case of Mehboobnagar, nothing came in the way of appointing a judicial inquiry in addition to the railway inquiry, I want to know why in this parti-

cular case, since people are very much agitated and distressed at what has happened, why can't a judicial inquiry be set up ?

Let this enquiry be completed. Let us see, because we won't know what the result is. Nobody will know. Will that satisfy the people in this country ?

Sir, many commissions have gone into the various aspect of railway safety. There is one Sikri Commission. He was an eminent judge of the Supreme Court. There was a Wanchoo Commission. They have made very important recommendations and findings. They have suggested that the brake power of the locomotives is not always adequate and that certification is necessary which is not always done to certify that the brake power should not be less than 85 per cent. And there should be a periodical inspection. I can't quote their reports, but they made all these recommendations because they find that many of these precautions are not always scrupulously adhered to.

Then there is the question of defective coupling of coaches. Now, the reports are coming in the papers and I think the Minister has also said, or perhaps he has not said because he is a very cautious man, that it was perhaps due to the sudden application of brake by the driver. The train was going at fairly high speed, I do not know what speed. I do not know whether there was speed restriction. Anyway, the driver was supposed to have suddenly applied the brake and that lead to this kind of derailment. Now, I want to know whether the tracks and the bridges, the bridges mainly, and also the signal system are bearing more load than they can actually take. I am talking in general, Sir. I can't talk what happened there.

There is a craze for running fast and superfast trains. Unfortunately most of them run late, only the superfast surcharge is collected from us. The train very often does not arrive on time. That is the experience of the people who travel by Rajdhani Express between Howrah and Delhi. But the point is that this craze for running

fast and super fast trains is all right provided it is not on out-moded tracks, the tracks which are badly in need of renewal, the tracks which are suffering from fractures, what are called hairline fractures which are not visible to the naked eyes but are dangerous. So, I should say that the safety of the passengers on the bulk of routes may have been given lower priority than providing comfort to upper-class passengers on the major trunk routes, the routes linking Delhi with Calcutta, Bombay and Madras and all that. There are these superfast trains running very comfortably though they may not arrive on time. Have the tracks been renewed ? How much of the tracks have been renewed and how much remained to be renewed ?

I was told some months ago, I can't vouch for the hundred per cent reliability of the report, that some group of foreign railway experts who had come to our country expressed the opinion that in their country if trains were made to run at the speed at which Rajdhani Express runs on tracks like we have got, they will never take a risk like this because anything might happen at any time.

SHRI H.A. DORA (Sirkakulam) : God is there in our country, otherwise, these trains should not run on these tracks.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA : Sir, the Sikri and the Sarin Committee accused the railways of not giving necessary priority to the maintenance and renewal of track and other assets. So, there are heavy arrears of track renewal which of course during the Railway Budget discussion every year we are told that it is due to the lack of resources. There is a backlog which has to be made up gradually. That is what we are told. But the point is from the safety point of view what are the implications of this ?

Higher speeds and heavier axle loads constitute a major risk on these fractured rails and distressed bridges. I confine myself to these two things, viz. fractured rails which are badly in need of renewal and secondly, what are called in railway terminology, 'distressed' bridges. Obviously, we do not expect miracles. We do not expect that

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throughout the country, you can overnight renew tracks and everything. The point is not that. The point is, so long as we have got these weaknesses in the infrastructure, how we are going to ensure the safety of these trains running at very high speeds with huge loads.

Derailment of goods trains is very very frequent. You can say that it does not matter because no human life is lost. But on the Eastern Railway stretch, between Mughalsarai and Kanpur and Mughalsarai and Tundla, invariably on two or three days in a week, there is a derailment of goods trains which sometimes succeeds in blocking the main line and delays the trains. Why is it happening very often ?

Now, I just want to conclude by suggesting two causes which may be operating. One is the fact that the work is being handed over to private contractors. As far as we know from the workers and employees themselves, the maintenance work on the tracks is being gradually and consciously handed over from the departmental workers to private contractors in many places. I would like to know to what extent you are doing that. What is the policy behind it ? As far as we understand it, this is a part of the so called economy drive of the Central Government to get rid of all those permanent Class IV gangmen of the P.W. Department who have been doing this work of maintenance from the days of the British. Of course, they do it manually. But they are very experienced people and nobody has ever complained that due to some negligence or inefficiency of these gangmen, some serious accident has taken place. And they work in extremely difficult conditions. They go about on the track in the scorching sun during rains and winter, patrolling stretches of track allotted to them and they have always been congratulated for doing an excellent job.

I want to know whether the Railways have adopted the policy of gradually giving this work to the private contractors. For example, what was the position here in Kerala ? I raise this point because our experience tells us that Railway contractors,

or any other private contractors who are out to make a fast buck will never do the work properly and thoroughly. It is like Mr. Bhagat's handpumps in the Trans-Yamuna colonies, where they were paid for sinking the pipes down to 40 feet, but later on it was discovered that they were sunk at a depth of just ten feet. People are now dying of cholera right and left. This is the way the contractors work. I would strongly oppose such a policy. It is not only the maintenance of tracks. I know it is being done in other departments also, even in the workshops where overhauling and repairing of wagons and coaches take place. A big part of the work is being handed over to private workers. I think this will have a very harmful effect on the efficiency and quality of the work.

Secondly Sir, for some years now, in the name of modernisation and new technology, we know that some machines which are called tamping machines or plasseromatic machines are being used for checking the track. These machines are brought, perhaps not in large numbers, sometimes from Japan and sometimes from West Germany. These machines run along the track by themselves and they are supposed to do automatic mechanical maintenance. I would like to know whether the performance of these machines in our Indian conditions has been thoroughly reviewed and studied or not. To what extent are they being used ? The Minister should tell us whether their performance is found to be satisfactory or not. Or is it just a sort of modernisation fad ? Where tracks are concerned, any kind of latitude or laxity should not be permitted because it ultimately concerns the safety and lives of our passengers.

So, I accuse this Government firstly of not giving us any information at all. Even before the Commission of Inquiry started to work, no factual information was given. All that we have been given is contained in this statement made here in this House. It contains nothing except how many ministers rushed there from Delhi, how many high railway officials rushed there, when they rushed there and so on and so forth and the fact that some amount of *ex-gratia* relief was given to the victims. Now I read in the papers that about one lakh rupees is

going to be granted to the family of each deceased person. By the way, what is the rate of compensation given to the victims of air accidents? Certainly, it is not less than a lakh of rupees. But generally, victims of railway accidents have always traditionally got much less compensation than those who are killed in air accidents. For example, what was the compensation given to the victims of that ill-fated Air India Jumbo which was damaged by an explosion, off the Coast of Ireland and which crashed into the ocean killing the entire crew and the passengers? I would like to know the amount paid, of course not from this Minister, but as a matter of comparison. How much compensation was paid to the deceased in that case, or in any other major air accident? I think, there is a big discrimination, rather a big gulf, between the victims of railway accidents and air accidents. Considering also the tragic circumstances of the case, they should be dealt with more liberally and more handsomely. We cannot bring them back from the depths, but at least some solace and some relief to the people of Kerala who have suffered in this horrible disaster should be provided. And it is the Government of India's responsibility.

So, with these few words, I move this Motion and I hope that the House will generally press for more information and for points which will not hamper the inquiry but perhaps help the Inquiry Committee.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN (Cannanore): Mr. Chairman, Sir, July 8th was a black Friday so far as Kerala is concerned. It was on that day, nine coaches of the ill-fated Island Express running from Bangalore to Trivandrum had plunged into the Ashtamudi Lake resulting in the tragic death of 105 persons and leaving another 150 or so badly injured. This gruesome accident has sent waves of shock across the country.

Before I begin, I make use of this opportunity by paying my homage to those people who have lost their precious lives in this gruesome accident.

PROF. N.G. RANGA (Guntur): On behalf of all of us.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN: I also make use of this opportunity to convey my deep sympathies and condolences to the bereaved families. It is my privilege to compliment the commendable service rendered by the locals especially the bold and adventurous fisher folk of the locality who even at the risk of their lives had saved hundreds of people who were involved in this tragedy. I sincerely hope that this discussion will not end as a ritual, as in the case of other discussions on similar subjects. I fervently hope that the hon. Minister will take note of the points raised by the hon. Members in the House and I hope he will take effective steps in this direction.

I take pride in the fact that we have a very dynamic and smart Minister at the helm of affairs of Railways.

I appreciate his willingness to tender his resignation in the light of this tragedy; and I understand the philosophy behind such a move. But I am constrained to say that what is required is a fresh and bold initiative to prevent future recurrence of such incidents. Accidents may occur due to many a reason, and it is for the Ministry to identify the reasons and take preventive and deterrent steps.

The hon. Minister has stated at Quilon that the Chief Commissioner of Railway Safety is going to make a thorough probe into this affair. I am at a loss to understand what is special about this inquiry. As Mr. Indrajit Gupta had rightly put it, it is only a statutory requirement. What is important is the findings of the inquiry, and the remedial steps which the Minister is supposed to take. Such inquiries conducted in the past go to show that these inquiries have not helped to fix the responsibility for such accidents. All those inquiries go to show that they were probably intended to cover up the exact truth behind these accidents.

For example, Mr. Indrajit Gupta had cited an example of the 1956 accident at Mahboob Nagar. After it, our hon. Railway Minister Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri had tendered his resignation. It is my strong suggestion that if the Minister has any sincere intention to make amends for this ghastly

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accident, he should initiate a judicial inquiry by a renowned Judge. Then only will the people be satisfied, and the true facts brought to light. I do not think that there would be anything to be scared of in having such an inquiry. In the ultimate analysis I would like to say that it would only help the Minister, as also the people who travel in the trains.

I wish to draw the attention of the Minister as well as the House to a very significant point. It is not a matter of mere coincidence that over the past two years, at least five goods trains have derailed between Quilon and Kottayam. Had these trains been passenger trains, I shudder to think what the consequences would have been. Here, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he is aware of these derailments; and if so, what were the reasons for these derailments, and what steps have been taken by the Minister to prevent future recurrences of such incidents.

I would also like to know how many officers or employees of the Administration have been taken to task after these repeated five derailments between Quilon and Kottayam during the past two years. What explanation can the Minister offer for these tragic incidents? The latest accident about which we are discussing now, has also occurred on the same route. I would like to enlighten this hon. House that people by and large in Kerala believe that it is the callousness as well as criminal negligence on the part of Railways which is chiefly responsible for the accident which occurred at Perinad. If their doubts are unfounded, I request the hon. Minister to come forward and clarify his stand on the derailments during the past two years.

Railways no doubt are spending crores of rupees for renovation as well as maintenance. But, apparently, much remains to be done in this direction. One week before this tragedy, on the 30th of June, the Driver and the Guard of the Madras Mail had registered a complaint with the Administration that there was an unusual jerk when the train had passed the bridge where the present accident has occurred. I would like to know

why, inspite of the warning given by the Driver and the Guard of this train, no proper action has been taken by the Ministry in this regard.

It is also reported that the Driver who was running this ill-fated Island Express was not fully qualified to run the train. I do not know whether it is a fact or not: this Driver was working in the Nagercoil area, and he was recently transferred to the Quilon area, and he was until then only running local trains as well as goods trains.

I am told that he was not qualified to run express trains. Whether that matter is correct or not, I would request the hon. Minister to come forward and give an assurance that the valuable lives of the train passengers would not be left to the mercy of such unqualified drivers.

Another aspect that requires probing is the report of some of the survivors of this tragedy, that the train had been running at an enormous speed. Hopefully the Minister will pay attention to this particular aspect.

I am extremely happy to note that the hon. Minister Shri Madhavrao Scindia, as well as the hon. Minister Shri Krishna Kumar, who is representing that constituency and the Parliamentary Affairs Minister Shri M.M. Jacob and also the hon. Health Minister, Shri Moti Lal Vora and others have rushed to the spot and supervised the rescue operations. I really congratulate them. I note with satisfaction that the Government of India has offered Rs. 1 lakh each to the families of the victims. And, of course, this amount is double the amount that the Railways usually gave to the victims of railway accidents in the past.

It is especially gratifying to note that our beloved Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi has already offered Rs. 30 lakhs to the victims of this tragedy. I congratulate our beloved Prime Minister on behalf of the people of Kerala. Moreover, at the instance of the Prime Minister, the Health Minister Shri Moti Lal Vora himself rushed to the spot and he went to almost all the hospitals and supervised the relief operations and he distributed medicines worth Rs. 5 lakhs.

It may be noted that victims of this accident are mostly from poor families or below average families. Of course, the Government has given Rs. 1 lakh per victim. But considering the pathetic financial situation of those poor people I request the hon. Minister to give or provide employment to any one of the family members of the victims. I am sure that this august House will join me on this particular aspect.

I have a humble suggestion to make to my friends sitting opposite to me. There is a tendency to politicise gruesome accidents like this.

SHRI H.A. DORA : It is not.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : What compels me to make such a suggestion is the stand taken by the Kerala Chief Minister, Mr. E.K. Nayanar and his friends. The Chief Minister complained that he and his colleagues were not given proper coverage over the Television after this accident. What a tragedy ! A tragedy much bigger than the one which occurred at Perinad ! I want to say that it is painful to hear that such a statement was made by a Chief Minister like Mr. Nayanar at the site of such a tragic incident and that too in the midst of rescue operations which was done by people of all walks of life.

It is still apparent that there is a deliberate attempt to politicise the entire issue.

It seems the Kerala Chief Minister is authorising his agents to make collections from Gulf countries. Nobody knows the *bona fides* of this action. I want to know from the hon. Minister whether he has authorised the Kerala Chief Minister to make collections in the name of those who have died in this accident. The hon. Minister may clarify his stand while replying to this debate.

Before I conclude, I would once again request the hon. Minister to make an objective study about this accident and do all that is possible to prevent the future recurrence of such tragedies.

SHRI THAMPAN THOMAS (Mavelikara) : Sir, 8th July, 1988 was a day of

sorrow and grief for the people of Kerala, where this accident took place, and also for the entire country.

AN HON. MEMBER : For the entire nation.

SHRI THAMPAN THOMAS : I too agree ; for the entire nation.

This accident took place very near my constituency, only just 20 km. I was there in my constituency, when I heard that this accident took place, and rushed to the place. On the same day one of the young MLAs of Kerala was getting married and the entire Cabinet and also the MLAs and other public men were assembled there. All of them also rushed to the spot.

Sir, I am not going into the details about what happened on that day. First of all, I take this opportunity to place on record my condolences along with other Members of this House to the members of the bereaved family.

I also place on record the contributions made by the local people in the rescue operations.

This accident is revealing certain facts. I agree with Shri Ramachandran on his first two points that it is the result of criminal negligence on the part of the Railway administration. Criminal negligence on the part of railway administration, I do not think, the Government including the Minister can shirk the responsibility. Whatever things subsequently have done, donations, something like that, will not explain the position and will not relieve of the responsibility of the Government from this path.

The track between Ernakulam and Trivandrum is about 200 KMS. and it has been utilised more than 120 per cent. We are using it for many years together. Ten fast trains are operating everyday from Trivandrum. About fifty thousand people are travelling over this bridge, where this accident took place. Ten long distance trains which go to Delhi, Bombay, Madras and Guwahati are passing through this bridge. There is only one single track between Ernakulam and Trivandrum. Sir, Trivand-

[Shri Thampan Thomas]

rum is the capital of Kerala and it is connected by one single track. The contribution of this Government towards Kerala in the improvement of railway for the past forty years, I would like the Minister to account before the House. Britishers, when they were in power, have given railway upto Ernakulam. Because it was Madras Presidency and connecting Madras, there was a broad gauge. I have seen this train first time in my life at the age of eighteen. I belong to that area. A metre-gauge line connecting Quilon and Ernakulam was given in the year 1958. Keralites are working in Delhi. Even in the hon. Minister's office, there might be Keralites working. People who are searching for job, have gone to Delhi, Guwahati and other parts of India from there. From top to bottom, they are moving around. Lakhs of people are living outside Kerala and all these people want to travel.

The maximum profit earned by Railways by way of passenger trains is from Kerala. There are big railway lines in these areas. If you take it on ratio basis per kilometre distance, the maximum profit earned is from Kerala. Because ten trains are running with full capacity. All people are travelling after taking tickets. How much they have contributed? What the Britishers had given plus what was given after 1958, was about 150 Kilometre metre-gauge railway line. Subsequently it was made into single line broad-gauge in the year 1975.

There is no double line track between the capital city and national capital or elsewhere. The capital city is not connected by a double line.

Now, Tuticorin Port has been expanded. When it expanded, goods traffic has also increased. One of the major ports now which is being developed into major port is Tuticorin. I am told that six or seven Jumbo trains are passing through this single track everyday. Other trains are held up for the purpose of goods traffic. Then, oil refineries, oil tankers are moving around. A number of trains are moving in this traffic for the purpose of goods traffic as well as

passenger traffic. Recently in the last Budget, six new trains were introduced from that area to the northern area.

And in these lines, only one track has been maintained by the Government. May I know from the hon. Minister whether any steps have been taken to develop this track?

Six accidents have taken place within a short distance of 50 kms. within a period of one year. The main reason for this is improper maintenance of track system. There are novel methods for maintaining the track. But no such device is available on that track. Over and above that, there is a ban on recruitment. Workers are not there to maintain the tracks. The enquiry is going on and the reasons for the accident will be known later. But one of the reasons which is responsible for accident is the poor maintenance of the track. According to reports, the train was running at a speed of 80 kms. That much speed is permissible on this track. And the de-railment has taken place before the bridge. It is also reported that some three or four days before this accident, some report was made about the track conditions by some other drivers. Looking into all these aspects, one can come to the conclusion that there is a gross negligence on the part of the Railway Administration. Therefore, the Railway Administration cannot escape from this responsibility. Therefore, the immediate requirement is that double lines are given and train facilities are streamlined and such other methods are provided there which would avoid future accidents.

When we look at this problem we find that railway employees are made the scapegoat for this accident. That is not proper. The drivers are forced to work for more than 10 hours a day. There was an agreement between the railway unions and the Railway Administration that they will not be forced to work for more than 10 hours a day. But in spite of that, because of ban on recruitment and also the policies adopted by the Government, they are compelled to work for more than 10 hours. Is it proper? In this case, I am told the drivers were compelled to work for more than 10 hours

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that may be one* of the reasons for the accident. Therefore, it is necessary that the railway administration must immediately implement the agreement that was entered into with the recognised unions.

There are certain automatic devices which have been developed by the railways themselves to find out the possibilities of railway accident through some warning system. Has Government provided such automatic systems in that area ?

I am told that about 20,000 kms. of railway track in India is not properly maintained. It is also in a renewable condition. What steps have been taken by the Railways to renew this track of about 20,000 kms. ? I am told that automatic signalling system has also not been provided there.

More accidents take place because of unmanned railway crossings. About 1000 railway accidents take place in a year because of unmanned railway crossings. For the purpose of reducing expenditure, the local bodies and local authorities are asked to bear the expenditure of manning the unmanned crossings. I think, the Railways themselves should take up this responsibility of manning the unmanned railway crossings in order to avoid accidents in such a large number.

17.00 hrs.

There is a possibility of sabotage on the railway tracks in various parts of the country. To avoid that, is there a patrolling system provided ? Earlier in 1977, when the Janata Party was in power, there was a patrolling system of gunmen and RPF. Now that system has been discontinued in order to curtail the expenditure. Also the fish-plates are getting removed. So, new systems and joints should be provided for these. Will such things be done ?

I am told that the sleepers provided for the railway tracks are not of good quality, they are of poor quality. What steps are the Government taking to avoid future accidents, that should be revealed from the experience of this accident. That is one of

my submissions.

Secondly, as my friend Shri Indrajit Gupta has pointed out, the detail of this inquiry may not be available to us. All the papers connected with this inquiry should be placed on the Table of the House and also a judicial inquiry should be conducted into this matter. To avoid future accidents, that is a must.

Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, by resigning and pinpointing the moral responsibility on himself, had shown that the officers are accountable. In this case who is accountable ? Finally you will make a driver or somebody like that a scapegoat and you will say that it was an accident which took place. I am proud today to say that Mr. Hegde has resigned on the issue of telephone tapping. He has never said that it is the Chief Secretary who had sent the letter..(Interruptions). He has taken up the responsibility upon himself. To pinpoint the responsibility and accountability on the officers, courage should be there to resign. It is reported that the hon. Railway Minister had tendered his resignation but the Prime Minister did not accept that. But it was his moral duty to have resigned. Then only the officers can also be made accountable. Otherwise they will also find a scapegoat—a driver or somebody like that—and will say that it was an accident and nothing can be done in such cases. Lives of lakhs of people lie in the bands of the Railways. Even I am to travel by train tonight. I do not know what will happen to me. Even I am in suspicion what will happen. So, if that is the case, it is the responsibility of the hon. Minister to assure the nation that the Indian Railways is safe. This accident has shown that the Indian Railways are not safe. So, the hon. Minister should tell the nation that by such and such action the railways are being kept safe and will continue to be safe, or such and such actions will be taken to keep the railways safe. That is what I require in this matter.

[Translation]

*SHRI G.S. BASAVARAJU (Tumkur) :
Mr. Chairman, Sir, 8th July, 1988 was a

*The speech was originally delivered in Kannada.

[Shri G.S. Basavaraju]

tragic day for the whole country. On that day the ghastly Railway accident took place at Peruman bridge taking a heavy toll of lives of more than hundred passengers.

Every year about 30 to 40 accidents are taking place in the country and hundreds of persons are loosing their lives. Our Prime Minister and the Railway Minister have taken all steps for relief. But the crux of the matter is to go to the background of the accidents. If you look at the accidents that occurred during the last ten years, it will be clear that most of the accidents took place near bridges. Our colleague Shri Indrajit Gupta was mentioning about the construction of bridges. The Britishers had constructed several bridges in the country in the past. There is a vast difference between those bridges and the bridges that are constructed these days.

In this particular accident, speed might have been the cause of the accident. Nine bogies were drowned in Asthamudi lake. Weak track might also have been the contributory factor for the accident. Negligence on the part of the driver also might be the cause. The honourable Minister should go deep into the another and find the real cause of the accident.

17.05 hrs.

[MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

During 1956 one fatal railway accident took place near Mehboob Nagar. After that there was another major railway accident near Hyderabad. 1987 was the year of railways accidents as there were a number of accidents. One accident occurred on 9-7-1987. Trivandrum-Mangalore Express, Dakshin Express, Lucknow-Kanpur Express met with accidents and several persons lost their lives in these accidents.

I shall not attribute the cause of accident to natural calamities. Accidents due to natural calamities are very rare as far as my knowledge goes. It is the human failure which is responsible for most of the railway accidents.

In my constituency once accident was

averted one and a half year ago. Due to the alertness of the Station Master and the driver the Bangalore-Poona Express was saved from a fatal accident. The train was stopped before entering the Station. If it had run four meters further the accident would have occurred and at least four bogies would have been derailed.

The Railway administration is weak. The unions donot have co-ordination. These aspects have to be set right because lakhs and lakhs of people travel by trains daily. These passengers should not be frightened. They should have confidence in the Railway journey. For Motor Vehicle accidents we have tribunals. I suggest that Railway accidents claim tribunal should be set up to help the affected rail passengers. Air passengers are insured. Motor Vehicles are also insured. Similarly train passengers should also be insured. For this purpose the Railways department can collect one per cent of the fare towards insurance. Insurance is very important and very essential for all the rail passengers.

There is one newly constructed unguarded open bridge near Alamatti across river Krishna on Sholapur-Gadag section in Hubli Division of South Central Railway. This is the most unsafe bridge. Hence the trains that pass through this line are always late. I urge upon the hon'ble Minister to look into this matter immediately.

The Contractors and the engineers who are responsible for construction of weak bridges and over bridges should taken to task. I have written several letters to the hon'ble Minister in this regard but so far no action seems to have been taken.

One bridge was inaugurated in our Constituency. The contractor had put my names on the foundation stone without the knowledge of the authorities. This bridge collapsed within one year of its opening ceremony. This is the fate of railway bridges. On other bridges even in the national highways crores of rupees are spent on their constructions and hence enquiry should be ordered about the such gross negligence of the contractors and engineers. I hope the hon'ble Minister to help the victims of the accident at Asthamudi lake

in all possible manner. I also urge upon the Minister to take steps to see that no such accidents occur in the country in future.

Sir, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak and with these words I conclude my speech.

[English]

SHRI SURESH KURUP (Kottayam) : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, the magnitude of the tragedy is known to this House, I may say. As was very well described by my hon. colleagues who spoke earlier, 105 people lost their valuable lives due to the negligence of the Railways. But for the timely intervention of the local fishermen and the leadership given by the authorities including the Chief Minister of the State who was on the spot luckily, the toll would have been much higher.

Sir, this accident occurred four days after the accident involving the Siddheswari Express and the Minar express on the Bombay suburb and exactly on the same day on which our Railway Minister's pet train, Satabdhi Express, was supposed to start from the New Delhi Railway station. That was postponed because of this accident. And this shows the priorities of the Railways. Now, the Indian Railways give preference to pomp and splendour at the cost of the safety of the passengers. Sir, these types of accidents are not occurring regularly not because of want of any efficiency on the part of the railway authorities but because of the sheer luck of the passengers who are travelling in these trains.

Sir, now an inquiry is being conducted. I know, these inquiry reports are placed on the Table of the House. Some Members have mentioned that this is kept as secret but it is not so. Regularly, these reports are placed on the Table of the House and they are a public document. (*Interruptions.*)

Now, an inquiry by the Railway Safety Commissioner, as usual, is being conducted. I do not know what sort of an inquiry report, they are going to give. The report may be exonerating right from the Railway

Minister downward all the concerned officials and all the concerned persons who should take the moral responsibility. It may be like a Shankaranand Report, I do not know. But whatever may be the tone of the report, the general public in Kerala genuinely believe that this ghastly tragedy occurred only due to the negligence of the Railways to Kerala and especially to this part of Kerala. I could come to that later. These types of accidents will occur again and again, if this negligence continues. Let us admit, first of all that the Railway Safety Commissions and also the Estimates Committee of this House have repeatedly pointed out about the urgency of properly maintaining railway track. I think in the last Lok Sabha, the Estimates Committee in which Mr. Bansi Lal was the Chairman, had done an elaborate study and one of the most important points they had mentioned is that these tracks are not properly maintained. The Sikri Committee and the Sarin Committee reports also point out that the Railways are not taking seriously this maintenance of tracks. Let us admit that. There are thousands of kms. of tracks which you are not properly maintaining. I think, Kerala is the highest casualty in this regard. The Minister may deny that. A former Minister who was handling this Railway portfolio came to the accident spot. I do not know who authorised him to come there and he had the temerity to say, temerity to tease one of the Kerala State Minister who said that these tracks are not properly maintained. He was teasing the State Minister in front of the Press persons. He is none other than Mr. Jaffer Sharief. Who else can do that ?

SHRI SAIFUDDIN CHOWDHARY (Katwa) : Who was the other Minister ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI S. KRISHNA KUMAR) : He was cantankerous.

SHRI SURESH KURUP : Sir, multi-million rupees investments are going on in the Railways. They say, it is for modernisation of Railways. But they are not concerned about the track maintenance. As Mr. Thampan Thomas has rightly pointed

[Shri Suresh Kurup]

out, the density of traffic in this area is very high, especially from Trivandrum to Cochin. Now even the Railway officials admit that the traffic has attained the optimum level and it is only a single line there.

It has been the consistent demand of the people of Kerala and all the Governments—present and past—of the Kerala State that this track between Trivandrum and Cochin should be doubled but they are not taking it seriously. At least, after this type of accidents, I hope that the Railway Minister and the Railway Department will take this seriously.

I understand that this track maintenance is given to private parties. When these points were raised in the other House, the hon. Minister denied them. But our information from the railway employees and also from some office-bearers of the railway union is that this track maintenance is now given to private parties, the replacement and the other various phases of this maintenance is given to private parties.

I would like to know why this maintenance is taken away, why some important aspects of this maintenance are taken away, from the railway engineering department and given to private parties and why within a short span of two years, six accidents occurred, six derailments of the goods trains have taken place. Were these derailments enquired into and whether the authorities have submitted any report to the Railway Board here? Is the hon. Minister aware of it and whether any action was taken on it?

As regards the bridges, as comrade Shri Indrajit Gupta has pointed out, I do not know whether this bridge is considered a distress bridge or whether this bridge was under observation.

I would like to know from the hon. Minister what was the condition of this bridge and whether this bridge was placed under observation, whether any speed limit was prescribed for the trains while passing through this bridge.

In many parts of our country, railings are there on the side of the bridges. But we cannot find a single railing by the side of any of the bridges in Kerala. I do not know why. This is one of the major bridges, Ashtamudi. I would like to know whether the railway would consider putting railing at least on the side of the major bridges in Kerala.

As regards the bogies, I do not know whether the hon. Railway Minister has travelled in any of the II Class bogies of any train.

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA (Bankura):
Has he travelled by train at all?

SHRI SURESH KURUP : I have travelled both in II Class and I Class by the train Island Express. I would like to inform this House that the most dilapidated bogies are attached to this Island Express.

According to the railway authorities themselves, the life span of a bogie is 25 years. The hon. Minister should inform this House how old were these bogies of the Island Express. It is the practice of the railway to give the most contaminated bogies to Kerala. Island Express is one of the very prestigious trains of the Indian railways and one should personally travel in II Class in that train to know in what sort of condition those bogies are. I say that the Island Express is the worst train. The hon. Minister should explain how much old were these bogies.

Another information I want to get is whether the checking of the brake system of the train is done properly by the Department and whether this checking was done to this particular train when it halted at Ernakulam Junction.

I would also like to know whether the driver was competent enough. I do not know whether it is correct or not but there are rumours that this particular driver was not competent enough to drive an Express Train. I think that man was in utter panic situation. The Press reports indicate that the train was moving at a speed of 80 KM per hour and brake was applied suddenly and even the driver told some Press Repor-

ters that he applied brake. He himself admitted this. This appeared in the newspapers. The Minister should clarify.

In conclusion, I would like to mention some points. One of my hon. colleagues on the other side mentioned that the Kerala Chief Minister and some others were complaining about TV coverage; they were not properly given proper coverage on the Doordarshan. Nobody has complained about that. We, on our part, are not so particular about our faces appearing on that idiot-box. But, I would like to mention one thing here. The Railway Minister and the Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting and also the Health Minister, all these Central Ministers, came there after some 10 or 12 hours. Almost all the Cabinet Ministers in Kerala including the Chief Minister were there in Quilon at that time and they had rushed to the spot...*(Interruptions)* Luckily they were there. *(Interruption.)*

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN (Cannanore) : The Chief Minister of Kerala has specifically made it clear at the Press Conference that he was not given proper coverage on TV. That is also there. That appeared in the newspapers. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI SURESH KURUP : Doordarshan was not mentioning anything about the presence of the Chief Minister or his Cabinet colleagues. Do you think it is not worth-mentioning? *(Interruption.)* I would like to say that the TV and Doordarshan are nobody's family property. The Chief Minister of that State is entitled to get proper coverage. These people show the faces of all these Central Ministers.

SHRI S. KRISHNA KUMAR : Of all the Chief Ministers, the Chief Minister of Kerala is getting the maximum coverage on TV in the regional news bulletins and current affairs programmes and we have statistics to prove this

SOME HON. MEMBERS : No. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI SURESH KURUP : The people of Kerala know who is getting the maximum coverage.

SHRI G.M. BANATWALLA (Ponnani) : Let us talk about the tragedy rather than the TV coverage. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI SURESH KURUP : We are not political vultures to make political capital out of this. But I would like to mention about one aspect of Mr. Scindia's statement there. While talking to the Press Correspondents there, he refused to mention one word about the State Administration and the services they rendered. You should compare it with Bihar. Even the Times of India wrote an editorial yesterday. You should read it. Those people who capsized in that river in the Boat tragedy there, their dead bodies have not yet been recovered. You compare that with the efficiency of the Administration in Kerala. He could not find a word of praise for the Chief Minister of Kerala or to the Administration of Kerala. We do not want your certificate. But you should at least show such niceties when you come to a tragic spot like this. Shri Krishna Kumar had the temerity to say that the services of the Collector were mentioned. Probably he may be remembering his IAS days. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI HARISH RAWAT (Almora) : I think Collectors are representatives of the State Government. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI SURESH KURUP : I don't want to mention that.

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA) : I went to Kerala not to indulge in niceties, tea-parties with the Chief Minister of Kerala. I went there to do what best was possible in such a tragic circumstance. As far as the Administration is concerned, I did mention about it.

SHRI SURESH KURUP : You should have the courtesy to mention that.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : did mention about that.

SHRI SURESH KURUP : You said that the Collector was mentioned. *(Interruptions)* After coming back here, he enacted

[Shri Suresh Kurup]

the drama of resignation. Who is accountable for this? Who is responsible for this type of a tragedy? The political leadership should take the responsibility.

He enacted a drama; he leaked to the press, "I have submitted the resignation to the Prime Minister, but the Prime Minister has not accepted it". How can he accept it? He is not owning moral responsibility to any of the acts of omissions and commissions of his Party or his close colleagues. He should follow the example set by his predecessors like late Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri whose son is sitting beside him.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI S. KRISHNA KUMAR): Sir, this major rail accident, this heart-rending tragedy occurred at Peruman bridge over the Ashtamudi lake, a site within the parliamentary constituency which I have the privilege to represent in this august House. In fact, over one-third of the fatalities have been from Quilon constituency. As the people's representative, as the Member of the Lok Sabha directly concerned with this tragedy, I pay my respectful homage to those who have lost their lives and express my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families.

In the afternoon of the 8th July when news of this accident reached me in Delhi, I immediately contacted the hon. Prime Minister as well as the Railway Minister. The Railway Minister was already engaged in a meeting to mobilise the rescue operation. I accompanied Shri Scindia in an overnight journey by a special plane to Trivandrum, in fact, in a 7-seater plane, non-stop for five hours, as waiting for a bigger plane would have entailed further delay for our journey. I would like to thank my colleague, Shri Scindia, for immediately rushing to the accident site as well as for the able leadership he had given to the rescue and relief operations. Perhaps, as most of the hon. Members rightly pointed out, the greatest heroes who emerged from this tragedy are the local fishermen and other adventurous youth of the locality who at,

grave risk to their own lives, would have saved not less than 200 passengers from the jaws of death. I would also like to congratulate the police, the fire force, the district administration, the doctors and the nurses under the State Government as well as the Railway, the Navy, the Army and the other Central Government personnel who laboured night and day for many days under the most trying conditions in organizing the rescue and relief operations. The interim relief announced by the Railways for this accident was double the rates which were normally applicable hitherto. The Railway Minister has already announced a compensation of about a lakh of rupees to every bereaved family. I would like to thank the hon. Prime Minister for promptly releasing and making available to the Chief Minister of Kerala Rs. 30 lakhs from the Prime Minister's Distress Relief Fund. Altogether, each of the bereaved families would be getting about Rs. 1,30,000 which, I understand, is the highest quantum of compensation so far paid in respect of any railway accident. Sir, nothing can compensate the loss of human life. We can only console those who have lost their near and dear ones. I had, at that time itself, visited all the 28 houses within my constituency which accounted for 35 deaths. I would have liked to visit the other houses spread throughout Kerala also, but that was impracticable.

In my own way, I am liaising with the State and the Central Government agencies to organise rehabilitation for the victims of the bereaved families on a long-term basis. And I have already set up a control room or a cell at Quilon for this purpose and started organising voluntary agencies as well as State Government and the Central Government agencies for this purpose.

I am thankful to my colleague Shri Scindia for responding favourably to our request for sanctioning of a foot bridge over Ashtamudi Lake, *inter alia*. This is not directly connected with the accident as such, but this was a long-standing demand of the people of the area. This foot bridge will connect the two islands where in the normal course, many accidents take place of pedestrians who use the Railway Bridge. There are cases in which even children going to the schools jumped

into the Lake to avoid on-coming train. I would like to request my colleague that the work on this project may be started immediately and that it may be completed within six to twelve months. I understand that the Railway Board has already initiated the preparation for estimates. Sir, there is no politics in death, there is no politics in sorrow, no politics in the death throes of all those unfortunate victims trapped in the sinking train or in the continuing agony of the bereaved families. The Central as well as the State Government agencies have done their best in organising relief in the given circumstances and that is the perception of the people of that area. That is the true perception, as I believe it. Five Central Ministers visited the site as also the entire cabinet of the State Government under the leadership of the Chief Minister Shri Nayanar. I would like to congratulate both the State Government and the Central Government, as the Member of Parliament from that area for organising relief in a prompt way and giving succor to the victims.

The Indian Railways is the second largest railway system in the world and Asia's largest, with perhaps the least accident rate, controversies and arguments notwithstanding. We are a world leader in Railways. Sir, I started my career as a Railway Engineer and I am proud of the Indian Railways which is now giving consultancy services to other railways elsewhere in the third world and other countries. With no fear of exaggeration, I can say that under the administration of Shri Rajiv Gandhi and under the leadership of my colleague Shri Madhavrao Scindia, Indian Railways are making tremendous strides in all its operations including modernisation and development.

Some questions have been raised regarding the allotment of railway outlays to Kerala. As a representative from Kerala I have also been making several representations for more consideration and more projects to Kerala as well as speeding up the existing projects. And this is an ongoing process. But I understand that in the track renewal programme undertaken with added emphasis by the Central Government, virtually every piece of track which required renewal in Kerala has already been renewed and that the tracks have been completed.

The Kerala tracks were put only in 1975 with the introduction of the broad gauge especially in this section and only curves with more than three degrees required track renewal and that has already been completed. Therefore, this accident cannot conceivably—I do not want to go into any details because this is the subject matter of an enquiry—be directly attributed to such aspects as track renewal. Sir, in spite of the best technology, in spite of the best care, accidents do happen due to equipment and human failure. We can only learn from the accidents and use this knowledge to reduce the probability of accidents in the future.

I am in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. A comment was made that the Members of the State Cabinet who visited the site were not given adequate coverage by Doodarshan. I would like to crave your indulgence in pointing out that this is an accident happened in the railways which is a Central Government Department and five Central Ministers rushed to the site. Naturally, in so far as the Central Government is ultimately responsible for relief, rescue and rehabilitation operations. In matters concerning the Central Government Departments, the visit of the Central Ministers of course received greater attention in the media.

But the hon. Chief Minister of Kerala as well as Shri Nadar, the State Minister who is technically in charge of the Railways in Kerala were given special coverage by Door-darshan. In fact, interviews were taken from them. Unfortunately, they chose even that opportunity to pursue and implement their one point programme—viz., criticizing and denigrating the Central Government. They did not say anything about organising the relief. They used the entire telecast time allotted to them for finding fault with the Railways and saying that the accident has happened due to the negligence of the Railways.

The people of Kerala are most literate, they are politically alert and they can always understand and appreciate even the nuances of politics. I do not think the people of Kerala have taken kindly to any attempt to politicise this great tragedy by whoever it be.

[Shri S. Krishna Kumar]

Incidentally I would say, though this is not the time to say it, that in a recent analysis that we have conducted in our Ministry and which we are ready to give in Parliament, of all the regional news and current events coverage by Doordarshan all over the country, the most coverage has been given or has been availed of among all the Chief Ministers of India by Shri Nayanar, the Chief Minister of Kerala and the Marxists Party in Kerala. The second largest coverage goes to the hon. Chief Minister of West Bengal, Shri Jyoti Basu and the Marxists Party of West Bengal. After that, roughly only half of the above coverage in terms of newslines etc.,—we have statistics, we can prove it and these are incontrovertible statistics—comes Chief Minister and Ruling Parties even such big States as U.P. and Madhya Pradesh.

The improvement of the safety of the railways is an imperative and continuous process and I hope that this ghastly accident which has taken place in my constituency and the lives lost will spur the railways towards greater efforts for railway safety. I pray again for the accident victims. May their souls rest in peace.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA : Did he reply to any question of facts ?

SHRI S KRISHNA KUMAR : I am not the Minister concerned.

SHRI B. B. RAMAIAH (Eluru) : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, on an occasion of this kind first of all we have to pass a condolence message and send it to the bereaved families. On the 8th of July, the 26 Down Bangalore-Trivandrum Express which is also called Trivandrum Express had a very grave accident due to unfortunate reasons which we have to find out.

The major purpose for us to discuss this matter is to review the position as to what exactly has happened. Whatever happened we may not be able to do much except to help the bereaved families to get proper compensation and also to get them relief and employment. This part of the responsibility

of the Railway, I am sure, the hon. Minister will take care of.

The second part of it is how this has happened, the reason—for this and the cause and who is responsible for it. It is very important to know whether it is the maintenance department of the Railways or any other department which is responsible for it. Whosoever is responsible we have to make a thorough investigation about it. Both the sides of the House have agreed to have a judicial inquiry into this. This is absolutely necessary in an accident of this nature. You remember a similar accident happened in Andhra Pradesh at Manchrala in Adilabad district last year where we lost about 60 lives. As somebody else has also mentioned these accidents are happening quite often and derailment has happened quite a number of times. Obviously this shows that there is some lapse and the Railways will have to pay more attention on the maintenance aspect. As has been mentioned by my colleague also the 56th report of the Estimates Committee has said that track maintenance is one of the important items and the condition of bridges also needs much improvement and proper care. The dilapidated condition of coaches is known to everybody.

In fact on the one side we say our Coach factory has got surplus capacity whereas on the other side we do not have proper replacement of coaches. We are also trying to export coaches to other countries but we also need proper assistance from other countries. The accidents usually happen in monsoons. That shows our preparedness for monsoons is not upto the mark. In Japan they have lot of typhoons and earthquakes yet they are able to run the Railways more efficiently. If we are required to get help from them then we should not hesitate in getting the same. We have enough people in this country who can learn things and understand things and work hard. There is no shortage of manpower but it is only a question as to how does the Ministry utilise the manpower in these things. If we can make use of these things then we can avoid accidents in future. No doubt accidents happen in other countries also but what I say is that we can minimise them to the maximum extent provided we take proper care in maintenance. Negligence

aspect has to be taken proper care of.

Coming to the actual accident I would like to say the figures in respect of grievous injuries and simple injuries may be correct but the figure of people who have lost their lives is not correct because we do not maintain a list of passengers travelling by train. Then there can be ticketless travellers also on a train. It is only from the number of bodies that have been recovered or the complaint of the people about the loss of their relatives that we have made this guess work. Just like in the airlines we do not have the list of those travelling by the train. The railways should maintain a list of passengers travelling by any train so that we may have a proper understanding of these things.

There is one more factor which I feel worries everyone of us. It is about the overtime or the long duration of duty that the Indian drivers have to perform. If it is a fact then it requires proper judicious control. We should not over-use these people. If we use them beyond a certain limit then their efficiency goes down. The Ministry should be able to take proper care in this respect and try to minimise the over-working of the drivers on the Railways.

With these few words I thank the Deputy-Speaker for giving me an opportunity to speak on this subject.

[*Translation*]

SHRI BANWARI LAL PUROHIT (Nagpur) : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, it was a heart rending news for everyone to hear about the Railway accident in Ashtamudi Lake. Everyone who heard this news was stunned. It was a major accident which took 105 lives and nearly 200 people received injuries. The question arises as to what were the duties of the Government after this accident. The foremost duty of the Government after the occurrence of such an accident anywhere is to provide relief to the victims and take due care of them. After listening to all the speakers and getting all the information by means of the newspapers, I feel that the Government has fulfilled its duty admirably in this regard. Five Central Ministers visited the spot. The local fisher-

men deserve to be heartily congratulated because they saved hundreds of lives risking their own lives. The district administration also fulfilled its role. No complaints were received from any quarter to the effect that any kind of carelessness was adopted due to which people had to suffer or lost lives. The victims were provided a compensation of Rs. 10 thousand instead of Rs. 5 thousand. Though it is not an adequate amount but perhaps rules do not permit to provide more compensation to them. But I would certainly like to submit that when so much is being talked about socialism in the country then the railway travellers should get more compensation. The Government should take note of the fact that the airlines-travellers get a higher compensation than the railway travellers.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE : Now it has been raised to Rs. 1 lakh.

SHRI BANWARI LAL PUROHIT : You know how much compensation is paid to the airlines travellers. The authorities should take responsibility to provide jobs to the nearest relative of the victims. You should fulfil this expectation. The question also arises as to how this accident occurred. In the modern world no one would be taken to this argument that it was a historical lake haunted by a ghost or a divine curse which is responsible for this accident. Gone are the days when people used to believe in such superstitions. We have to find out the fault that caused accident and see what can possibly be done. There may be a possibility of an old track or an old coaches of the train behind this mishap. If this tragedy occurred due to non-maintenance of old coaches, then the citizens of the country have right to know from you in that regard. The second suspicion is whether the axle etc. were out of order or else the axle of the coaches were not in a working condition due to which the accident occurred. It will also be looked into whether the driver or the staff were at fault or else is there any technical reason behind it. The hon. Minister should clear these doubts. A complaint was made when a jerk took place but the goods trains were derailed. There after the railway authorities did a lot of work. I would appreciate the hon. Minister because

[Shri Banwari Lal Purohit]

the overall performance of the railway is satisfactory. The leadership which the railway department has got in Shri Scindia is absolutely satisfactory.

Just now it was demanded that the Railway Minister should resign but I would like to know its reason. First of all, I would say that it was wrong if the hon. Minister tendered his resignation to the hon. Prime Minister under the grip of emotion after visiting the site and seeing the tragedy. Suppose if a war is going on somewhere and the enemy side blows our plane, then should the Defence Minister face the situation bravely or leave the battlefield by tendering his resignation? Such things should not take place. The most regrettable thing is that when an accident of such dimension has taken place in which 100 people lost their lives and nearly 200 persons got injured, the Chief Minister of Kerala and other Ministers got angry by the mere fact that their photograph was not published in the newspapers. What will the citizen think about such leadership. The subject of debate today is to consider as to what steps should be taken by us to prevent such accident in future. We have read for the first time in the newspapers that there is a Railway Minister in Kerala also. If you do not get angry about the photograph and think about the 15—20 lakh people who elect representatives and send them here...

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA : Please do not mislead the House. Do not give a wrong interpretation.

SHRI BANWARI LAL PUROHIT : This is the work of the newspaper agencies. The sad part of it is that so called Railway Minister of Kerala is very angry because in spite of so much of hard work his photograph did not appear in the Newspapers. We people are there to serve and we should only serve the masses. It is not appropriate to expect that our photograph should appear in the Newspapers if we have saved a life. This will no longer remain a service. We should go to the depth of the accident and find out the causes of the accident. So far as the judicial enquiry of the accident is

concerned, I have got the information that your Safety Commissioner is having holiday at Lucknow. My submission is that you should get it enquired from the Chief Engineer instead of any officer or Engineer so that it may be found out as to where an error was made and no one may pressurise anyone.

[English]

SHRI K. MOHANDAS (Mukundapuram) : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, we are discussing one of the worst train accidents in the history of Indian Railways. The accident which occurred on Peruman bridge on the Ashtamudi lake on 8th July is the worst ever train accident that Kerala has seen. This accident has shocked the whole nation and the people of Kerala have not yet come out of this shock.

It may not be possible to know the exact causes of this accident before the inquiry report is submitted by the Commissioner of Railway Safety. However, certain facts have emerged from the statements of the passengers who have survived and the people who actually saw the accident taking place. It has been accepted that the train was coming at a very great speed. The speed recorded is 80 kms. per hour. It has been more or less established that the engine had derailed a few yards before the bridge. But it moved on and crossed the bridge because of the high speed. When the engine and one bogie crossed the bridge, the driver applied sudden brakes. This caused the accident. Had the driver not applied the sudden brakes, the bogies would have crossed the bridge and the derailment then would not have caused such a heavy loss of life.

18.00 hrs.

Why did the driver apply sudden brake when most of the bogies were on the bridge is a thing which is beyond our understanding. May be he acted in panic and be lost his presence of mind. That only shows he is not an experienced driver. It looks very mysterious that he applied brake only when his engine crossed the bridge. Could not the driver have known that by applying sudden brake the bogies which were on the

bridge would fall into the deep Ashtamudi lake and result in heavy loss of life? The fact is that he is an inexperienced driver and he was driving passenger trains in the Nagarcoil sector. The most important question is why such an inexperienced man was given charge of the train? I would like to know the views of the Minister on this question.

The next point is about the level of maintenance of this train. It is said that after every 6 or 8 hours run, the brake system and other safety systems of the train are checked thoroughly. There were reports in Malayalam papers that no such thorough check is being done on the Island Express. This is a very popular train in Kerala but at the same time the worst neglected train too. It has been said that on that fateful day no check was done while the train halted at Ernakulam. I want to know whether it is a fact. If it is a fact, then who is the responsible official? What have you done to him? Have you fixed the responsibility on that official for serious negligence?

The accident on Peruman bridge brings into focus the sad neglect of Kerala by the Railways. Perhaps Kerala is the only State where the rail bridges do not have side railing. It is very surprising that the railways have so far not thought about providing side railing on the major bridges in the State. Not only that, anybody happens to be on the bridge when a train comes, he will be crushed under the wheels as there is no space on the bridge for him to move over to. In fact many deaths have taken place on this bridge in the past. I would, therefore, request the Minister to take immediate steps to put up side railings and footpath.

It is reported that of late a number of accidents have taken place in the Kottayam-Quilon sector involving goods trains. I fail to understand why the Railway authorities failed to take it seriously. All this shows that the Railways are not paying any attention to the vital question of rail safety in Kerala. This neglect, the attitude of indifference and neglect shows that there is no hope of improvement in rail service in the State. I will cite just one example to prove this point. The Kerala Express running

between New Delhi and Trivandrum had brand new coaches when it was introduced a few years ago. Now most of its bogies are very old and useless and the amenities provided in the train are very poor. The food supplied is rotten. The 3-tier sleeper coaches are packed with people who perform short journeys causing a lot of inconvenience to the long distance passengers. Although it is a fast train, it moves like a Janata Express stopping at most of the stations between New Delhi and Nagpur. Practically every day it runs late by 3 to 4 hours. Is it the way a long-distance fast train should be treated? But there is nobody to take care of it.

Coming back to the accident, I want to say that the claims of compensation should be settled quickly. The rules should be liberalised in order to entertain the genuine claims coming from relatives of the dead whose bodies could not be recovered. There is a strong possibility that some bodies might have been washed away into the sea or eaten away by big sharks. Some of the bodies recovered after two days had certain parts eaten away by fish. So, the possibility of more bodies missing is very much there. In that case purely on technical ground the claims should not be ignored.

Finally, I would like to request the Government to suitably reward the local fishermen who saved a good number of the passengers. Words are not enough to describe their courage and sense of duty. But for their timely help the casualties would have been much worse. Therefore, the Government should do something to help those poor people. With these words I conclude.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : It has been decided in the Business Advisory Committee's meeting to extend the time of the House if necessary to finish the work. I think we can extend upto 7 o'clock and try to finish it today. I hope the hon. Members will accept it.

SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS : Yes.

SHRI I RAMA RAI (Kasaragod) : Mr. Deputy-Speaker Sir, a threadbare discussion has already taken place about the accident

[Shri I. Rama Rai]

between Sasthankotta and Perinad over a bridge on the Asthamudi lake through sabotage is not ruled out. But the surviving passengers' opinion was that the accident was caused due to the application of a sudden brake. It is learnt that the train derailed before entering the bridge and after passing the bridge only, the driver applied the brake. That might be the reason for this accident. That is what the surviving travellers have told us.

This ill-fated train had crossed its counter-part, viz. the train that was coming from Trivandrum to Bangalore at Sasthankotta a few minutes before the accident occurred. Therefore, it is clear that the track has no defect. I think, the speed of the train and the untimely and sudden application of the brake must have been the reasons for the accident. Now, talking about the bridge, I feel that the bridge might have been in a sound condition, but the driver might be a man with an unsound mind. This also may be yet another reason.

It is said that time is the greatest healer of wounds. In this case, a lot of time may be required before the wounds are healed. In this accident, many have lost their family bread-earners, many have lost their children and many have lost their husbands and other relatives. According to our hon. Minister, in this particular accident 105 lives were lost, 51 people were injured very seriously and about 150 people sustained minor and simple injuries.

As far as the relief work is concerned, the Railway Ministry and the local civil administration and the Navy and other people have done a commendable job. But for the local fishermen, the toll would have been much higher. Within minutes, just in half-an-hour, it is said that nearly 200 fishing boats of different sizes came to the spot and the fishermen jumped out of the boats and rushed towards the half-submerged and sub-submerged coaches to pull out the suffocating passengers. No words can describe the saga of human courage at that moment.

Now I come to another point. Many hon. Members have taken pains to mention about this point in great detail. It is about the report of the Commissioner for Railway Safety. This report is usually considered a confidential document and it is not published. That is what I learnt after coming to Parliament. On many occasions, we have discussed many matters concerning the Railways. But nobody has asked for this report on any occasion and nobody has taken pains to find out whether this report is published or not. The old system of the British days is even now followed as far as the report of the Commissioner for Railway Safety is concerned. Secondly, though the office of the Commissioner is originally dealing with railway safety and accidents, it is under the Ministry of Civil Aviation. This is yet another anomaly or confusion which is not explained.

This report is pushed under the carpet for some time, so that people would forget the accident. Subsequently the report might be presented beautifully. There is a saying: 'The operation has been successful, but the patient has died.' This is what happens in such cases. About two-thirds of accidents in the Indian Railways are due to human error. This is what we learn from the documents. We can avoid these human errors by giving suitable instructions to the officials concerned at the proper time.

Crores of rupees are spent after these accidents. Why cannot we follow the saying: 'Prevention is better than cure'? Why should we not spend some money on these tracks and on some of these bridges? The people, especially in Kerala, are worried and are putting so many questions to us. But we are, after all, not technical people. But as people's representatives, we are supposed to answer their questions.

In some parts of Kerala, we have had torrential rains during this rainy season. Do the Railways have any arrangements for special checking of the bridges before the monsoon?

Another question is whether the Driver in question was an experienced one, and whether he was of sound mind. The answers

to these questions have to be given by the Government.

There are so many other aspects of this accident which have to be dealt with. But the less we talk about the Kerala Chief Minister the better it will be. He has gone to the extent of putting an advertisement in 'Kuwait Times' seeking donations from the people there to help these railway accident victims, thus indirectly telling them that neither the Government nor the people here are competent to help these victims and their families. This amounts to lowering the prestige of our country. That is what I would say about it at the moment.

I would suggest that the report of the Commissioner for Railway Safety should always be placed before the House ; and it should be allowed to be discussed. I would also suggest that unless we can ensure 100% safety of the track, Super-Fast trains should not be sanctioned. You should also consider having an insurance coverage for railway passengers. It will be a good idea.

So many other suggestions have been given already by our friends here. I hope that all these discussions will result in steps being taken to reduce the number of accidents in the Indian Railways in future.

SHRI G.M. BANATWALLA (Ponnani) : The devastating accident to this Trivandrum-bound Inland Express was indeed heart-rending. Our hearts go out to the families of the bereaved ; and we extend our condolences to the bereaved families. Our sympathies are with those who were injured. We have a consolation in the fact that the Union Ministers, Ministers of the State and all the responsible authorities, without losing any time whatsoever, rushed to the spot.

The Minister of Railways also did well by offering his resignation and taking up the moral responsibility. Of course, there was no need for him to resign, but that showed the sense of responsibility and the grief at the tragedy. Indeed, had the local people and the local fishermen not come forward, the tragedy, one shudders to think of the dimensions it would have taken. We are grateful to them and we are proud. We from Kerala are proud that courage and

immediate action was not wanting at the appropriate time on the part of the local people and the fishermen.

Now, what could be the causes of this heart rending tragedy is a matter of investigation. There may be defects in tracks, defects in locomotives, defects in coaches, bridge collapse, human error—so many things can come up. The point that I want to emphasise is that the inquiry must be completed as expeditiously as possible, and then its causes must be made well-known. The travelling public must know clearly and without any ambiguity whatsoever what were the causes that led to the tragedy and what follow-up action is being taken to avoid, or minimise as far as possible, such tragedies.

It is most unfortunate that even on such occasions politics has its play. Speculations are rife with respect to the causes for the tragedy and then if we do not have the report in time and if that report does not get the widest possible publicity, then especially in this sensitive area of Kerala the political exploitation in the absence of the proper publicity to the causes etc., would be maximum. We already have an indication of it before us. I do not want to go into that sordid aspect right now. But I must say that it is the laxity on our part that the reports do not come in time which lead to speculations about the causes and then there is exploitation, politically mooted exploitation with respect thereto.

Another point is that we should not be told in terms of statistics that we are doing so well in safety measures and all that. Even one single incident would be a tragedy here in this area. There was a sense of complacency with respect to our records in relation to train accidents. We are told that we have hardly 1.1 accidents per million train kilometres. But this should not be a cause for any complacency. Even at 1.1 accidents per million kilometres, the fact remains that the incidence of accidents in the country is the highest.

Here we have the report from the Comptroller and Auditor General, the report that was presented to this House in the month of March.

The Comptroller and Auditor General's

[Shri G.M. Banatwalla]

Report noted that no targets were fixed for inspection of safety measures. One would like to know what is being done with respect to such a grave observation of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

The Report further said that as far as rail track testing is concerned, hardly 37,954 kilometres of rail track testing was completed against the target of 58000 kilometres. There is therefore a lot of deficiency in this particular area and I must emphasise that it must receive priority in the hands of the Government.

Some time back, we had Sikri Commission recommendations and if I am not mistaken, the Sikri Commission has recommended Safety Commissioners for each of our Zonal Railways. I would like to know from the Government as to the action taken with respect to having Safety Commissioners for each of our Zonal Railways.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker Sir, let us look at the cause wise analysis of the train accidents. We find that among the total accidents, human failure accounts for the highest number of train accidents. In 1985-86, there were 717 unfortunate accidents and the human failure, specially the failure on the part of the railway staff claimed 484 of these accidents. We therefore find that out of a total of 717 train accidents, 484 accidents were because of the failure of the railway staff. Similarly in 1986-87, out of a total 644 train accidents, 418 accidents were because of the failure of the railway staff. I must therefore emphasise that this particular area, namely the failure on the part of the railway staff, must receive prior and greater attention and all the necessary steps should be taken to see that this particular failure is avoided as far as possible.

I do understand that in our safety strategy, there is now a switch to technological devices in order to reduce our dependence on human element. But there also, there is need for an element of caution because we find from the statistics that the number of train accidents is on the increase because of the failure of equipment. The increase may be marginal, but the increase is there. I

must therefore emphasise that proper attention should be given to this area also.

There is another area, which is there. The number of train accidents is on the increase because of unmanned level crossings.

Here, unfortunately, the attitude taken by the railway authorities is very unhelpful. Whenever we approach the railway authorities for the manning of these level crossings, all sorts of technical objections are raised that local people, the local panchayat must come forward with the necessary funds. And if the local panchayat specially in places like Kerala, is very poor, then nothing can be done. Die—that is the freedom that is given over there. Therefore, there must be proper flexibility in our rules that at least in those places where panchayats are poor and are not in a position to give the necessary capital contribution, it is seen that these dangers and threats to life are eliminated. Unfortunately, such unhelpful and unresponsive attitude is there on the part of the authorities that just before rising to speak, I was feeling very much frustrated as to whether to speak or not. Even against our small, small suggestions, all sort of technical objections are raised. And those suggestions from the local people, local representatives are frustrated by an unresponsive attitude based on mere technicalities.

There is a consolation in the fact that the hon. Minister has pointed out that the compensation and relief that is being given to the people here in this case, is the highest. If this accident was the worst in the history of Indian Railways, then the ex-gratia grant or compensation that is being given—though there can be compensation for loss of life—is the maximum. But even then we find that delay takes place. I must, therefore, emphasise on expeditious settlement of claims, Proper rewards be given to fishermen and it is necessary to see that it is the fishermen who risked their lives, get the reward rather than those who were standing on the shores merely receiving the passengers and the dead bodies.

We had a very irresponsible attitude on the part of the Chief Minister of Kerala advertising in the Gulf countries for funds

for relief of those affected. I must ask the Government: Was there any paucity of funds to provide relief and compensation to the people? It was not there. But mere political motivation and an attitude that smacks of degrading the nation, was indulged into by advertising in the Gulf countries for the relief of our people. We must take strongest possible exception to such an attitude on the part of the State Government. At the same time, I emphasise and urge upon the Railway Minister to see that there is no paucity of funds whatsoever to come to the succour of the victims in time.

[Translation]

DR. G.S. RAJHANS (Jhanjharpur): Mr. Deputy-Speaker Sir, the rail accident on the Periyar Bridge in Kerala reminds me of the Badlight accident of 1981. I had visited the site of that accident. This has given me a first-hand knowledge of the plight of victims of rail accidents. In the Badlight rail accident, one-fourth of the victims were unable to get any compensation. Instead, technical points were raised such as whether the deceased had bought a ticket and what was the number of the ticket. The travellers had drowned and it was difficult to find out whether they had bought a ticket or not. Many people travel by trains without informing their relatives. Only after 2-3 years do the victims's kith and kin come to know of their relative's demise in the rail accident. Exactly the same thing happened in the Kerala train accident involving the Island Express. People were returning in the week-end most probably without the knowledge of their relatives.

Today, the situation is such that every train is overcrowded. On my frequent travels by rail I have seldom seen a train which is not overcrowded. Many people buy tickets even when reservation is not available. Compartments are filled upto three times of their actual capacity. I do not know much about conditions existing in the Kerala Island Express but I know about most of the other trains which are generally over crowded and with this I can assume the number of passengers in Kerala Island Express. The names of many passengers might not have appeared on the reser-

vation charts. So I request that an insurance cover be provided when the passenger buys a ticket. In foreign countries there is a system of issuing insurance covers along with tickets to enable the next of the kin of the passengers to claim compensation in the event of an accident.

As far as compensation is concerned, the amount has been increased from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1 lakh. This amount may be reduced to Rs. 75,000 if need be because the amount itself is not important. What is more important is the need to provide a job to at least one member of the victim's family. After the death of the bread-winner, his family faces a lot of problems. Recruitment in the railways provides for jobs to the dependent or widow of the railway employee killed in a rail accident. At least one dependent of each person killed in a rail accident should be provided with a job.

Whenever a discussion on railways is held in this House we demand new lines or change from narrow gauge to broad gauge of the existing lines in our respective constituencies. This does not result in our demands ever being met, but the hon. Members are satisfied that they have had their say in the House. Maximum emphasis should be laid on railway safety. Neither the hon. Members nor the Rail Ministry gives this aspect the importance that it deserves. The hon. Minister would certainly have received a preliminary report about the cause of this accident. I have carefully gone through the newspapers from both North and South India. After reading the reports and editorials in each, I found all newspapers at variance with each other. Some find fault with the locomotive, some with the track while others say the coaches or the sleepers were defective. Most of the newspapers say that the driver was overspeeding. The Rail Ministry has an instrument called the 'Speed Recorder' which can determine the speed at which the train was moving.

Why is the Government reluctant to make public the findings of an inquiry conducted into a mishap? Nobody gets to know anything. The findings of the Badlight inquiry are as yet unknown. Such inquiries should be entrusted to the Safety Commis-

[Dr. G.S. Rajhans]

sioners only and not to the judiciary. But the findings must be made public. The inquiry report must be discussed in this House because safety of passengers is of supreme importance.

One of the newspapers said that majority of accidents are caused by human error. No doubt the accident in Kerala also resulted from human error. But the Railwaymen's Union is so strong that the Government dare not take action against any railway employee. Let the hon. Minister give an assurance that action will be taken against whosoever is responsible for the lapse. The whole country will praise the hon. Minister if he does so.

Every month we hear of accidents at railway level crossings. It is said that a heavy expenditure will have to be incurred to make every railway level crossing a 'manned level crossing. Yet, is anything more precious than human life? The railways have a large number of employees. Let the hon. Minister give an assurance that all level crossings would be manned. People can be recruited on a part-time basis for manning the unmanned level crossings. Maximum attention should be paid on safety measures.

The Government should not show reluctance in presenting and discussing the reports of inquiry commissions in the House. In this way others will also be able to adopt safety measures.

SHRI BALKAVI BAIRAGI (Mandsaur) : Hon. Mr. Deputy-Speaker Sir, I shall take very little time. First of all, I pray for the peace of the departed souls of the victims of the railway accident. Then I want to thank the people belonging to Government and other organisations and the public who helped in the rescue operations.

I will be brief and try to focus the hon. Minister's attention towards some points. Some people are looking the accident from a political angle. This attitude has been condemned by the public around the country. The hon. Minister may rest assure that whosoever tries to lend political colour to such incidents will have to face the wrath of the public.

I request the Government not to entrust the inquiry to either the judiciary or the Commissioner of Railway Safety. Nothing can be gained if the inquiry is conducted by these officials. The inquiry should be conducted by the Chief Commissioner of Railway Safety under whom the various Commissioners of Railway Safety would function. The office of the Chief Commissioner of Railway Safety is located at Lucknow. Let the Government ask for the inquiry report. Perhaps this will remove the wrong notion of some of our hon. senior colleagues that inquiry reports never come to Parliament. As far as I know, the Safety Commissioner's Report on rail accidents is placed on the Table of the House. An inquiry should be conducted quickly but there is no point in instituting a judicial inquiry. Thanks to the Opposition, the judiciary has been subjected to a lot of mud-slinging in Fair Fex enquiry. Now no Judge would be willing to be a member of any inquiry commission. This is the Opposition's gift to the nation. Today, a Judge participating in a judicial inquiry will invite a lot of criticism. So the Government is requested to take note of this matter.

When Shri Shastri's resignation was accepted by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the step taken by the former was praised in the House even though the country lost a capable, honest and duty-bound Railway Minister. We want to thank the hon. Prime Minister for refusing to accept the hon. Rail Minister's resignation. The Railways' progress during the hon. Rail Minister's tenure has been no less notable. The hon. Rail Minister is a sentimental person. He has converted the entire Railway organisation into one big family, which is not an easy task. The hon. Railway Minister's tenure would be known as a golden period in the history of Indian Railways. I encourage the hon. Minister to keep up the good work. We are all grateful to him.

I would like to submit that the enquiry may be conducted by the Chief Safety Commissioner and every thing is made public so that all the doubts in the minds of the Members of Opposition are cleared.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, the people of

the country is apprehensive about one point. In this connection, I would like to draw the attention, particularly of our hon. Colleagues from Opposition that immediately after the accident two statements were made. According to one statement the Chief Minister hold that the accident occurred due to lack of proper maintenance of track. The entire track was renewed in 1984. Shri Krishna Kumar who had occasion to look after the Department of Railways has also said this. It was renewed in 1984 and doubts are now being raised in 1988. The State Chief Minister is not a technical person, even then he levelled his first charge about maintenance. Some of the union leaders as well as some hon. Members in the House also, pleaded not to interrogate the driver lest he should be made a whipping-boy. This thing is being reiterated from the very first day till to date. Then how is it possible to go ahead with the enquiry of a railway accident without interrogating the driver. The intension is to hold the enquiry. The question of saving or implicating the driver does not at all arise. Everybody, whoever is concerned with the accident, should be interrogated and action deemed necessary should be taken against the guilty, I would like to express my thanks to you for your hurriedly rushing to the site and conducting rescue operations there. You rushed to the site within the least possible time by a small aircraft and reached there at 3 A.M. The people of the country know it. You did your duty with dedication and showed your fullest sympathy and compassion to the victims. Our colleagues raised the point of compensation. You should personally take the responsibility of providing adequate compensations to the appropriate persons. We will be very grateful if at least one person from each of the family is provided job. These innocent persons have been killed for no fault on their part. I have tried my best to say whatever was possible. Now it is upto you to pay attention towards it and arrange the report of enquiry at the earliest so that the main cause of the accident could be known and the people of the country could be assured of non-recurrence of such accident in future.

*SHRI M. SUBBA REDDY (Nandyal) : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, Railway accidents are taking place quite frequently. During the days of British, the railway accidents were very rare. The main reasons for the growing number of train accidents, I feel, are the indiscipline and irregularity. When a train accident took place in 1956, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, the then Railway Minister resigned setting a fine tradition. This noble step had such an impact that the rate of accidents came down sharply. The main reason for the accident that we are discussing now, is that the concerned officers did not perform their duties well. Devotion to duty was lacking on their part. The selection of drivers is far from satisfactory. Drunkards and persons who do not take their job seriously are being selected as drivers. The very process of selection is defective. The irresponsible drivers are contributing to a large extent to the growing accidents. The present accident attracted the attention of the media because the train involved was an express train carrying hundreds of passengers. Only when there is some loss of life it gets publicity. On the other hand several accidents involving the goods trains in different parts of the country are taking place. These accidents involving goods traffic are by and large ignored both by the Government and the media. Hence whether there is publicity or no publicity, the Government should try to probe deep into the matter and arrive at the root cause for the growing number of accidents. There is a major defect somewhere in the present functioning of Railways and the Government should try to find out that defect and rectify it. Many of the bridges were constructed during the days of British. These bridges are not being maintained well. Engineers, who draw fat salaries, do not take sufficient interest in their duties. They do not check the condition of bridges thoroughly. This is an important point that the Government should note. The dereliction of duty on the part of these officers is not excusable. Late Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri had to resign for the lapse of the officials. Since he was an upright person, he owned the responsibility and resigned on moral grounds. Then too,

[Shri M. Subba Reddy]

it was a case of dereliction of duty of some officials. But the resignation of one man will not change the scenario. The set up is not going to change with the resignation of a person. The irregularity is on the increase now. As though this irregularity is not sufficient enough, the irresponsibility on the part of officials is also going up simultaneously. Sir, we travel by trains quite frequently. It is everybody's knowledge how irresponsible the drivers are while discharging their duties. In foreign countries, the drivers compete with each other in efficiency. Such drivers are amply rewarded when they drive the train punctually. The drivers are awarded prizes if they reach the destination half an hour earlier. But, here in our country drivers compete with each other in flouting the punctuality and may perhaps receive awards if they drive the train 24 hours late. This is the position prevailing in Indian Railways today. It speaks volumes of the present administration. Hence what we need is a thorough change in the present set up of the administration. If we persist with the present set up the trains continue to run late then accidents will continue to occur. Hence I plead for a thorough change in the entire set up from top to bottom. The track maintenance is also not satisfactory. Quite a number of people are engaged in the track inspection. There are quite a number of gangmen also who are engaged for this purpose. But are they doing justice to their job? We are not in a position to see whether they are checking up the track and coaches regularly and thoroughly. Nobody takes it seriously whether these employees are carrying on their jobs satisfactorily. There are many persons involved and only when every person performs his duty well, then only a train can run safely. The drivers should not be considered as being entirely responsible for the accident that takes place although. I agree that irresponsible drivers do largely contribute to accidents. Sir, whenever any accident takes place, many a precious life is lost. There will be many in the list of victims who were direly needed for the nation. The country will be deprived once and for all, the valuable services of many able bodies and able minded people. Very recently a boat accident took place in Bihar.

The reports say that overloading was the reason for the accident. Sir, whenever any accident takes place, departmental enquiries are conducted. But, Sir, I am against such departmental enquiries. The departmental enquiries do not serve any purpose. A judicial enquiry should be constituted. Only a judicial enquiry can unearth the reasons for the accidents. Various departmental enquiries conducted so far could not help us in pin pointing the reasons for the accidents that have taken place. Hence, there is no use going for a departmental enquiry in the present case. Accidents are on the increase. Many accidents take place on roads every day. The owners engage unqualified persons as lorry drivers as they are available at lesser wages. The unqualified and unfit drivers are the root cause of many accidents. Many of such accidents are going on without any notice being taken either by the Government or the media. On the other hand accidents involving buses are not many. The reason for the less number of accidents where buses are involved is that the drivers are qualified and responsible. The employment of qualified drivers is contributing to a lesser number of accidents while the employment of unqualified drivers in lorries is contributing to more number of accidents. It shows how important is it to employ the right type of persons as drivers.

Sir, the administrative set up has to undergo a thorough change if we want that the accidents should be averted in the future. Computers are being installed everywhere. The electronic equipment is very useful in efficient control of every system. We should by to instal the necessary equipment near every bridge to forewarn us about the impending floods. Lightning conductors are being fixed on top of every major building in order to protect it from lightening and thunder bolts. Similarly suitable electronic equipments and indicators should be installed and made use of at every bridge to save it from floods. This will help us in preventing train accidents. Otherwise accidents will continue to take place and lakhs of rupees of compensation would continue to be distributed. It is really pitiable that many a precious life is being lost everytime during these accidents. To hold the hon. Minister responsible for the accident is not proper.

There is a lot of machinery involved in it. Railways are a very big organisation. Such a big organisation like Railways need a Minister of Cabinet to preside over it. Only a Minister of Cabinet rank can do justice to the department. Hence the status of the present incumbent in the Ministry of Railways should be raised to cabinet level. There are many top ranking officials functioning in the Ministry. Hence only a Cabinet Minister would be in a better position to control and guide them. The Ministry had been degraded in the recent years. Once again it should be upgraded and put in the change of a Cabinet Minister. Let me hope, that the present Minister of State for Railways would be elevated to a Cabinet rank very soon. However competent he may be, he will not able to do justice as long as he continues to be a Minister of State. Hence once again I plead for elevation of the present incumbent to the Cabinet rank.

Before I conclude, I once again stress the need for improving the administrative efficiency for averting accidents in future. I thank you very much for the opportunity you have given me to speak.

SHRI HARISH RAWAT (Almora) : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I also join my hon. colleagues in praying for the peace of the departed souls and conveying our condolences to the bereaved families. We expected that a discussion on this subject would be taken up in the House in the very beginning, but unfortunately the discussion on this important matter could not be taken up as we were busy in some other matters. Our hon. colleagues have expressed doubts over the enquiry of the Railway Safety Commissioner. I cannot understand what is the justification behind their doubts. So far as the accident aspect is concerned, every one of us knows about it. The Railway Board and its members are more concerned about it than us. The Government has accepted most of the recommendations so far made by the Safety Commissioner and taken action on them. I do not find any justification for raising finger over his competence. It is in the records that no efforts have ever been made to cover up the shortcomings pointed out in the reports by the Railway Safety Commissioner. In the

present case we are confident that they will try to go deep into the matter. I agree to the suggestions of Shri Bairagi that it will be better if the hon. Minister raised the level of enquiry of the Railway Safety Commissioner. As a matter of fact I do not doubt about the competence of the Safety Commissioner of the zone where the accident took place. In addition to him, his senior officers should also be associated in the enquiry and their report, when received, should be laid on the Table of the House and there would be no harm if it is discussed publically outside the House. I would like to lay stress on the point of track renewal about which it is being said here repeatedly that the Government did not accord required priority to this work. But in fact the efforts made by the Railway Board to clear the backlog of track renewal in the Sixth Five Year Plan by spending money on this count during Seventh Five Year Plan have been appreciated by all of us. In view of financial constraints, we should appreciate their difficulties. It is not true that the accident took place due to non-renewal of the track, because the accident is not at all related to track renewal. The then hon. Minister Shri Krishna Kumar had said 3-4 years back that the track renewal work had been completed. Still a general feeling is developed that the accident caused due to non-renewal of track, it will somehow or other boost the track-renewal work on which you are spending 25 per cent or more amount. Besides the people of the country will come to know about it and you will receive support not only in the Parliament but of the people out side the Parliament as well. I was, therefore, submitting that there is no harm if the report of the Safety Commissioner is made public when it is received.

Several of our hon. colleagues drew the attention of the House towards reconstruction of bridges. I understand that the hon. Minister has started the work vigorously and got 300—350 bridges re-constructed. Instead of making a complaint on this account, it would have been more appropriate had our colleagues complained that Kerala was allocated lesser amount for railway work. Every Member of Parliament wants and often makes complaints that his consti-

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tuency should get more and more railway lines. But there are some unfortunate persons like me sitting in this House whose constituency is lying vacant without a single railway line.

When we discuss here that the Government will take up the track renewal work vigorously and more funds will be allotted for this purpose, we feel that our rights are being snatched away. Areas already covered get benefit by it. Even then I am in favour of according priority to this work because this is a work of national importance.

I do not agree to the views of my colleagues that Kerala has been allocated less funds, because the State has been allocated the highest amount during 1986-87 as compared to its population and area. It was Uttar Pradesh followed by Bihar which have been allocated lowest amounts. There would have been a justifiability had the hon. Members from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have made such complaints.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I understand that some of our hon. Colleagues have made unsuccessful attempts to politicise this issue. It will be most unfortunate if this issue is linked with politics. We would have praised the Government of Kerala had they extended cooperation as quickly as the Ministry of Railways, the Government of India and the three wings of the Defence Services did on their part. We should see that the whole country with all its resources at its command should come to the rescue wherever and whenever such accidents take place. The Government of Kerala and the leaders of the State committed a grave mistake by dragging politics into this matter. Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, you will be surprised to know that some people even put obstacles when the hon. Minister was prepared to reopen it after track renewal was completed and the Railway Board issued a communique to this effect.

Our hon. Colleagues have tried to impute political motive behind the resignation tendered by the hon. Minister for Railways. There is no politics in it. Hon. Shastriji was a great man. I do not want to compare the hon. Minister with Shri Shastri. The

hon. Minister is serving the railways as an ideal Railway Minister. He is engaged in the task of leading the railways ahead as a good leader and as the head of a family. There is no need to submit resignation. There is no need to flee from responsibilities. There are a lot of challenges before the Railways. I, therefore, would like to submit that he should accept those challenges with greater degree of courage and boldness so as to minimise the number of accidents.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I would like to share the views and sentiments expressed by Shri Balkavi Bairagi and other hon. Members. We are very grateful to the Prime Minister for not accepting the resignation of the hon. Minister. I would like to submit to you that instead of being carried away by the sentiments, he should work with firmness and face the challenges confronting the Railways. The country as well as the entire House is with him in this task.

[English]

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA) : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak today with a sense of great anguish because of the tragic accident that took place in Kerala last month. We, in the Railways, believe in accepting and categorically stating that we, in every way, deeply feel our own moral responsibility when such tragedies occur. There is no way by which we would escape that. That feeling and that sentiment occurs in our mind. I am deeply indebted to the kind words spoken by Mr. Banatwalla, Mr. Balkavi and Mr. Harish Rawat. Undoubtedly, they will further embolden us to redouble our efforts in our task, shoulder our responsibilities and fairly and squarely face the challenges that are ahead.

Sir, the House has consistently, over the last couple of years on every occasion whilst offering constructive criticism, tacitly given us support in our work and offered support to our policies. I detect this undercurrent today also. I am deeply indebted to the House. I would, at the outset, like to express my deep appreciation for the incalculable and commendable support given to the relief operations by the local fisher-

men. They rallied to the cause and many lives were saved because of their efforts. It is unfortunate that at the time of such a tragedy, there have been people who have, as Mr. Banatwalla rightly said, tried to politicise the situation. I would not like to indulge in a dialogue through you, through the Parliament of this country with such people because I feel that I then would also become a victim of that temptation.

If I try and answer them, I will also tacitly and indirectly be indulging in introducing an element of politicisation in this tragedy. Therefore, I will refrain from rebutting what some people in Kerala, including some Ministers, in a very intemperate fashion have stated about this accident, making wild accusations. I am myself not a technical man as Mr. Indrajit Gupta has said, and I would not venture to go into the technical aspects of it. It is because of this that we eagerly await the Report of the Commissioner for Railway Safety, so that the man who is totally competent on the subject could furnish us the information as to what the causes were, what our lapses were, if any, and his recommendations as to how we should to rectify those lapses.

19.00 hrs.

I will deal, individually, with some of the major points that the hon. Members made. My hon. friend, Shri Indrajit Gupta, asked why these Reports should be kept confidential. At the end of the financial year, the Ministry of Civil Aviation submits the Report of the Commissioner for Railway Safety which includes all the major accidents that have occurred during that year whose reports have been furnished during that year, along with the causes, affixing the responsibility as to whether it was a failure of equipment, whether it was a failure on the part of the railway staff, whether it was sabotage, whether it was because of the element of nature, and giving us recommendations as to what we should do about it in the future. This is the document that is presented to the House annually. So, I do not think there is any attempt to maintain secrecy about it.

There was some talk also of a judicial

inquiry. In exercise of the powers conferred under section 84 of the Indian Railway Act, the Central Government in the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation have framed rules captioned 'Statutory Investigation into Railway Accident Rules, 1973, for inquiries into accidents by officers of the Commission, and under these Rules, all major railway accidents where above a certain number of casualties occur or a financial damage over a certain level occurs are inquired into by the Commissioner for Railway Safety. Inquiries into accidents by the Commissioners are in the nature of public inquiries. Wide publicity is given through the local press, inviting the public to tender evidence bearing upon the accident being inquired into, and wide press coverage is given when this evidence is tendered. It is not something which is held *in camera* in a very hush hush way. So, the Annual Report, as I said, of the Commissioner for Railway Safety is a public document. It contains the salient features and major recommendations in respect of all the major accidents inquired into by the Commissioner during that year. Railway working is one which is of a highly technical nature and, therefore, the officer or the authority inquiring into such accidents must be some one who has some railway experience, who has the technical abilities and who can expeditiously try and pinpoint the likely causes of the accident.

It was because of this that the organisation called the Commissioner of Railway Safety Organisation was set up under a different Ministry to ensure total independence. In fact, when the three Ministries were merged—Civil Aviation, Railways and Surface Transport—we recommended to the Government that is the three Ministries were now coming under one Cabinet Minister, the Commissioner of Railway Safety Organisation should be removed from the Civil Aviation Ministry and put under another Ministry under a different Minister. This is evidence of our own desire to ensure independence of that organisation.

Also, as I said, judicial enquiries can be very long-drawn out. The purpose of a judicial inquiry would be to ensure independence of the authority which the Commissioner of Railway Safety Organisation

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already has ; to ensure that any member of the public could appear and give evidence which is done ; to ensure that the enquiries are not held *in camera*, which the Commissioner of Railway Safety does not do. At the same time, the process is very much expedited because of the technical expertise available. I am expecting the Report of the Commissioner of Railway Safety within a very short while. It is because of this that we are adhering to a time-tested process, I am sure his recommendations will be of great benefit to us. We ourselves are most anxious to know what the causes could be. It is also our effort to implement his recommendations.

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA (Bankura) : In toto.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : In toto. I believe if my memory serves me right, that in the last five years, we have received through such reports, approximately 200 major recommendations. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA : How many of them have been implemented ?

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : Let me complete. About ten to fifteen are in the nature of observations leaving about 180 or 185, of which between 175 and 180 have been implemented by us. The same matter was raised in reference to the Kunzro Committee of 1962. I would like to dispel any notion that may exist. Unfortunately, I can expect a few Members of the Opposition to be very charged on this occasion and try to use it in a way as to launch an offensive, on the Government. But I was quite surprised that a couple of our Members on this side also who seemed to exhibit some sort of notion that we are trying to brush things under the carpet. I would like to inform such Members that...(*Interruptions*)

Let me finish. Don't be so sensitive. I wasn't meaning you. Sir, the Kunzro Committee of 1962 had given 462 recommendations of which 85 were observations,

leaving 377, out of which we did not accept 23. There was a disagreement on 23. 354 recommendations out of 377 have been implemented.

The Wanchoo Committee of 1968 gave 531 recommendations, of which there was a difference of opinion in 91 and 399 have been implemented.

In the Sikri Committee Report of 1978 there were 459 recommendations of which 429 of the accepted recommendations were implemented and those under implementation are only 30. What the point I am trying to make is that we find these recommendations very useful in locating the lacuna in our method of operation. We try and improve and overcome that lacuna through our planning, through our investments, so that the same reasons may at least, if not be completely wiped out, be diminished in the future.

Mr. Indrajit Gupta who normally always presents his views in a very sober and balanced fashion unfortunately did make a statement that he expected that there were many more deaths than 105. I would not like to speculate on that because early reports in the media gave rise to feelings that it would run into hundreds. We did our best to salvage the rolling stock. At that time some people were saying that you will find hundreds of bodies in the coaches. Those coaches had been studiously searched by the very industrious naval divers who gave us very timely assistance. I must express my gratitude to the Navy. They recovered a number of bodies which were inside those coaches. But when finally the coaches were pulled out, fortunately those doubts were dispelled. Today the toll stands contained at 105 which too is a massive toll. I am not trying to diminish the size or the magnitude of the accident.

Mr. Indrajit Gupta mentioned about railway accidents and a number of other Members—though he himself did not—said that railway accidents were on the increase. I feel very hesitant, in a way very embarrassed to talk about statistics, cold statistics at a time of such high emotions. But when

such matters are raised by hon. Members of Parliament, it is my duty as head of the Railway Organisation to set the record straight. It is our endeavour to diminish the total number of accidents to the minimum possible and no complacency as Mr. Banawalla expressed—I can assure him that no complacency will be allowed to creep in through satisfaction of viewing the end of the year statistics. However, since this matter has been raised, I must set the record straight.

There has been continuous improvement in the last three years in the number of railway accidents. The year 1985-86 was the lowest ever in Indian railway history. There was a further improvement of approximately 10% in 1986-87. 1987-88 has been a record low in Indian railway history. A large number of these accidents of course took place in freight movement. We pay special attention and special care, extra care, more care than freight movement for passenger movement. In the 604 accidents that took place in 1987-88—I include minor derailment of freight wagons and accidents at un-manned crossings which are the responsibility of the road user—there were only seven accidents where people lost their lives and 19 more in which people were injured.

I have to time and again remind the House, over and over again that my stating these figures today should in no way be interpreted as expression of satisfaction on my part. We will never be satisfied. We will continually try and improve this record. But the fact remains that through the efforts of not the Minister but from the Chairman Railway Board down to the junior most on the line—the PWI, the patrol man, the gangman who work day in and day out—to them I must pay tribute. Everytime in my Budget speech I have tried to pay tribute to them. Their endeavours have borne some fruit. At such time of tragedy it is a natural sentiment that we with one Left sweep brush all that work aside. I would like to remind the House that those men have endeavoured and have worked towards greater rail safety and rail safety has improved. But we are not satisfied and the effort will be kept up continuously in the future too.

I would like to mention that if you take the base year of 1981-82 there has been a diminishing in accidents to passenger trains by 43.7 per cent. It has been almost halved. I would also like to mention here because here again Mr. Indrajit Gupta mentioned this, that according to him some foreign railway experts who were wandering around our system said that if such tracks existed in their countries they would never dare to run their trains at the speed that we are running. Mind you again it is a strange situation that has suddenly occurred, where I have to tell the House almost in a way of assuring the House that the Rajdhani which was cleared for 130 km. per hour in 1969 is today cleared for 120 kmph. The Mail and Express trains which were cleared for 110 km. many of them are today cleared only for 100 kmph I mean this is in a way opposite to progress but strangely enough I have to re-assure the House that we have slowed down when actually we should be speeding up the trains keeping full safety in mind.

We are in any case much slower than the railways abroad and I think there is no major harm in that because our priorities are different. Their priorities are different. Our priorities must not necessarily be high speed trains. Our priority must be to increase the capacity so that the common man who has no alternate means of transport in this country gets an opportunity to travel from one place to another at as reasonable a price as possible. This should be our priority. High speed beyond a certain point is not really relevant in our country. There is no point in running Rajdhani at 200 kmph. and aiming to do that by spending thousands and thousands of crores of rupees. Take you at 7 or 8 AM and deposit you at Howrah at 2.30 a.m. You might have a good rest and reach at 5.30 or 6.00 a.m. So the margin of improvement is such that really high speed is not that relevant today in our country. We must aim for it in the future and go towards it from the point of view of trying to acquire technology in a limited way because that itself has its own fall out and ripple effect on other technology areas. So that should not be our main objective. Our main objective must be bulk transport in the cheapest way possible for the common man who has no alternate means of transport in this country.

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Anyhow, I digressed but those foreign experts and if such existed I would like to tell the House that recently in an article in *Progressive Rail-Roading*, which is an international magazine, it is mentioned that :

"Canadian Railways in late 1987 was headed for further gains in safety, after having logged its safest year ever in 1986 and the best record among comparable North American Class I Railroads, that is, the USA."

The accidents per million train kilometres—which were published in miles, converted into kilometres—in 1987 are 1.10. We are 1.02 and our safety record, when compared to the safety records of those abroad, does not fare too badly. Japanese—much quoted with the technology that is available to them, which was not available to us—1.36 and we are 1.02 ; British 1.88 ; Germany 1.54 ; Pakistan—comparable railways—12.45. The only developed country, of which we have figures, which has a better record than us, is France. And that is 0.88. But I think considering the technology that is available to us, Indian Railways have tried to do their best in the circumstances. The fact that we compare favourably with international railways without the technology, that is available to them, is itself a tribute to those hundreds and thousands of railwaymen who work night and day to ensure the safe travel of passengers on the Indian Rail way system.

Sir, a number of Members talked about level crossings. I would like to mention that in this country, we have approximately 40,000 level crossings of which 25,000 are unmanned and 15,000 are manned. Manning is done on the basis of certain traffic figures and on the basis of certain norms. If we were to man all the 25,000, it would cost us crores of rupees. Therefore, for those crossings, on which there is not much traffic, through a campaign of education and creating a greater awareness in the road-user, we can involve him in the railway exercise. I feel that responsibility should not be shirked because those crores

of rupees can be spent in other safety features, like track renewal, like renewal of rolling-stock, like automatic and various other sophisticated signalling and track circuiting.

These are precious resources which are very limited. If I had unlimited resources, certainly a lot of things could be done. In fact, within the resources available, new lines have been given meagre allocations in the last 2-3 years. How much flak had the Railway Ministry to face ? Time and again, during budget discussions and other discussions, Shri Basudeb Acharya—sitting in front of me—himself raised issues about West Bengal ; quite rightly so.

Shri Balkavi Bairagi had talked about Madhya Pradesh. And many Members talked about their States. But in 1985, we took a conscious decision that rather than concentrating on far and wide expansion of system, in a meaningful manner some expansion will go on. Our main priority must be rail safety. To ensure rail safety, our bulk investment must be on track renewal and renewal of rolling-stock. That is why as much as 60 per cent of our total annual plan allocation is spent on these two heads alone—33 per cent on renewal of rolling-stock and in these three years, between 20—25 per cent on track renewal. On an average, 1,909 kilometres of track was renewed in the Sixth Plan every year. We are renewing, on an average in these first three years, approximately between 3,900 and 4,200 kilometres of track. We have a programme to wipe out every year the backlog, that we inherited in 1985, of approximately 20,000 kilometres by 1995 by wiping out about 2000 to 2500 kms of backlog every year along with 2200 and odd kms of new arising that crop every year ; that makes a total of 4000—4200 kms. We would certainly like to expedite this programme even more. Today we are spending Rs. 800—900 crores on this. If we double it, we will have to spend Rs. 1800 crores, which would be 60—65 per cent of our Plan. Then, how can we spend on signalling and telecommunication, how can we spend on renewal of rolling stock and how can we spend on certain project linked lines like Koraput-Raiguda line ? We have given Rs.

60 crores for that and if that line is not completed in time, your thousands crores of investment for the Vizag Steel Plant will go waste. Therefore, a balanced approach has to be made because of the resources available. Now, I come back to the level crossings. In India, the total number of level crossing accidents in 1987-88 was 62, which included un manned crossings also. We have 11000 trains running every day. Time and again, I have to remind the House, I am not being complacent, I am not satisfied, but the improvement by the railway staff and the railway officers have been tremendous. In a comparable year, 1983-84, because that is the year for which figures are available internationally. On the Indian Railways, the total number of accidents on railway crossings was 82 ; in Britain it was 55, better than us ; in Japan, which is much quoted with all the technology, it was 651, ten times which took place in India ; West Germany 255, USA 6'62 and in India, as I said, 82.

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA : Road traffic should also be taken into consideration.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : Naturally, technology should also be taken into consideration. One neutralises the other and, therefore, the figures become comparable. I am only mentioning these figures because the hon. Member, Shri Indrajit Gupta mentioned foreign experts and I just wanted to put the record straight that internationally, we are not figuring that badly.

I would again like to quote another foreign statistics. Shri Indrajit Gupta mentioned about that also. I would like to mention the number of deaths per number of passengers travelled. In USA for every 200,000 passengers that travel, there is one death ; in France for every 17 lakh passengers, there is one death, in United Kingdom for every 66 lakhs passengers that travel, there is one death and in India for every three and a half crores of passengers that travel, there is one death.

I would like to put these in proper perspective when we judge these things. What

a massive system this is with 11 thousand trains running every day, where the amount of route traversed by the railways is equivalent to circling the world 23 times every day ! That is the magnitude of the task and we attempt not to be over-awed by this magnitude and try and see that the situation is handled in such a way that in spite of the magnitude of the task, we are ahead internationally and at the same time keeping that magnitude of the task in mind do not derive a magnitude of satisfaction from being ahead marginally of many other developed countries.

I would like to assure the hon. Members that as far as track renewal is concerned, as far as the renewal of rolling stock is concerned, full attention is being given to these areas. They are considered our priority areas.

Regarding bridges, I am sorry Mr. Gupta is not present here ; but he talked about distressed bridges. Distressed bridges are those bridges where there are some signs that a closer watch must be kept. Maybe the word is open to misinterpretation. Maybe a better term could have been used—a better nomenclature. But distressed bridges do not mean unsafe bridges. A distressed bridge means that certain signs are occurring where extra attention has to be given, and extra emphasis has to be given, and a much closer watch than normal has to be extended until that bridge is rehabilitated. In our bridge rehabilitation programme too, in 1982 we had approximately 2200 bridges which were labelled as distress bridges—not unsafe bridges, again. That number, by eliminating about 300 to 350 a year including the new arisings of about 100 to 150 bridges a year, we have brought down this year to 913 ; and in another 3 to 3½ years, we should be able, I think, to clear the backlog which we have inherited, and just deal with the new arisings every year.

But again, I would like to emphasize that distressed bridges are not unsafe bridges ; and this particular bridge was not a distress bridge. Some mention was made about the Trivandrum Express having experienced some sort of a jolt about 2 or 3 Kms. ahead, before the approach of the

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bridge. It was a fact. I think it was on the 30th of June that a slight jolt was felt by one of the railwaymen on the train. It was reported at that particular station ; and an immediate caution order was issued. Four goods trains passed whilst that caution order was levied. A caution order means that you cut down your speed to a very minimal amount and proceed very carefully. The PWI examined the track extremely closely and the next day or the same day, after close examination gave clearance again that the track was fit, and was in a good condition. Apart from that, various other tests were also carried out. A track recording car was run on the section on 21st January 1988 and the track geometry was found in a satisfactory condition. On the 12th April 1988 AEN inspected the bridge and also passed it as being in sound condition. Something called the accelerometer recording of the section was last carried out on 10th March 1988 wherein the accelerated values were observed to be less than .02 g, which indicates a satisfactory condition of the track. So, in every way the inspection procedures had been carried out, and the track had been replaced. I would not like to go further on this, throw any further light on this or speculate on this, because there is an enquiry in process, and I would not like to prejudice or vitiate that particular enquiry.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : I had spoken about repeated derailment between Quilon and Kottayam during the last two years.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : Derailments occur not necessarily because of the track. Derailments can occur because of mechanical failure, equipment failure ; it can occur due to sabotage as, in fact, happened in the case of the two accidents that had been mentioned.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : But there are repeated derailments on the same route.

• SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : I am telling you : there are different reasons, and differing reasons which are the cause for

derailments. Therefore, you cannot say that it was necessarily because of one particular reason. It can even be caused by faulty driving of this particular goods train ; it can be because of equipment failure, it can be because of track failure, it can be because of sabotage, it can be because of an obstacle, or possibly because of a mistake.

SHRI SURESH KURUP : Was this enquired into ? (*Interruptions*)

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : I will look into it.

There was some mention, also of the accident that took place to the Tamil Nadu Express which, I think the hon. Members know, was as a result of the tampering of the track on the approach to the bridge, and has been put down as a sabotage. Apart from that, Mr. Gupta mentioned rail fractures.

As far as rail fractures are concerned, again, there has been a significant improvement. In the Southern Railway, if I remember rightly, there has been an improvement, almost 30 per cent, and on the Railways as a whole there has been an improvement in these last three years since 1984-85, there had been an increase of 4 per cent, continual increase built up to that particular time. But from that time onwards there was a decrease of 20 per cent and ranging between 10 and 20 per cent in subsequent years also. So, in rail fractures there has been significant improvement.

There was some mention about the track maintenance being given out on contract. No item of regular track maintenance is being done by contractors.

DR. SUDHIR ROY : What about track renewal ?

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : There are certain track maintenance areas which are sometimes given out on contract, but they are very peripheral. As a policy, no work of regular track maintenance is allowed to be done by contract, only special things like, some things of occasional nature, deep screening of ballast and certain areas of track renewal are done on contract. But the bulk of the work is all still done departmentally by the Railways.

Mr. Gupta also asked about the performance of the tamping machines and various other machines. A constant watch is kept on those machines and they are satisfactory.

The driver was promoted from the Shunter to a Driver, the lowest grade of B or C, in 1980. So, he has had eight years of working as a driver. He was promoted from Shunter to Driver (C) on 16th September, 1980. So, he has had eight years of experience.

I think I have covered most of the points that the hon. Members have mentioned, and also Mr. Indrajit Gupta's points, who very comprehensively made his presentation. I think most of the points that hon. Member Shri Suresh Kurup made also have been covered here.

I would once again like to say that we in the Rail Ministry are very grieved by this tragedy that occurred, our deepest, most heart felt and most sincere condolences go to the bereaved families. We will try and ensure that speedy compensation is given to them. As hon. Members know, an ad hoc Claims Commissioner has to be appointed on the recommendation of the State Government. Within three days of the accident we wrote to the State Government and received the name a few days ago. Within three working days of having received the name the notification has been issued yesterday, and an ad hoc Claims Commissioner has been appointed. On his demanding money, it will be immediately deposited and after that the matter then lies in his hands to expeditiously dispose of the cases.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : Has the Chief Minister been entrusted to collect money from the Gulf countries to compensate the victims ?

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : I do not want to comment on the Chief Minister's action.

SHRI G.M. BANATWALLA : You must. You must do. It is very degrading. It is politically motivated. (Interruptions) Was there any paucity of funds on your part here, that led him to go there ? You comment on that. (Interruptions) What type of politics is going on there ? You must comment upon such things.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : It is a very serious matter. (Interruptions)

SHRI G.M. BANATWALLA (Ponnani) : An impression is created as if no funds are made available here..(Interruptions) What an impression it creates to go with a begging bowl before the International community ; such an image has been created..(Interruptions)

SHRI SURESH KURUP : You people are getting even otherwise...(Interruptions)

SHRI G.M. BANATWALLA : This is a matter of national honour. Have a sense. I am not talking about who gets what from Moscow...(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Okay.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : Sir, what Mr. Banatwalla has expressed and my hon. friend has expressed, I think that they have already very eloquently given expression to sentiments that exist in the hearts of many of us. I, as a Railway Minister, would not like to comment on the Chief Minister's action. (Interruptions)

SHRI G.M. BANATWALLA : Do not be so good.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : I think enough has been said. All I can say is that if the reports are true...(Interruptions)

SHRI SURESH KURUP : It is true. So what ? (Interruptions)

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : This is the copy of the appeal published in Gulf Times and Arab Times...(Interruptions)

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : Mr. Ramachandran, let me just complete. If it is true that he says that the money is being collected for the pedestrian footpath, I find it extremely strange because I had already announced that as a special case, the Railways at their cost will build that pedestrian footpath. Mr. Krishna Kumar, Mr. Karunakaran, Mr. Ramachandran—they have been talking to me about this, they have been mentioning this to me and I had already accepted it and declared that as a special case, the bill will be fully footed by the Railways. So, I do not see any reason for anyone to ask for any money either

[Shri Madhavrao Scindia]

inside this country or outside this country. I find it very strange if it is true...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : The Chief Minister entrusted the job of collecting money to two private agencies. Their names are given here...*(Interruptions)* This is the copy of the appeal made by the Chief Minister in Gulf Times as well as in Arab Times. I am prepared to place it on the Table of the House...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : No.
(Interruptions)

SHRI G.M. BANATWALLA : Permit him to place it on the Table of the House...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : No. Let him write...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI SURESH KURUP : There is nothing to cover it. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : If what is said is true, all the reports are true, I think this is most unfortunate...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI SURESH KURUP : It is true. What is wrong in it?...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : I think it is for a man as senior as him to judge for himself as to what actions he should take...*(Interruptions)* Also the Kerala Government has been through hon. Members of Parliament, through my friends like Sureshji and even in Rajya Sabha, some hon. Members of Parliament of Kerala from the Opposition benches and also the public in Kerala have been talking about my not having mentioned the role of Kerala Government or the Chief Minister. I can only say that I have time and again mentioned my appreciation, first of all, to the fishermen, who rendered services of the highest order given at a time of great stress and great crisis, and we highly appreciate their spontaneous action. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI HARISH RAWAT (Almora) : You must also give some rewards to them.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : I had already mentioned to Mr. Krishna Kumar that if they can find some society or some organisation to which we can make

some suitable donation, then we would like to do it. I had already mentioned this to Mr. Krishna Kumar a few days back and I hope to get some feedback from him. Along with that I also mentioned that the local administration responded with alacrity. The Collector and the full team worked very hard and gave us all assistance. Administratively they are a wing of the Kerala Government. When I say that I have appreciated what the administration has done, they are the bureaucratic wing of the Government. I express my appreciation to the bureaucratic wing of the Government.

As far as the political wing is concerned, the less said about it the better. Because instead of trying to pour oil over troubled waters, instead of trying to defuse emotions, all that we kept getting from some hon. Ministers of the Kerala Government which was most unfortunate at such a time of tragedy, were attempts to try and whip up emotions and sentiments and try and inflame the situation, instead of trying to help us in pouring oil over the troubled waters.

This is most unfortunate. Therefore, in my conscience I could not express appreciation to that sort of political action that was taking place on such an incident. But to the bureaucratic wing of the Kerala Government I express my full appreciation for all the support that they have given. Undoubtedly they have given us great support.

I would like to thank my colleague Shri Krishna Kumar, Shri Banatwalla, Shri Balkavi Bairagi and Shri Harish Rawat for their very kind words at the time of great mental stress for all of us.

It would go a long way, I can assure you, to re-kindle our morale and raise our spirits so as to rededicate ourselves to the task ahead and shoulder our responsibilities to the best of our ability.

I thank the House again for the patience they have shown and express my condolences in this tragedy.

19.45 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Friday, August 12, 1988/Sravana 21, 1910 (Suka).