

# **RAJYA SABHA**

*Thursday, the 17th April, 2008/28 Chaitra, 1930 (Saka)*

*The House met at eleven of the clock,*

**MR. CHAIRMAN** in the Chair.

## **MEMBER SWORN**

Shri Shivanand Tiwari (Bihar).

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## **REFERENCE BY THE CHAIR**

### **The victims of bus accident in Vadodara, Gujarat**

**MR. CHAIRMAN:** Hon. Members, as you are aware, a tragedy took place on 16th April, 2008, when more than 40 persons, most of them school children, killed when bus carrying them to school crashed through the railings of a bridge and plunged into Narmada canal at Bodely village in Vadodara district of Gujarat.

We offer our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and also pray for the early recovery of those who got injured in this accident.

Now, let us proceed with the Question Hour. Question No. 361, Shrimati Brinda Karat.

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## **ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

### **Underground fire in Jharia Coalfield area**

**\*361. SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT:** Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that around seven lakh people in Jharia Coalfield area in Jharkhand are affected due to underground fire; and

(b) if so, the steps taken by Government to protect the lives and livelihood of the people affected, environment and areas by controlling the underground fire?

**THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COAL (SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA):** (a) and (b) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

### ***Statement***

(a) As per the sample survey conducted by Jharia Rehabilitation and Development Authority (JRDA) in 2006, the estimated number of houses/families in Jharia Coalfields

which are affected due to underground fires are 98314 comprising 44155 houses of Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL) employees and 54159 houses of Non-BCCL persons.

(b) The mining areas of Jharia and Raniganj are faced with fire and subsidence problems due to century old mining operations in these coalfields. These problems have been receiving attention of all concerned from time to time and mitigative measures have been taken on case to case basis at different time. However, as a permanent solution to the problem it is now contemplated to rehabilitate all the population living in the endangered areas and fire areas are to be dug out to the extent possible. Taking this into account an Action Plan has been prepared for Jharia and Raniganj Coalfields with an estimated investment requirement of Rs. 8659 crore. While the Government of West Bengal has conveyed their acceptance to the proposed Rehabilitation and Resettlement package, acceptance of Government of Jharkhand is awaited. As soon as it is received the approval of the competent authority will be sought for the proposed Action Plan.

For implementation of Action Plan State Government of Jharkhand has entrusted the job to Jharia Rehabilitation and Development Authority (JRDA) and State Government of West Bengal to Asansol Durgapur Development Authority (ADDA) and coal companies will provide all the technical support. As per the Action Plan the funding is proposed to be done by Government of India and Coal India Limited (CIL).

The following steps have been taken to prevent/control fire and subsidence:

- Surface sealing and blanketing
- Isolation by trenching and back filling with cohesive soil
- Filling of opencast high wall, shafts, inclines and other subsided areas
- Blind flushing with sand/cement/fly-ash/grout mixture
- Cooling by water curtain/infiltration ponds.

With the concerted efforts ten fires have been liquidated out of 70 fires inherited by BCCL at the time of nationalisation. In the meanwhile 7 new fires also occurred post nationalisation period. The surface area under fire has reduced to 9 sq. km. (in year 1994) from 17 sq. km. (in year 1986). Further NRSA (National Remote Sensing Agency) has reported that the area of surface fires is about 3 sq. Km. as per their coarse resolution satellite data in Dec., 2006.

Since 1997-98, 12 schemes under Environmental Measures and Subsidence Control (EMSC) and 4 schemes under Rehabilitation and Control of Fire Scheme (RCFS) were taken up for a total outlay of about Rs. 101.45 crore. As against this, 7 EMSC schemes have been completed and 5 EMSC and 3 RCFS schemes are under implementation. One RCFS scheme has been dropped due to dismantling of Dhanbad-Patherdih Railway line and subsequent mining there.

A demonstration scheme for successful implementation of rehabilitation of endangered houses was approved by Government of India and funded by Ministry of Coal for shifting of 4600 (3100 non-BCCL and 1500 BCCL) houses from most endangered areas in May, 1998 for an amount of Rs. 33.88 crore which was revised in February, 2003 for an investment of Rs. 61.09 crore. 344 numbers of houses for BCCL employees have been constructed and the balance 1156 houses are being tendered. Construction of 3100 non-BCCL houses by the Jharia Rehabilitation and Development Authority (JRDA) is also under progress.

SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT: Sir, it is my privilege to ask the first question to the new Minister. I congratulate him. I just would like to remind him what he said when he was an ordinary mortal like us. He said, 'The Minister should not give general answers to specific question'. So, this is a very specific question to the hon. Minister.

Sir, the hon. Minister has given a very detailed reply and I thank him for that. There are two sets of problems concerning this whole issue. The first one is relating to putting out the fire and the second one is relating to rehabilitation.

I have just visited these sites. I have visited 14 of these places. Unfortunately, what I saw and the magnitude of this crisis can only be called as a national disaster and the reply of the hon. Minister do not match with each other. For example, he says that around 98,000 houses have been affected. But, what is the total number of houses have been built. The princely number of 354 houses for BCCL employees, 1156 is still being tendered and 3100 non-BCCL houses are in the process of being built. This is after around 10 years. This is the result of the effort. So obviously, it is a very serious issue. The main problem is the multiplicity of authorities and the non-accountability. This is the major issue. In the reply itself the hon. Minister said that 'the Government of Jharkhand has not accepted. We are trying to persuade.' So, my first supplementary is: Given the utter failure to deal with this issue, which is of the proportion of a national disaster, will the hon. Minister form a more integrated Committee with experts, remaining itself as a nodal agency, by keeping a time-bound framework and also by including in the Committee representatives of the displaced people.

SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Your suggestion will be looked into and if it is required, we will, definitely, put up a nodal agency, but the facts remains this. What this Government has done was not done in the past. In 2006, this Action Plan was, especially, made and under that, Rs. 8,659 crores have been set apart for this. You say that different agency should be set up. Obviously, in our system, every responsibility cannot be with us. As far as providing land and rehabilitation is concerned, it is the responsibility of the State Government. We can only provide the facilities. If the State Government does not give us land, what can be done? Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, I request the hon. Member to force this population living there to move from there. We have special departments in both the companies; BCCL and ECL just to motivate these people to get out of their places and go to safer places. I will give the reasons why these houses are not built up. You said that we have built up 400 houses. Actually, for BCCL employees also, we have build 344 houses only. It is true. Around 204 families have been shifted. But, we have not been able to convince more people to shift. Similarly, for non-BCCL people, 3100 houses are being constructed by the local Government, and 900 houses will be completed in the next three months. The point is, even if the houses are to be constructed, there is no constraint of funds. The Government has provided enough funds. Funding is proposed to be done either by the CIL or by the Government. The most important factor is, please support us to motivate these people to move from endangered areas.

SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT: Sir, if I can first motivate the hon. Minister to show a little sensitivity to the terrible plight of the displaced, I would think, at least, part of my duty is done. So, I would request you again to kindly include those representatives in your committee and please go and visit the site yourself and see the huge gap which is there. The lives of these people are at stake and here you are giving this type of answer.

Anyway, Sir, my second supplementary relates to the Jharia town. The first point that I have made is about rehabilitation. The second issue is of, actually, putting out the fire. Now,

I went to Jharia town. There is a Jharia Bhachao Committee in that town. This Action Plan, which the Minister has mentioned in the House, is not of 2006, it is a much earlier Action Plan. In that Action Plan, there is a very specific clause that Jharia town can be saved and should be saved by proper stowing of sand in the gaps caused by the excavation of coal in the earlier mine. In other words, the town is, basically, on pillars. There are huge gaps under that town. About 3-4 lakh people are living there. While the town people are discussing this issue amongst themselves, they are also constantly requesting the Government to get the best technology and stow the sand so that they can be saved. I want to know from the hon. Minister whether the assurance given to the House that the Action Plan he mentioned, which talks about saving Jharia by stowing the sand in an urgent manner, will be implemented.

**SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA:** Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, I would like to inform the hon. Member that Jharia town is located in the Central Eastern part of Jharia Coalfields. Jharia town is surrounded by coal mines, practically, from all sides. Jharia town is not affected by the fire at present. And, there is no proposal to relocate the main Jharia town entirely. There are fires in the adjoining and surrounding areas of the town. Some of the areas in or around Jharia town are prone to subsidence. Such prone areas have been identified for shifting. As far as the need for assurance is concerned, I would say that the Government is going to take every effort to save the human lives.

**श्री एस. एस. अहलुवालिया:** सभापति महोदय, जब भी कोयला खदान में आग लगने की और कोयला खदान बंसेने की अर्थात् सब्सिडेंस की बात आती है, तो दिमाग में चाश्नाला और चीनाकुड़ी की घटना आ जाती है। उसी को मद्देनजर रखते हुए फिल्म वालों ने सरकार को और जनता को जागरूक करने के लिए काला पत्थर नाम की एक फिल्म बनाई थी, ताकि सबके अंदर जागरूकता आए और सबकी उससे पहचान हो जाए कि वहां पर क्या होता है। माननीय मंत्री महोदय ने अभी नया-नया पद संभाला है और उन्होंने इसका बड़ा विस्तार पूर्वक जवाब दिया है, किंतु उस विस्तार-पूर्वक जवाब में मानव संवेदना कहीं पर भी प्रतिलिखित नहीं होती। जब 1970 के दशक में कोयला खदान का राष्ट्रीयकरण हुआ, उसके पहले तो माइन्स सेफ्टी रूल का उल्लंघन होता था, किंतु नेशनलाइजेशन होने के बावजूद अभी भी माइन्स सेफ्टी रूल का उल्लंघन हो रहा है। जैसा कि मुझ से पूर्व प्रश्नकर्ता माननीया वृंदा कारत जी ने कहा है कि GRDA के रूल में लिखा हुआ है कि झरिया शहर को बालू भरके बचाया जा सकता है। जब कोयला निकाल लिया जाता है, तो बलियों से पिलर बनाए जाते हैं और उनमें बालू भरा जाता है, किंतु वह भरा नहीं जा रहा है। ट्रकों आदि के बिल पास तो होते रहते हैं, लेकिन आज तक इसकी कोई मॉनिटरिंग नहीं होती है। झरिया सब्सिडेंस को रोकने के लिए जो कमेटी बनी थी और उस मॉनिटरिंग कमेटी को रिव्यू करने के लिए जो कमेटी बनी थी, उसको अगर आप पढ़ेंगे तो न सिर्फ झरिया और रानीगंज कोल बैल्ट में जो घटनाएं घट रही हैं, वे सामने आएंगी, बल्कि उसके साथ-साथ और भी बहुत सारी चीजें सामने आएंगी जो आज वहां पर हो रही हैं। मेरे सवाल का क-भाग है कि जो बालू भरने का काम है, क्या वह वहां पर हो रहा है या नहीं और इसकी लास्ट मॉनिटरिंग कब हुई? ख-भाग है कि वहां से जिनका डिस्प्लेसमेंट हो रहा है, दूसरी जगह ले जा रहे हैं - आपका कहना है कि वे वहां पर जा नहीं रहे हैं, हम उनको मनाएं और लेकर जाएं। वहां इंफ्रस्ट्रक्चर नहीं है, वहां रोड ट्रांसपोर्ट नहीं है, उनको कोयला खदान में काम करने जाना है, बच्चों के बड़ने के लिए वहां पर स्कूल नहीं है, हॉस्पिटल्स नहीं हैं और उनके वहां पर पहुंचने की भी व्यवस्था नहीं है और बाजार नहीं है, तो वे ऐसी अवस्था में कैसे दूसरे इलाके में जाकर बस सकते हैं। पहले उनके लिए ये प्रावधान उपलब्ध कराए जाएं। आप एक टाइम फ्रेम के अंदर यह बताने की कृपा करें?

**SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA:** Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would like to inform the hon. Member through you that plant subsidence takes place when extraction of coal pillars is done with caning system for which specific approval has been granted by the DGMS. ऐसा नहीं है। जो बालू

परने की आवश्यकता है, वह भरी जा रही है। कहीं भी उसके लिए कमजोरी नहीं की जा रही है, इसीलिए उस एफर्ट के प्रंदर, मैं आपको बताना चाहता हूँ कि 75 के बाद after nationalisation, 22 fire control projects covering 70 fires were taken up with an investment of Rs. 114.57 crores. Massive efforts were taken up by the application of best available technology such as blanketing the fire area with sand and mitti, digging and trenching, sand flushing and inert gas infusion. Besides, stabilisation work was carried out to save railway lines, roads, and other areas which were accessible. The number of fires which were completely liquideated is ten. 10 फायर को completely liquideate किया गया। ऐसा नहीं है, लेकिन आपको 70 बताया है। पहले 70 थे, फिर 77 हुए, 7 नए भी हुए और उनमें से 10 चले गए, अभी 67 बाकी हैं, हमारा उनके लिए भी प्रयत्न जारी है और कम्पलीटली चेप्ट हो रही है, ताकि यह सारी फायर खत्म हो जाए, लेकिन जब तक लोग वहां से नहीं हटेंगे, तब तक हमारा पूरा एफर्ट काम भी नहीं आएगा।

श्री बनवारी लाल कंछल: सर, मैं मंत्री जा का ध्यान एक महत्वपूर्ण सवाल की ओर दिलाना चाहता हूँ कि अभी पूरे ज़ा में हजारों एकड़ गेहूँ की फसल जल गई है और उसमें करोड़ों किसान बर्बाद हो गए हैं। सरकार उसके लिए क्या उपाय कर रही है? सभापति जी ... (व्यवधान) ... यह आग से संबंधित प्रश्न है।

श्री सभापति: सौरी, यह आग से संबंधित प्रश्न नहीं है।

SHRI SYED AZEEZ PASHA: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the hon. Minister in his reply has stated that 70 fires were there at the time of nationalisation and seven new fires occurred in the post-nationalisation period. But, still, there are many other fires which have to be extinguished. Sir, I am told that the US team has also visited these places and you are also taking the help of the World Bank team in this regard. So, I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to how many years it will take to extinguish the fires completely in Jharia and Raniganj.

SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Sir, it is very difficult to have that kind of assessment because it is impossible to know as to what kind of fire is actually taking place inside. We extinguish some portion of it but some still remains. So, it is a continuous process and it is very difficult to tell how many years this process will take. If we know that total problem, we can probably assess it. But there is not technology available in the world which can tell us exactly what is the biggest problem in this regard.

SHRI PRAKASH JAVADEKAR: Sir, the Minister was mentioning that the people are not ready for rehabilitation and going to the new places. I want to know whether there is any scheme or whether there are any efforts from the Government side to take these people into confidence and to show them the actual facilities available at other places. And, whether the Government is making any effort to motivate them and take help of the NGOs who are working with the people in that area. I want to ask whether this type of effort has been initiated by the Government or not.

SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Sir, as I said earlier, and I repeat it again, both these companies, namely, BCCL and ECL, have a special department with very senior officers who are trying to motivate the local people and who are also using the NGOs also. We are involving the local public men and we are also using all the social workers. So, every effort is being made to motivate them and we are also requesting the local Government to help us. We understand the humanitarian aspect of this problem and our Government is very much sensitive to this problem. It is not true that we are not trying it, but, as you know, it is extremely difficult to change the mindset of the people to go from one place to other. It is very difficult. So, if you can also help us, we will be glad to take your help and the moment any help is required from the Government, we will help you also. Please tell us.