

[Shri Kapil Verma]

internationalise the issue which is strictly a bilateral issue only to harass us. Our Prime Minister has taken a strong stand. I am told privately that when Mr. Ershad came and when he met Mr. Gandhi, he told him very frankly not to complicate such matters and not to do any such thing which may disturb our relations.

In Maldives what our army did is certainly praiseworthy.

So, our international relations particularly have been very very good, and on that front our Government has had a very great success. Before closing I will say a few words about the Wage Board issue for journalists. I hope the Wage Board will submit its report quickly and the employees will call off their boycott. Even if they do not call off their boycott, the Board must go on with its work and submit its report by March 31. The Government must ensure that the report is submitted by this deadline because the journalists are expecting a long-awaited relief while the employers are trying to sabotage it. To me it seems they will go to court. So, the Government must adopt a very strict attitude on this issue.

I have been raising the pension issue also from time to time. I am sorry that the Pension Committee has delayed matters. The Labour Minister wrote a letter to me saying that report will be submitted in February, but the other day in reply to my question he said that it will be delayed. I hope the Committee will be asked to expedite it.

With these words I compliment the Government for various successes in the international and domestic fields. Since other friends have already spoken on other fields, I would only say since the Opposition does not have much to say on the international and other subjects, they talk nothing else except their resolve to remove Rajiv Gandhi.

They are fighting amongst themselves. They are talking who their Prime Minister will be all the time. They are day-dreaming. They know they are not going to come to power. Since they are fighting amongst themselves, people know the facts and real position and when they are already fighting before coming to power what will they do when they come to power. The people have the experience of the Janata Government. I am sure our party will come to power after the elections and we will make the motion of thanks for the President's Address after next year. Thank you.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:**  
Hon. Members, we have exhausted the list of speakers for today on the Motion of thanks on the President's Address. The Minister of State for Science and Technology is here. His business is listed at 6 O' Clock. Since he is here we can ask him to again his statement.

### STATEMENT BY MINISTER

**Recent fire in the semiconductor complex Ltd. Chandigarh**

**THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENTS OF OCEAN DEVELOPMENT ATOMIC ENERGY, ELECTRONICS AND SPACE (SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN):** It is with a deep sense of regret I have to inform the hon. Members that on the 7th February, 1989, around 11.40 p. m. a fire was noticed at Semiconductor Complex Limited, SAS Nagar, Punjab, a public sector undertaking under the Department of Electronics engaged in the manufacture of integrated circuit chips and related modules and sub-systems. Steps were immediately taken by the fire fighting staff of Semiconductor Complex Limited and the fire tenders

from Mohali, Chandigarh, Punjab State Electricity Board, Ropar and Air Force Service Station to put out the fire. The fire was finally put out on the morning of 8th February, 1989.

There has been extensive damage to the device manufacturing facility and R & D area. However, the other building housing administration, corporate staff and computer aided design facilities were unaffected. There were no casualties. The Inquiry Committee constituted to go into the cause of fire under the Chairmanship of Maj. Gen. S. A. Mohile (Retd.), Ex-Director, Defence Institute of Fire Studies, Ministry of Defence has submitted its report to Chairman-cum- Managing Director, Semiconductor Complex Limited. This report, along with the evidence yet to come from the analysis of ash samples taken from four different locations to ascertain about the contents of petro-chemicals in the ashes if any, is to be considered by the Board of Directors of Semiconductor Complex Ltd. SAS Nagar, Punjab. A preliminary estimate of the loss on account of the fire assessed on the basis of the financial records of the company works out to about Rs. 60 crores.

Semiconductor Complex Limited has a total staff strength of about 850 personnel. About 50 per cent were affected by the fire in terms of employment. Bulk of the staff are Technicians and Technical Assistants category.

Steps are being taken to ensure that the highly trained personnel at Semiconductor Complex Limited are not dispersed and their services continue to be available. The intention is to re-establish the facility at the present site using this opportunity to the extent feasible to upgrade the technology level.

Rehabilitation measures are being worked out in detail. Steps to ensure continuity of supply of products and services to user agencies have already

been initiated. Semiconductor Complex Limited has also sent their engineers to other public sector undertakings in the field with a view to obtain sub-contracts for assembly work from these organisations and to explore the possibility of utilising their facilities for fabrication of integrated circuits.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:**  
Mr Vishwa Bandhu Gupta.

**SHRI VISHWA BANDHU GUPTA (Delhi):** Madam Deputy Chairman, I think, we should be happy at least for the fact that there were no casualties in this massive fire. This is a heartening thing. However, the loss according to the statement by the hon. Minister is quite substantial and I am wondering whether the Minister would let us know if suitable fire-fighting facilities could be developed in sensitive plants like this plant so that losses can be contained in case of fire. May I know from the hon. Minister whether adequate arrangements existed at this plant because in his statement he has said that he had to get Air Force Service Station and other people to put out the fire? They took about 24 hours to put out the fire. This would be one matter of concern as to what we have learnt from this fire to be able to save such facilities in the future.

The other matter of concern is about the personnel. These are trained people and I understand they are specialised people. Now, they have no work at all and they are likely to be dispersed in spite of the fact that some efforts would be made not to disperse them. May I know from the hon. Minister as to when this plant can be restarted and what would be the cost of restarting this plant?

He has also been kind enough to mention that there is an intention on the part of the Government to upgrade the technology. Now, this is a good thing because once we have

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lost the facility, if we are going to put in a lot of money, we may as well have it at the state-of-the-art. May I know from the hon. Minister in what way upgrading of this technology is being envisaged by him?

Lastly, the loss has been assessed at Rs. 60 crores. How this loss has been arrived at? Is it the loss of the actuals or is it the loss of things that we would have produced, sold and so on and so forth? That is an area where I would like to have a clarification from the hon. Minister.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:  
Another clarification from Mr. P.N. Sukul.

SHRI P. N. SUKUL (Uttar Pradesh): Madam Deputy Chairman, I agree with my hon. friend, Mr Vishwa Bandhu Guptaji that there has been no casualty. The loss is to the tune of Rs. 60 crores. Madam, from the statement is clear that the enquiry is not yet complete and the analysis of ash samples is yet to come. So it does not seem to be complete even now. If the enquiry is not complete, then we do not know what is the cause of accident because cause of the accident has not been mentioned in the statement specifically. I would like to know from the Minister if he has any idea about the real cause of the accident, whether it was due to negligence or it was due to some other reason. If it was negligence, on whom responsibility is to be fixed? That is also a question.

I would also like to know particularly what precautions were not taken due to which the complex was burnt out? Since 50 per cent of the workers engaged in the Complex do not have any work and the question of their rehabilitation is there, I would like to know from the hon. Minister how the Government proposes to rehabilitate these 50 per cent workers employed in the complex and how and by when they propose to rehabilitate Plant itself.

डा० रत्नाकर पाण्डेय (उत्तर प्रदेश) : माननीय उपसभापति जी, मंत्री महोदय ने सेमीकंडक्टर कॉम्प्लेक्स लिमिटेड में अग्नि दुर्घटना जो 7 फरवरी को हुई थी, उसके संबंध में सदन के समक्ष जो अपना वक्तव्य रखा है, वह थोड़ा क्लिष्ट से रखा गया है सेमीकंडक्टर कॉम्प्लेक्स लिमिटेड बड़ा सेंसिटिव संस्थान है और इसमें जो कुछ बनाया जाता है वह इलेक्ट्रॉनिक की दृष्टि से बहुत महत्वपूर्ण है। उसमें इस तरह से आग लगना राष्ट्रीय क्षति है। जिस प्रकार से दुर्घटना पर अग्नि शमन सेवाओं से नियंत्रण पाया गया, वह सराहनीय है और जो मेजर जनरल एस.ए. मोहिते, सेवानिवृत्त पूर्व निदेशक प्रतिकक्षा और दुर्घटना अध्ययन संस्थान रक्षा मंत्रालय की अध्यक्षता में जांच समिति बनी है, उसके बारे में मैं जानना चाहूंगा कि उसकी रिपोर्ट कब तक आ जायेगी।

इसके साथ ही जो विभिन्न स्थानों से जले हुए पदार्थों के राख के नमूनों का विश्लेषण होने वाला है, उनकी जांच कब तक पूरी हो जायेगी।

साथ ही यह भी बताने की प्रार्थना करे कि 850 कर्मचारियों में से 50 प्रतिशत लोग जो बेकार हो गये हैं या प्रभावित हुए हैं इस दुर्घटना से उनकी गैरलाय करने के लिये मंत्रालय क्या उपाय कर रहा है।

महोदया, ये मेरी जो जिज्ञासियाँ थीं। मुझे विश्वास है कि माननीय मंत्री जी इनका स्पष्टीकरण करेंगे।

SHRI BHASKAR ANNAJI MASODKAR (Maharashtra): Madam Deputy Chairman, I think the matter is quite serious and very sensitive. Although the statement has been made by the Minister, I have a few questions which are not met by the statement. There are no details as to how the fire caught up to this Semi-conductor Complex Limited and how the particular sensitive area was engulfed in the fire which destroyed, as the statement says, a very valuable device manufacturing facility as well as

the Research and Development area. So, I would like the hon. Minister to state if there are any details as to how the fire spread to these particular areas. Allied with this query is the query whether any *prima facie* reasons have surfaced so far because the enquiry has been carried out and I hope the Chair will agree with me that if the enquiry has been carried out and only the ash has to be analysed, as the statement says, there must be some primary data available with the Government and not only this House, but the entire nation is anxious to know about it. There are a lot of queries because the R&D is involved and this is one of the sensitive areas where we are trying to develop and build up ourselves. So, are there any *prima facie* reasons that have surfaced? If the hon. Minister is in a position he may answer.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN :** Mr. Masodkar being a former judge will only talk about '*prima facie*'.

**SHRI BHASKAR ANNAJI MASODKAR :** Because the statement says...

**THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN :** Yes, it is a very sensitive issue and I would like the Minister to answer.

**SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN :** Madam Deputy Chairman, some very pertinent questions have been raised. I could not give all the details in this statement partly because the questions were to come from the floor itself. Firstly, I answer about the origin of the fire. Of course, we have some preliminary data which we got informally. I do not know if it is proper for me to disclose all these things because we would like them to come from the Board or the Complex itself after they examine it and also after the crucial thing about the ash content has been examined forensically as to whether there is any trace of any kind of explosive

material used which caused this fire. Without that we cannot really give a decisive opinion. But I can mention one thing and that is, the report has not seen any reason to suspect that there was any sort of sabotage involved. Of course, you cannot rule it out unless and until we get the report about the analysis of the ash. Therefore, I am saying preliminarily rather informally that this is what we have got so far.

**SHRI BHASKAR ANNAJI MASODKAR :** You say to the extent it is possible for you.

**SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN :** I am saying to the extent that the Chairman and the Committee could conclude.

**SHRI BHASKAR ANNAJI MASODKAR :** There are a lot of queries being made. As the hon. Minister is aware, we attach a lot of importance to this research and development and he himself is heading it.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN :** This is towards self-reliance.

**SHRI BHASKAR ANNAJI MASODKAR :** People are asking why the Government is not coming out with facts. It is practically a month now. It was on 7th of February and we have entered March. So, the Government should come out with some facts about the incident.

**SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN :** We can come out with facts only after the full examination takes place. Probably it was not proper for me to say what I said now, the kachcha information. Until the scientific information comes, we cannot really say anything with any sort of confidence.

The fire started in a rather remote corner of the complex, what is called a rest-room where, I understand, an Assistant Engineer used to sit

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and transact his business with the sub-contractors. It is called rest-room. He goes away after 4 o' clock. The smoke detector gave a signal and when the person, the fireman, on duty went there, he could not first really see that smoke. But he could see a little bit. When he opened the room he found smoke coming out of that.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN :** May I intervene at this point? If such sensitive places are there and they have a smoke detector, do they not have automatic water-sprinkling device facilities?

**SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN :** I do not think there was any automatic water-sprinkler in this case. When the smoke was detected, he called for the fire service. The fire-fighting equipment which was there was put into use and was brought from other places in Chandigarh also. People rushed to the scene from different places with fire tenders. But there was a basic problem about that. This is a closed-in structure, almost a closed architecture. While they could see the smoke, they could not exactly assess in the beginning where the fire was coming from. There was a short period, a few minutes, of light failure and they had to find torches to look inside. Then the fire-fighting started. The basic difficulty was really the architecture of this structure itself. It was so closed-in for scientific reasons that they could not easily fight the fire. In fact, I know that a similar fire took place in the U.K. in a similar establishment and it was completely burnt down. And about four months ago, the same thing happened with another similar set-up in Hungary. There also they could not save it. So, maybe for the future we have to use our ingenuity to produce some mechanisms so that fire-fighting arrangements are made.

**THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN:** Sprinkler system.

**SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN:** Sprinkler system or other systems. Maybe the material used for building could be somewhat fire-proof and something like that. This will all be gone into by this committee and, if necessary by other experts afterwards.

Coming back to some of the other questions asked, much would depend on the rehabilitation of the plant itself. The plant can be rehabilitated according to our expert assessment within a period of 15 or 18 months, provided we get the equipment required reasonably fast. And the equipment required can be of two kinds. One: my friend, Mr. Vishwa Bandhu Gupta, raised this question about technology upgradation: Can we do that? The plant can be rehabilitated by getting the old technology itself; that is almost second hand equipment and devices which would be somewhat cheaper. Or it can be rehabilitated by getting the state of the art technology. This is why I mentioned that we would like to use this misfortune to upgrade the technology so that when the plant is rehabilitated and rebuilt, you would not have lost much time in terms of the technology we would have developed there otherwise. But that would be a rather more expensive business. It has been assessed that it would cost about 50 to 55 million dollars, nearly 70 to 75 crores of rupees, to get this. But fortunately the plant is insured and the insurance, of course, is in rupees. It might get on a rough assessment Rs. 40 to 50 crores out of the insurance. Only the balance we will have to make up from the Governmental sources. In fact, I understand BHEL has come forward making an offer since it is interested in this technology, that it would be prepared to put up rest of the amount required to rehabilitate the plant. But we will have to get the foreign exchange required. All this will have to be examined very severely from the financial as well as technological point of view before we make a

decision. But what we would like, *prima facie*, is to rehabilitate it in such a way that after 15 or 18 months when the plant comes into operation again it would be a more modern plant. This is our vision. I hope, finances forthcoming, it would be possible for us to do so.

The other question is about rehabilitation of the personnel. Nearly 490 people would be affected by this out of which 70 to 71 are apprentice trainees. We have to make use of them immediately because a considerable portion of them are highly trained people and they may get jobs anywhere, in India or abroad, and, therefore, before they are tempted to go elsewhere out of having nothing to do, we will have to provide them jobs and we will also have to assure them that the plant will be rebuilt so that they will have a challenging job ahead of them when they stay with us. For the immediate purpose we are thinking of, first of all, redeploying them on sub-contract jobs from such public sector companies which need this kind of technology—BEL, BHEL, ITI, etc. These companies have shown considerable interest and our people have gone over and discussed with them. The Department of Electronics has also taken it up and they are willing to help. If they all give some sub-contracting job for assembly to the Semi-conductor Complex, then they could be usefully occupied in doing that sort of work which it is possible for them to do. Another way of dealing with this problem is to import an immediately as possible devices like chips on boards, printed circuit boards, LSI devices, LSI chips etc. If we can import them immediately, then production can start so that the customers of SCL are supplied with the products for which they have already entered into contracts with them.

These are the two ways of giving immediate jobs to them. In fact, the Department of Electronics

has already taken action on this and the Ministry of Commerce has cleared the import of devices worth about Rs. 3 crores. So, we have taken very quick action on this. These are the plans we have for the immediate rehabilitation of the personnel who have been thrown out of employment.

Now, with regard to the assessment of the loss itself, about which my honourable friend, Mr. Sukul, has asked, it has been assessed not on the product value, but, I think, on the equipment value and, as I said, it is about Rs. 60 crores. Some details are here. But it contains all kinds of technical terms and I wish I could read them out to you. But I can give them to you later if you like to have them for your information.

Fixing of responsibility, of course, is something which has to come out of the report of the Committee itself and, naturally, if anybody is responsible specifically for negligence, that matter would be dealt with by the Government. But, so far, no evidence has come.

**SHRI BHASKAR ANNAJI MASODKAR:** When will the report come?

**SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN:** I think the report has already been submitted. But what is being awaited is the scientific analysis of the ashes. I do not think it will take much time.

**SHRI GHULAM RASOOL MATTO** (Jammu and Kashmir): Was it insured?

**SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN:** Yes, it was insured.

**SHRI GHULAM RASOOL MATTO:** The whole plant?

**SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN:** Yes. The whole plant was insured for about Rs. 70 to Rs. 75 crores.

SHRI GHULAM RASOOL MATTO: On the basis of the work which you have already started, how long it will take?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Matto, you were not here when all these questions were answered by the Minister. You can see tomorrow the record. The Minister answered very very exhaustively.

SHRI GHULAM RASOOL MATTO: Thank you, Madam.

SHRI B. L. PANWAR (Rajasthan) : Madam, I have only one small question to ask. This incident took place on the 7th of February. In his reply, the Minister has said that similar incidents took place in two countries abroad. When did they take place and were the remedies applied there taken note of by the Indian Government before this?

SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN: I must say that I did not use the other incidents in extenuation of what happened in India. I was only telling in regard to the fire-fighting problem.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: With regard to the struture of the building.

SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN: Yes. Then, with regard to the other two incidents, one incident took place

about four or five months ago and the other took place in 1972.

SHRI BHASKAR ANNAJI MASODKAR: Madam, the honou- rable Minister was talking about the time-schedule of the inquiry. Some- thing he was saying in his reply to Mr. Matto. I would like to know that.

SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN: That is what I have said. The only thing that remains is this.

SHRI BHASKAR ANNAJI MASODKAR: What is the time- schedule?

SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN: I cannot really say when it will be done and it would be really hazar- dous to guess now.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We can expect the honourable Mi- nister to expedite it.

SHRI K. R. NARAYANAN: It is with the laboratory and they are working at it and we are awaiting the results.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN : Thank you. Now, the House stands adjourned till 11.00 A.M. tomorrow.

The House then adjourned at six of the clock till eleven of the clock on Thursday, the 2nd March, 1989.