

Rajya Sabha consisting of ten Members, namely: —

1. Shri Era Sezhiya'n
2. Shri Syed Sibtey Razi
3. Shri Surendra Mohanty
4. Shrimati Usha, Malhotra
5. Shri N. P. Chengalraya Naidu
6. Shri R. Ramakrishnan
7. Dr. Malcolm S. Adiseshiah
8. Shri K. Mohanan
9. Shri Suraj Prasad
10. Shri Pranab Mukherjee

with instructions to report by Friday, the 6th August, 1982."

The motion was adopted.

THE ESTATE DUTY (AMENDMENT), BILL, 1982

[The Vice-Chairman (Shri R. Ramakrishnan) in the Chair].

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SAWAI SINGH SISODIA): Sir, I beg to move:

"That the Bill further to amend the Estate Duty Act, 1953, as passed by the Lok Sabha, be taken into consideration."

Sir, this Bill has a very limited objective. It seeks to amend the Estate Duty Act mainly with a view to implementing certain concessions in relation to estate duty announced in the Budget Speech for the year 1981-82.

One of the amendments seeks to raise the exemption limit in respect of estate duty from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1,50,000, which is the same as the exemption limit for wealth-tax. For this purpose, the existing rate schedule of estate duty is proposed to be replaced by a new rate schedule.

At present the 'nil' rate slab is limited to Rs. 50,000. On the value of the estate in the slab of Rs. 50,001 to

Rs. 1,00,000, the rate of estate duty is 4 per cent and on the value of the estate in the slab of Rs. 1,00,001 to Rs. 2,00,000, the rate is 10 per cent.

Under the new rate schedule, the 'nil' rate slab will go up to Rs. 1,50,000. The rate of estate duty in the next slab of Rs. 1,50,001 to Rs. 2,00,000 will be 10 per cent, that is, the same rate as is applicable at present on the slab of Rs. 1,00,001 to Rs. 2,00,000. The rates of estate duty in the remaining slabs will remain unchanged.

The effect of the proposed modifications in the rate schedule will be two fold. Firstly, no estate duty will be payable in cases where the value of the estate, as computed after allowing various exemptions provided under the Estate Duty Act, does not exceed Rs. 1,50,000. Secondly, in cases where the principal value of the estate exceeds Rs. 1,50,000, the estate duty payable will stand uniformly reduced by a sum of Rs. 7,000.

For purposes of wealth-tax, a house which is wholly or mainly used for residential purposes is valued according to the rent capitalisation method as prescribed under the Wealth-tax rules. The Wealth-tax Act also provides that the value of one self-occupied house owned by the taxpayer would be frozen, at the option of the tax-payer, at the value thereof as on the valuation date next following the date on which he became the owner of the house, or on the valuation date relevant to the assessment year 1971-72, whichever is later.

Clause 5 of the Bill seeks to provide that, for purposes of estate duty, the value of one residential house owned by the deceased will be taken at the same value as adopted for purposes of the assessment of the net wealth of the deceased on the valuation date immediately preceding the date of his death.

If the deceased was not charged to wealth-tax or the value of the house was not included in the net wealth of the deceased as on the said valuation date, the value of the house would

be determined by the Controller of Estate Duty in accordance with the provisions of the Wealth-tax Act and the rules made thereunder. However, if the house was constructed or acquired by the deceased after the said valuation date, the value of the House will be determined as on the date of the death of the deceased.

The Bill also provides that where the deceased was a member of a cooperative housing society, the value of one house or part thereof, allotted or leased to him under a scheme of the society, would be treated as a house owned by the deceased. The effect of the proposed provision will be that the existing concessions under the Estate Duty Act in respect of house property owned by the deceased will also become available in such cases. Besides, the proposed new provisions for valuation of one residential house will also apply in such cases.

As a logical corollary to the proposed provision deeming the deceased to be the owner of the house allotted or leased to him by a co-operative housing society, it is proposed to provide that any outstanding instalments of the amount payable by the deceased to the society towards the cost of such a house will be allowed as a debt owned by him. Any deposit made by the deceased with the society for the allotment or lease of the house will also not be included in computing the principal value of the estate of the deceased. As the two main concessions under the Bill were announced on the 28th February, 1981, the provisions under the Bill are proposed to be made with retrospective effect from 1st March, 1981. These provisions will, therefore, apply in relation to the estate of persons who have died after the 28th February, 1981.

The Legislatures of the States of Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Tamil Nadu have already passed resolutions under clause (1) of article 252 of the Con-

stitution adopting the proposals with respect to the amendments under the Bill. Hence, in relation to estate duty in respect of agricultural lands situated in the territories comprised in these States, the provisions of the Bill will become applicable from 1st March, 1981. In relation to estate duty in respect of agricultural lands situated in the territories of other States, the provisions of the Bill will also apply from the same date if the Legislatures of these States adopt them by passing appropriate resolutions under article 252 of the Constitution.

Sir, I trust that the Bill will be supported by the entire House.

The question was proposed.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI R. RAMAKRISHNAN): Mr. Nirmal Chatterjee.
... (Interruptions)...

SHRI NIRMAL CHATTERJEE (West Bengal): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, this is a rather interesting Bill in the sense that ours is a socialist country, and that we declare every-time from the housetops. Now, nowhere in the world, in any socialist country, is there an estate duty.

It is all the more interesting because in a socialist country we are trying to introduce amendments to the Estate Duty Act in the direction of raising the exemption ceiling from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1,50,000, which is the essential point as stated by the Minister in the Amending Bill. Now, Sir, the argument seems to be quite justified, why such an amendment should be there. What is that argument? That argument is that prices have risen, the rate of inflation is certainly not less than three times since the legislation was enacted. As a matter of fact, Sir, we know that the consumer price index for industrial workers whose base is 1960-61, has already crossed 450, which means the rise in prices is of the order of 4 1/2 times. The legislation was enacted in the year 1953. As the Minister may be knowing, 1953 was one of the years,

and that is the only Five-Year Plan period, when in India prices came down. And from 1948-49 to 1953, the prices came down further. Now, on the basis of 1953, the present price rise might be of the order of six times instead of 4½ times based on the base year 1960-61. Now, therefore, it seems there is a very convincing case that there should be such an amendment.

Now I will draw the attention of the Minister to another fact also. Something else also had happened since 1953. What is that? First is the adoption of the resolution that we propose to build a society on the socialistic pattern. We didn't stop at that. We further amended it and declared that our Republic would be a socialist one. Now we should remember both these important facts—that prices have risen and we have grown from a non-socialist pattern of society to, first, a socialist pattern of society, then into socialism. Now in one sense I do concede that we are approaching socialism. In which sense? Perhaps you know that the first thing that the socialist countries take pride in is that they are approaching a situation where there will be no longer any income-tax in their country. The socialist countries take pride in the fact. We are also, I submit, approaching that kind of socialism, in which sense? Increasingly, Sir, in our country, we are trying to reduce the proportion of revenue collected from direct taxes like income-tax, state duty, wealth-tax, etc. and trying to increase the proportion of revenue collected from indirect taxes. Now this is really a march towards socialism, only with one difference. In the socialist countries the range of income is very narrow. For instance, in the Soviet Union, in the days of 1936 when Stalin was there, the differential between the lowest and the highest incomes was pretty high. In all socialist countries they are trying to reduce it and in no country today the ratio of the

highest to the lowest is more than 10. Is that true of India? What is the ratio between those who are starving, those who are below the poverty-line, their income, and the income of those who own assets to the tune of 1500 crores of rupees, as do Tata and Birla. Now, in our country, the only difference with the socialist countries—perhaps the Minister will consider that to be an insignificant one—is that whereas there the income disparities are reduced, in this country they are increasing. They are increasing because what seems to be equitable in socialist countries is slightly inequitable in our country. Therefore, I deal with the term 'socialism' as an adjective to the Republic, a meaning which covers up capitalism.

Now I will draw your attention to the beauty of the Bill in another sense also. What is that? This Bill has pointed out only that the exemption limit has been increased from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1,50,000. I draw his attention to another factor which nobody has mentioned and which I think has not been mentioned in the other House also in their debates. It is not merely that the exemption limit is being increased from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1,50,000. There is an understandable fallout. What is that? The fallout is that in all the higher slab; even beyond Rs. 20 lakhs worth of assets there is a clean gift of Rs. 7,000 through this amendment compared to the original Act. If you see the Schedule, in the list of Schedule, in every case, starting from Rs. 2 lakhs to Rs. 3.5 lakhs, you are making a gift of Rs. 7,000 to all the people upwards. You are making a gift of Rs. 7,000 which is nothing to people who own assets of Rs. 20 lakhs or more; and yet you are making a gift of Rs. 7,000. Against that, perhaps you are charging him? How much? Only the other day, you had announced in the House—that you have increased the price of wheat in the public distribution system, which is Rs. 12 per quintal. Assuming a five-member household and assuming that an individual consumes not more than 100 kg. in the

course of a year, you are charging him a sum of 60 rupees as against giving him a gift of Rs. 7,000 as a bounty. Now, Sir, I am opposed to this amendment, not because prices have not risen but because we do not want to see such enactments piecemeal. In the totality of the thing we have to consider that, on the one hand, in the name of resource mobilisation you say that you have to mobilise these sixty rupees even from those who own an asset of less than Rs. 50,000. What is an asset worth Rs. 50,000? Assuming that it fetches a 12 per cent interest which our post office savings bank gives, it means Rs. 500 per month as income. Now from all those people who have an income below Rs. 500, who are not getting any benefit, you will be taking away Rs. 60, and as bounty you will give Rs. 7,000 minus Rs. 60 to all those who have assets worth Rs. 3.50 lakhs and above.

I will draw your attention to a second simple economic point. By amending this Act, what have we done? We are making a gift of Rs. 7,000 to all the higher slabs. We are not making it even progressive at this level. In trying to amend it, we are not trying to see that the bounty at the lower level will be more and the bounty at the higher level will be less. Such is the kind of regressive economics that has been introduced via this amendment.

Now, Sir, I may conclude just after indicating my opposition to this kind of amendment not because I deny the fact that prices have risen thanks to the efforts of the Government, but because I feel that taking the situation in an overall manner, this is combined with an attack on the people. You are raising the cloth prices and the prices of food and shelter, the basic human things for which human beings have been fighting for the last 10,000 years, for the last 1,00,000 years, to justify that they are animals of a different kind, that they have a superior existence compared to other animals, that they can re-make nature.

And yet today after all these years, we are continuously making it difficult for the poorer sections of the people to get their food, to get their cloth, to get their shelter.

There is another point which I want to mention and then conclude. What is that point? The question has sometimes been raised, not exactly in this House, that the rates of wealth tax and estate duty should be harmonised, that they should be of the same level. I am totally opposed to that idea. I am a Marxist, but this is not only from the Marxist point of view. Even economists and Nobel laureates—they are not Marxists—say, for example. Sir John Hicks, also argue that if there is inequity in the wealth that one possesses, if there is immorality, if there is perniciousness in the wealth that one is able to earn in the course of one's lifetime, it is doubly inequitable, doubly immoral, doubly pernicious if that wealth is inherited. That is opposed further to productivity, that is opposed further to progress in any society. When somebody inherits, one is bound to have an unequal situation. You might argue in terms of all kinds of economic theories. If you have amassed in the course of your lifetime a particular wealth, there is absolutely no justification for the inheritance of that wealth even in terms of any economic theories of the United Kingdom and the United States. Even if the wealth amassed in the course of his lifetime by a Ford is justified, what is the justification for the inheritance of that wealth by Junior Ford? Let me submit that these estate duties are there in every single capitalist country whether called socialist or not.^f They have such estate duties. And to what effect? Fords continue to live and prosper; Kennedys continue to live and prosper and inherit wealth and exploit their own working people and the people of the world at large. With these words, I conclude and indicate my total opposition to the amending Bill because the Act is not before the House. Thank you.

उपसभाध्यक्ष (श्री आर. रामकृष्णन्) : भा जी, 4 बजे एक स्टेटमेन्ट श्री शिव-पंकर जी को करना है।

श्री शिव चन्द्र भा (बिहार) : आप तो डिस्टर्ब नहीं करते लेकिन चेयर से ज़क्सर होता है। मैं जल्दी ही ख़तम कर दूंगा।

उपसभाध्यक्ष महोदय, इस तरह का विधेयक जिसमें टैक्सेशन को लेकर इस तरह की बातें रहती हैं, टैक्स लगाने के बाद कहते हैं कि इसको इतना एक्जम्पशन दिया जाएगा, इसको इतना एक्जम्पशन दिया जाएगा, तो कुछ बातें बार-बार एक ही कहनी पड़ती हैं, रिपीट करना पड़ता है। जैसा कि मंत्री जी का अपना स्टेटमेन्ट एक तरह का होता है उसी तरह से हम लोगों का भी कहना एक ही तरह का होता है।

इस विधेयक से यह साफ है कि सरकार के पास कोई टैक्सेशन की नीति नहीं है, प्रिन्सिपल्स आफ टैक्सेशन सरकार के पास नहीं है। सारा टैक्सेशन सिस्टम जो है हाथ-पांव है। इसमें इस बात की ज़रूरत है कि इसको सिम्पलीफाई किया जाए और स्थिति को मद्देनज़र रखते हुए, यदि सरकार के पास कोई प्रिन्सिपल है, कोई सिद्धान्त है टैक्सेशन का तो यह बताएं। मैं देखता हूँ कि जो भी टैक्स हो वह ज्यादा पैसों वालों, ज्यादा आमदनी वालों से लिया जाए लेकिन दावज़ूद इसके होता यह है कि जिनके पास ज्यादा पैसा है उन्हीं को ज्यादा फायदा होता है। यदि आप चाहते हैं कि समाज में आर्थिक डिस्पैरिटी न हो और आपका जो तथाकथित 20-सूत्री कार्यक्रम जिसको आप कहते हैं तो क्या यह ज़रूरी नहीं है कि यह जो डिस्पैरिटी है इस पर हम चोट करें। यह जो ग्लेयरिंग डिस्पैरिटी खेती-हार मजदूर की आमदनी और राष्ट्रपति की आमदनी ले लें, टाटा-निरला की आमदनी ले लें तो इस तरह की जो यह डिस्पैरिटी है इस पर आप क्यों चोट नहीं करते हैं तो इतना देखने करने की ज़रूरत क्या है? देखने के लिए कि यहां लेवल बदलो वहां बदलो और फिर स्पेकुलेशन होता है,

यह सब एक तरह की फाइनेंशियल जग-लरी होती है। टैक्सेशन समाज में बरा-बरी लाना चाहता है, यह होना चाहिए How much you got and how you got? कितना आपको है और कैसे आपको इतना हुआ। उपसभाध्यक्ष महोदय, यह नीति होनी चाहिए। यदि समाज में एक बराबरी की आर्थिक बनावट आप चाहते हैं तो हाउ मच यू गेट, स्पेकुलेशन या गलत तरीके से धन ज्यादा आपके पास है तो समाज का फर्ज हो जाता है कि समाज उससे ले ले। यह बात मैं नहीं कह रहा हूँ उपसभाध्यक्ष महोदय, एक बहुत बड़े कंजरवेटिव, सामाज्यवादी जो भारत को कभी आज़ाद नहीं देखना चाहते थे उसने कहा था। मैनचेस्टर की मजदूरों की सभा में 19 वीं सदी के आखिर में और 20वीं सदी के प्रारम्भ में विंस्टन चर्चिल ने कहा था। विंस्टन चर्चिल ने मैनचेस्टर में मजदूरों के सामने बोलते हुए कहा था कि The principle of taxation should be not how much you got but how you got?

एसा द्रीफ्ट क्लेग यदि हम चाहते हैं तो तकाज़ा यह हो जाता है कि जो बेल्व है, मकान में, जमीन में या दूसरे रूप में सरकार उस पर कंट्रोल कर ले और सारी स्टडी कर ले कि कितना धन, होडिंग बेल्व है और उस पर एक अनुपात के रूप में कर लगा दे, टैक्स लगा दे। मैं कहना चाहता हूँ कि इनकम का जो अनुपात होना चाहिए वह 1:10 का होना चाहिए। यदि इनकम नहीं तो एक्सपेंडीचर के अनुपात में लगा दीज़िए। मैक्सिमम और मिनिमम 1:10 के अनुपात में लगा दीज़िए और इस अनुपात को अगर आप समाज के हर क्षेत्र पर लगाने के लिए तैयार हैं तो जो एक्सट्रा धन है उस को मॉनलाइज कर लेंगे। आप बताइए, मैं 4 पी. एम.

मिनिमम ही लेता हूँ 50 हजार से बड़े लाख आप एग्जम्पशन लिमिट करने जा रहे हैं, 50 हजार की आमदनी भारत में कितने लोगों की है? जरा बताएं। जबकि 48% लोग दरिद्रता की रेखा से नीचे रहते हैं जब 48 प्रतिशत, 50% लोग दरिद्रता की रेखा से नीचे हैं इतनी हद तक जो हैं कितने लोग हैं एक

प्रतिशत डेढ़ प्रतिशत कितने लोग हैं उन लोगों को आप छूट दे रहे हैं और छूट देकर आप एक भी उदाहरण ऐसा बतावें जहाँ आपने छूट दी है और उसकी बदौलत एन्ट्रिप्रिनायरशिप की भावना उनमें आई है और उन्होंने कोई इन्वेस्टमेंट किया है, नया उद्योग खड़ा किया है। आपके अन्दर में यह बात है कि हम इनको छूट दे कर के सेविंग करंगे और इनवेस्ट करंगे और इससे डवलपमेंट होगा। देश का विकास होगा यह सेविंग के पीछे दर्शन है। लेकिन यह नहीं होगा। आपने जितनी छूट पहले दी है उसके आधार पर कोई चार उदाहरण आप बतावें जिससे कितने नए आन्दोलन निकल सकें हैं। उपसमाध्यक्ष महोदय, यह समाज की बनावट है और उस बनावट में इस छूट से यह होता है कि फजूलखर्ची बढ़ जाती है, कॉन्सपिक्यूस कंजम्प्शन होता है। दूसरे रूप में हकीकत में इससे कोई नया इनवेस्टमेंट नहीं होता है तो इकोनमी में शेक-अप करने के लिए यह छूट तो देते हैं उससे सहारा मिलता है और यदि वाई-एक्सीडेंट कहीं पर यदि विकास हुआ तो अच्छी बात है लेकिन ओवर-आल पिक्चर को यदि हम सामने रखते हैं तो उससे बड़ा फर्क नहीं होता है जिस नीयत से आप रखते हैं इसलिए मैं चाहूंगा कि यह तो एक टिकरिंग विद दी प्रोजेक्शन है। सारे टैक्सेशन सिस्टम को देश में रेशनलाइजेशन किया जाए और एक कमिटी बनाई जाए जैसे एल. के. भा. कमिटी है, चौकसी कमिटी है, दूसरी कमिटी हो उससे सारी इकोनमी की डिस्पॉजिशन को मद्देनजर रखते हुए और उसमें जो रिफॉर्म चाहिए विकास के लिए इस संदर्भ में एक कमिटी बनाई जाए और एक-दस के अनुपात में चाहे इन्कम के रूप में हो चाहे एक्स-पेंडीचर के रूप में हो, हमें एक नीति बनानी चाहिए और जो टैक्सेशन की नीति हम लागू करें वह सिम्पलीफाई हो जाएगी। यह जो आप चिपकी लगाते हैं, चिपकी लगा कर देखते हैं, हम छूट दे रहे हैं मिडलइन्कम के लोगों को यह गलतफहमी में लोगों को रखने का तरीका है। इससे विकास का

काम नहीं बढ़ेगा। आप रुपए के मूल्य को ले लेते हैं आप इसको रिट्रोस्पेक्टिव इफेक्ट 1981 से दे रहे हैं। 1981 में रुपए का जो मूल्य था उसमें हकीकत में कितनी आप छूट दे रहे हैं वह भी बात कही जाती है लेकिन यदि हम मान लेते हैं कि रुपए का मूल्य नहीं घटा है, 1981 की वैल्यू पर है तो भी मैं समझता हूँ कि इससे लिमिटेड लोगों को यह राहत आप दे रहे हैं यह लिमिटेड लोग इनवेस्टमेंट के रास्ते पर नहीं जाएंगे स्पेंडिंग और कॉन्सपिक्यूस कंजम्प्शन के रास्ते पर जाएंगे और ब्लैक मनी में मदद करंगे। इसलिए इसको बूमरंग कहेंगे। जो इनकी नीयत है इसका उल्टा असर होगा। इन शब्दों के साथ मैं इसका सख्त विरोध करता हूँ और यह कहना चाहता हूँ कि सरकार के टैक्सेशन सिस्टम को रेशनलाइज करने के लिए एक कमिटी बनाई जाए जैसे कि एल. के. भा. कमिटी है उसी आधार पर टैक्सेशन नीति को कैसे हम सिम्पलीफाई करें ताकि समाज में बराबरी हो और साथ-साथ हम को धन मिले योजना को आगे बढ़ाने के लिए। विकास के लिए स्माल सेविंग की बात आती है स्माल सेविंग का बहुत महत्व है। ग्राम कोष की बात दान वाले लोग कहते हैं। क्या हर पंचायत में आप एक योजना कोष नहीं बना सकते हैं? देश में भिक्षा देने में कितना पैसा खर्च किया जाता है क्या आपके कोई इस्टीमेट है। एक इस्टीमेट के अनुसार मोटे तौर पर पांच करोड़ रुपये एक साल में भिक्षा के रूप में दिए जाते हैं। यह भी स्माल सेविंग है। क्या गांवों में आप प्लान कोष बनाएंगे, जो अपना स्वतः दान दे उससे ताकि योजना के लिए भी आपके कोष में पैसा होगा और इससे बड़ा मोबिलाइजेशन भी होगा और इस तरह से प्लान कोष जो पंचायत लेवल पर बनाएंगे तथा स्माल सेविंग मोबिलाइजेशन दोनों से आपको धन मिलेगा और साथ ही साथ इससे विकास की गाड़ी आप उस मंजिल की ओर ले जाएंगे जहाँ बराबरी होगी। जो थोड़ी बहुत आपके सो काल्ड वीस सूत्री कार्यक्रम में है जो कहते हैं तो कहते हैं। तो वह एक जाल है वरना, यह सब

[श्री शिव चन्द्र भा]

जो है एक छोटी प्रॉब्लम है। इन्हीं शब्दों के साथ मैं इसका विरोध करते हुए कहता हूँ कि इस पर आप ठीक तरह से विचार करके एक कम्प्रीहेंसिव बिल लाएं।

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Blow-out in the Bombay High offshore field

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI R. RAMAKRISHNAN): Now, there will be a statement by the Minister of Petroleum, Chemicals and Fertilizers Yes, Mr. Shiv Shankar.

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM, CHEMICALS' AND FERTILIZERS (SHRI P. SHIV SHANKAR): Sir, I have to inform the House with a deep sense of anguish that a blow-out occurred at 9.30 P.M. on July 30 on Platform SJ located in the southern part of the Bombay High offshore field in position 19 degree 26/N 71 degree 18/E, about 100 mile= from the shore. There is an uncontrolled flow, of gas with traces of oil.

The jack-up rig 'Sagar Vikas' was drilling a well on this platform into a new formation where the available geological and reservoir data indicated the presence of hydrocarbons. The blow-out occurred when drilling at a depth of about 1660 metres. Seventy-four ONGC personnel who were on board the rig were evacuated in this dangerous situation, by helicopters without mishap. Despite the serious danger, an ONGC officer was able to climb on to the rig on August 1, 1982 and switch off the generators to prevent further mishaps. Unfortunately the well caught fire early this morning at 06.17 hours.

The ONGC has mobilised all possible resources to control this situation. A multi-support vessel with sophisticated fire-fighting chemicals and equipment, spares and materials together with five offshore supply boats, are at the site of the blow-out. A jet of

water is being sprayed over the well to check the spread of the fire in the well. Naval ships, planes and helicopters have also been mobilised to provide assistance. Two naval ships are in position near the site and naval aircraft immediately carried out reconnaissance. Coast Guard personnel are also on board to control and monitor any pollution that might arise. Other pollution control devices have also been mobilised in case such a danger arises.

The leading world experts in the control of blow-outs have been called in to assist the experts of the ONGC who have been working all hours of day and night at the site in a difficult and dangerous situation. Experts of the consultants already available in India are also at the offshore site.

Blow-outs are not uncommon in oil exploration. In the Bombay High offshore area itself, a blow-out occurred some years ago and it was possible to control it soon. Similar blowouts have occurred in Narsapur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam and of course elsewhere in the world. The cause of this blow-out will be investigated thoroughly just as soon as conditions permit.

I will not minimise the dangers in this situation but can assure the House that whatever can be done to control this blow-out in the shortest possible time is being done. I am sure the House will join me in extending to the ONGC our full support in their efforts to control the blow-out successfully.

SHRI MANUBHAI PATEL (Gujarat): Sir, it is a matter of great concern. So, if the Minister has got any information as to whether there is any loss of life, he should furnish it to the House.

SHRI MURLIDHAR CHANDRAKANT BHANDARE (Maharashtra): No loss of life.

SHRI MANUBHAI PATEL: Why should you say that when I am asking the Minister.