

the People Act 1950, a copy (in English and Hindi) of the Election Commission of India Notification S. O. No. 210 (E) dated the 7th April, 1979 [Placed in Library See No. LT-4519/79]

**PRESENTATION OF PETITION
SIGNED BY THE GENERAL SECRETARY,
ALL [INDIA STATE (BANK
OFFICERS' FEDERATION, MADRAS
AND OTHERS**

SHRIMATI MARGARET ALVA (Karnataka): Sir, I beg to present a petition signed by the General Secretary, All India State Bank Officers' Federation, Madras and 1210 other employees of the State Bank of India working in the State of Karnataka praying for the establishment of a Local Head Office of the State Bank of India at Bangalore.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Collision between 3 Up Howrah-Madras Mail and K 121 Local Train at Chengail Station of South Eastern Railway on the 18th May, 1979.

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE): Sir, with deep regret, I have to apprise the House of an accident that took place on 18-5-1979. At about 20.53 hours on that day, while 3 Up Howrah-Madras Mail was waiting outside the Home signal of Chengail station on Howrah-Kharagpur section on Kharagpur Division of South Eastern Railway, K 121 Up Howrah-Kharagpur EMU local train dashed into its rear. Consequently, 2 coaches of 3 Up Mail and 1 coach of the local train derailed. As a result of the accident, 13 persons died including the Motorman of the EMU local train, and another 38 were injured.

The accident site is situated on the triple line electrified section provided with track circuiting throughout and cdfloor light automatic signalling. In accordance with extant safety instruc-

tionst tooth the rearmost coaches of 3 Up Mail were steel bodied anti-teles-copic. It has also been reported that the side lights and tail lamp of 3 Up Mail, which are electrically operated, were lit at the time of accident.

Immediately on receipt of information, medical vans were rushed from Santragachi and Kharagpur. The General Manager, Chief Medical Officer and other senior officers of the railway proceeded to the site by road to supervise relief and rescue operations. Civil and Police authorities also attended the site of accident. The injured persons were removed expeditiously by medical vans as well as road ambulances to the Uluberia Government Hospital, Uluberia E.S.I Hospital, Ludlow Jute Mill Hospital, Garden Reach Railway Hospital, Kharagpur Railway Hospital and Howrah General Hospital.

Ex-gratia relief to the next of kin of the dead and to the injured was arranged. This will be in addition to a compensation upto a maximum limit of Rs. 50,000, per head payable under the extant rules.

Member Traffic, Railway Board, who was at Bombay flew to Calcutta on 19th Morning. My colleague, Minister of State for Railways also rushed to Calcutta by air on the morning of 19th May to ensure that all possible relief and medical attention is given. He went to the site of accident and visited the injured persons in various hospitals.

The Additional Commissioner of Railway Safety, who had also visited the site immediately after the accident, is holding the statutory inquiry into this accident today.

I am sure the House will join me in conveying our heartfelt sympathies to the members of the bereaved families.

PROF. SOURENDRA BHATTACHARJEE (West Bengal): Mr. Chairman, Sir, this is a very serious accident, as has already been stated

[Prof. Sourendra Bhattacharjee]
by the Railway Minister. But the figure of death, as quoted by him, is only 13, so far as I could follow. But in yesterday's news papers, I saw the figure, given out by the Government, to be 19. I do not know how in a statement today, the figure has been mentioned as just 13. This is one thing. The version of the people who were in the train, in the Howrah Railway Station and elsewhere, is that the figure of casualties must be much higher. The relief operations are continuing. I left Howrah day before yesterday night. I was there till 19th night. The accident took place at about 8.15 p.m. on the 18th. This is one aspect wherein the casualty figure has to be fully collected. I am very thankful to Mr Sheo Narain, the Minister of State of Railways, who rushed to the spot. In a statement, he has ruled out sabotage. Sabotage may be ruled out. But the fact remains that the two trains were on

the same line and this sort of thing is happening too often, I should say, wrong pointing and so on. I myself, along with Mr. Mohanty, Mr. Chakraborty and Mr. Mahapatro, have been involved in an accident near Burdwan Railway station. There also this trouble of pointing was there. The other day the Raj-dhani Express averted a serious accident, just a month back, and there also the train went on the same line as the other train. The report revealed that a very inexperienced person was placed in the cabin in charge of signalling and the point-man who was there was also not duly experienced. If our railway service is run on such a basis, it is becoming more and more dangerous. I do not know, there is only one precedent of Shri Lai Bahadur Shastri resigning on the question of a serious railway accident. I am not demanding the resignation of the Railway Minister, but if these things happened too often and the Government is unable to take effective measures to prevent the recurrence of

these accidents, we do not know where it will lead us to and whether it will be considered safe to travel by rail.

SHRI SURINDRA MOHANTY (Orissa): Sir, I crave your indulgence to speak for a few moments. I am actuated by the desire to ensure the safety of thousands of railway passengers. Sir, of late, railway accidents have become almost a weekly phenomenon. Even in the last week, in the Jammu-Kashmir sector, an accident occurred due to derailment, where six passengers were killed. Sir, we are not interested in what the Minister has stated on the floor of the House. These facts have already come out in the daily papers. We are not interested in knowing how many officers flew from where to where and how many Ministers reached the point of accident. We are really interested to know why these accidents are occurring so frequently. There is something wrong. Something is wrong somewhere. Otherwise, these accidents would not have occurred so frequently. The Minister should take the House into confidence. The common point that is being battered out is sabotage. Sir, the derailment of which my hon. friend made a mention just now, near Shaktigarh. Burdwan section; I have seen with my own eyes there the nut bolts were not fixed tightly. They were loose. The gangman did not fix the nut bolts. Yet, it is being said that it is an act of sabotage. Sir, the accident that occurred near Kharagpur cannot be an act of sabotage. It is a question of faulty management, it is a question of human failure. I would, therefore, urge upon the hon. Minister to mention what specific measures he is going to take and also whether he can give an assurance to the travelling public that their journey by rail will be conducted with safety in future.

SHRI JAHARLAL BANERJEE (West Bengal): Sir, one of the reasons given in the paper for the ac-

cident that occurred recently, was that there was a bad turning and some of the railway people had demanded for a signal there. This demand has been there for a long time, but no signal has been put. If there was any signal at that point, as it was a bad turning, there would not have been any accident. Then, Sir, the other point that was made in the newspapers was that at 12.00 at night, after a long time, the railway officers had an opportunity to go there to see things for themselves. Thanks to the jute mill authorities, they came with light and other things. The neighbouring villagers came with everything possible for help. So, as the accidents are taking place very frequently, I would like to know whether the hon. Minister will take the help of the hon. Members in the Opposition, at least the Opposition leaders to find out the cause of every accident which has taken place during his time and what steps he has taken. It will certainly give us some hope that he will try his utmost so that accidents are averted.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE (West Bengal): I would not agree with Mr. Bhattacharjee to demand the resignation of the Railway Minister because in that case the Prime Minister will really find it difficult to have somebody in the Cabinet incharge of Railway Ministry because every day some accidents are taking place and every day he will have to go on changing his Railway Minister. So the point is not that.

I would like to know from the hon. Railway Minister whether it is a fact that for quite some time past his attention has been drawn—at least the Department's attention has been drawn—to the extremely precarious conditions in both the Eastern and South-Eastern Sections of the railways concerning Calcutta and Howrah.

Secondly, I would like to know from him whether it is a fact that almost all the daily newspapers

published from Calcutta quoted the official sources. They have not given their staff reporters' or special representatives' views about the number of casualties. How is that there is a difference between what appeared yesterday and what the Minister is giving today? It is expected that he will have upto date information and he will be posted with the latest information when he is making a statement on the floor of the House. I do not know how he is going to reconcile these discrepancies and whether he will stick to his own figure, or whether he will give any credibility to the figure published in the local newspapers.

Thirdly, I would like to know whether it is a fact that because of a sharp bend in that particular section of the track, many a time it has been suggested to the railway authorities to devise certain measures. In fact, the people call it an accident-prone zone, like the drought-prone area or the flood-prone area. That section of the South-Eastern Railway between Santragachi and Changail is an accident-prone zone. Therefore, knowing the peculiar situation of the track and the area, what measures the Government has contemplated to avert such accidents. This is not a single accident taking place.

Lastly, I would like to know whether it is a fact that the track is over-loaded. Particularly at that hour, all the local and suburban trains rush is here and many of the main trains arrive or leave. Mostly such trains leave. Therefore, the track is heavily loaded. All these facts are known to the Ministry and to the authorities. In spite of that, what they are going to do about it. The staff is over-worked; the mechanical operations are failing because of defects and poor maintenance. In view of all these facts, I would like to know what the Government is going to do to avoid this type of crisis. There may be human failure. But

[Shri Pranab Mukherjee]

ultimately human lives are lost, property is lost and no amount of compensation—it may be Rs. 1000 or Rs. 50,000—is going to recoup the loss suffered by the inmates and near relations of the families who have died or have become permanently disabled.

SHRI AMARPROSAD CHAKRABORTY (West Bengal): Sir, in that area our organisation is working. I received a trunk call from them. The numbers of wounded and dead are varying. The last reports we have received is that the figure of those killed is 29 and not 13. I think the Minister is not informed properly by the railway authorities. The number of wounded is more than 90. This is the latest trunk message we have received from the local people and our organisation. This is very very undesirable on the part of the Department to give wrong information.

Secondly, as my learned friend has pointed out, it was demanded by the people that signal must be there. There always some accidents are taking place—minor or major.

Thirdly, I would request the hon. Railway Minister to kindly see that the over-congestion on the railway line in that section is removed. This has been represented by the local people several times. I went myself as a member of the Cabinet when people gheraoed Changail station. I remember at that time the Railway authorities there made a compromise offer to make a separate line. Changail station has been removed from the original place. There is a dangerous curve there. Sir, it is hardly 11 kilometres away. Railway authorities have said that they had been there at about midnight. Eight-thirty p.m. is said to be the time of the railway accident and they arrived there at 12.00. This is our experience also at Saktigarh when we had been in the train then. Myself, Mr. Bhattacharjee, Mr. Mahanti and Mr. Mahapatro were there and

with difficulty we brought the local railway people there after two hours. Here, after about four hours they went there. I raised this point at the Consultative Committee meeting also. The Railway Minister assured us but in spite of the assurances, this is happening everywhere.

SHRI HAREKRUSHNA MALLICK (Orissa): Sir, I only remind the hon. Minister of Railways about the suggestion I made during the discussion on the Railway Budget to monitor against accidents. I feel that from this accident we should view things seriously and start regular monitoring. There should be a headlight to the train and also there should be a red light at the rear so that any train coming in front or from behind will see the light and stop. That is number one. Number two is, I feel that around cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and Madras, the local trains are causing a heavy load. Therefore, some track should be left open for local trains only and other tracks left for other trains.

Another point is, to a problem city like Calcutta, people are coming. All the people coming from the south need not go to Calcutta. There may be load shedding at Kharagpur and the trains may be diverted from the trunk route so that they need not go to Calcutta where they may have to spend time and money.

In this context I would like to remind you of the terrible accident which took place in Orissa near Jaipur Road where a running train collided with a standing train when hundreds of people died. I think the Railway Minister may not be blamed personally for that but he should! preserve efficiency. At every stage people should be trained. I am sure, the gangmen who deal with these points, etc. are illiterate. Therefore, I should say, they should take advantage of adult education in hfc

department. He should see that no illiterate person remains there and all are trained properly. Thank you, Sir.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE: Sir, hon. Members have made some specific inquiries. I would like to give a pointed answer to the various questions raised. Honourable Prof. Bhattacharjee has inquired whether the figure that had appeared as 19—which had earlier also appeared as 16—is correct or the figure that has been given is correct. Sir, this House may recall that a number of papers, on the next day of the accident, indicated that the figure was 16 but they themselves corrected the figure next day because, actually what happens is sometimes when an accident takes place—due to collision of two trains, some passengers get trapped in the debris and till the bodies are extricated some of them are dead and some of them are alive. Sometimes it is presumed that they are dead. That is why most of the papers indicated that the number of persons dead was 16. Only one paper mentioned 19. Now they themselves corrected it as 13 because we had kept all the bodies for inspection/identification, out of 13 bodies, ten have been identified. Out of such of the bodies as have not been identified seven have been preserved. The photographs are actually published and we are trying to see whether those three bodies also can be identified. As far as injured persons are concerned some passengers were given some first aid on the spot and immediately after that they went away. Thirty-eight people were put in the hospital and out of those thirty-eight persons, one person has been actually discharged. As far as these 38 persons are concerned, there are some who have got grievous injuries and their number is 27. The number of those who have got simple injuries is 11. That is the position as far as the number is concerned. Many hon. Members wanted to know if there

was any defect in the signal system? I wish to inform the House that from Kharag-pur up to Howrah there is a track circuiting system. Under this system, if any vehicle or any train is stationary and some other train is coming towards that train, the signal immediately behind that train is red, and the signal beyond that is yellow. When the incoming driver sees the yellow signal, he is supposed to go slow, and afterwards when he goes to the red signal, he is supposed to halt there. We have made such a system that if the system fails, rather than the green colour being displayed, the red colour should always be there, so that even if the signal fails, it fails on the safe side displaying red signal. So, red colour was already there. After seeing the red light, the driver is supposed to go very slow. For instance, in the beginning he is supposed to stop for two minutes, and if due to failure it is red, he should gradually move. It seems, if neglecting that a driver were to move at a fast speed after crossing a red signal he may dash against a train ahead that is how a collision can take place. Sir, the Additional Commissioner for Railway safety is already inquiring into the matter, and therefore, I do not apportion blame on 'X' or 'Y'. But this is the general position.

Mr. Mahanti asked; How is it that so many accidents are taking place? Sir, as far as the railway parlance is concerned, even a short circuit in a compartment is described as a railway accident. It is not correct that recently accidents have increased in number. I may inform the House that the last major accident in which a large number of casualties took place was at Vasai Road and that was in April, 1978. After that accident involving such a large casualty—I am not referring to bus accidents but train accidents, collision, derailment and all that—for the first time after such a long time it has

[Prof. Madhu Dandavate]

taken place. Even that has to be avoided. I can assure the hon. Member and through you to the entire House that we have taken a number of concrete steps. I have already informed this House some time ago that in Howrah-Burdwan section and Gaya-Mugalsarai section we have already fitted automatic warning system that is fixed on the locomotives, and on the track also it is fixed up. Each costs Rs. 80,000 as far as the instrument on the locomotive is concerned and Rs. 10,000 at a station where a track-magnet is fixed. As far as suburban track is concerned, in Bombay, and soon after that in Calcutta also, we are trying to fix up automatic warning system. Besides that, I may inform the House that route relay interlocking system is at 85 stations, penal interlocking at 266 stations, colour light signalling at 966 stations, track-circuiting of run through lines at 1717 way-side stations and interlock at 5083 stations. So, we are trying our best to see that safety is improved, and we are confident that we will be able to improve it.

As far as Mr. Banerjee is concerned, he said that the Opposition leaders' meeting should be held to find out how the accidents can be reduced to the rock-bottom level. You probably know that we have already set up a Special Accident Enquiry Committee after the Kunzru Committee and Wanchoo Committee which is headed by Justice Sikri, and there are other members who happen to be experts. There are also members drawn from the general public, trade union movement experts, engineers and officers of the railways, and I am sure that soon we will be able to get an interim report and implement it to the best of our ability.

There are also complaints made by some Members that at some curvatures there is some difficulty and that they are not able to see the signal.

As far as the entire route from PTow-rah to Kharagpur is concerned, there is track-circuiting and automatic signalling arrangement upto Home station is there. The hon. Member is correct that in 1973, i.e., six years prior to this accident, one accident had taken place at this very spot, and some members of the staff had suggested that it was because there was a curvature.

SHRI AMARPROSAD CHAKRABORTY: That is what I said,

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE: I am referring to you as well as others. There is a curvature of 2 degrees. The suggestion is that either some halt should be introduced at that particular site or some other alternative arrangement should be made. We are exploring that possibility. If that is done, that difficulty can also be eliminated. Then, Sir, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee said about the repeated occurrence of some of the accidents in the sensitive areas of the Eastern and the South-Eastern Railways. He also referred to the curvature. I have replied to that point. And he said that there are incorrect figures. Sir, in all the accidents that have taken place in the course of the last so many years, you will find that sometimes during discussion people raise controversies about the number of persons dead. But we have our precise machinery to identify the dead and the injured. After all, compensation is to be paid. As you know, according to the rules, in case of accident, the nearest kin is to be paid a maximum amount of Rs. 50,000 in the case of death. Therefore, the claimants come forward to claim the dead bodies, and also those who are injured. Up till now, after the accident has taken place and we have announced the figures of compensation, after months have passed, no relation has come forward with the complaint that he suspected that his relative had died but he had not been paid the

compensation. That itself is an indication that we do not want to hide the facts at all. In the end, an hon. Member has suggested that local congestion on the trains is there. Mr. Malik made that point. It is true that congestion on the lines has been increasing tremendously. Sir, the House will be surprised to know that every day one crore of passengers travel by the Indian Railways and we are carrying 6 lakhs tonnes of freight. Therefore, we are trying to see that the number of tracks is increased, but financial constraints come in the way. We are also trying to see that alternative routes are provided. As far as the suburban areas are concerned, there is a constructive proposal that it is better that rather than having the present conventional terminus, we shift the terminus. The terminus for the local trains should be one and the terminus for the through trains should be an altogether different one. That is one of the things that the Accidents Committee under the chairmanship of Mr. Sikri is investigating. I can assure the House that all constructive proposals and suggestions made by them will be taken into account. (Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN; No further discussion.' Calling Attention.

CALLING ATTENTION TO A MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Reported non-purchase of wheat by the Food Corporation of India at the price declared by Government, result- ing: in fall in its price and distress sale by farmers

SHRI KALP NATH RAI (Uttar Pradesh): Sir, I beg to call the attention of the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation to the reported non-purchase of wheat by the Food Corporation of India at the price declared by the Government, resulting in fall in its price and distress sale by farmers and the steps taken by the

Government to guarantee a fair price to the farmers.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATION (SHRI BHANU PRATAP SINGH): Sir, the State Governments are primarily responsible for organising price support operations within their jurisdiction. The Food Corporation of India operate as one of the procurement agencies to the extent of the role assigned to them by the States. The Government of India have repeatedly impressed upon the State Governments the necessity of ensuring co-ordinated and integrated working of the State agencies like the State Civil Supplies Corporations and Co-operative Institutions on the one hand and the FCI on the other in the matter of organising the price support operations. On the 20th and 24th March, before the commencement of the rabi marketing season. I have personally reviewed the purchase arrangements made in some of the wheat producing States and discussed with the State Food Ministers and officials about the number of purchase centres opened, cash credit limit arranged, gunny supplies, transport problems, storage, accommodation available and such other matters.

According to the latest information supplied by the State Governments, purchase centres have been opened in the various States as follows:

Punjab	776
Haryana	163
Uttar Pradesh	2769
Rajasthan	204
Madhya Pradesh	292
Bihar	538

From the trend observed so far, the market arrivals have been heavier this year than the last year. According to the latest information available, a total quantity of 39.42 lakh tonnes of wheat has been purchased under the price support operations by the