

The House reassembled after lunch at two minutes past two of the clock.

[The Vice-Chairman (Shri U. K. Lakshmana Gowda) in the Chair.]

CALLING ATTENTION TO A MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Reported Accident in a Stone Mine at Suket Village in Rajasthan

SHRI SHRIKANT VERMA (Madhya Pradesh): Sir, I beg to call the attention of the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Labour to the reported accident in a stone mine at Suket village in Rajasthan resulting in the death of a large number of mine workers and injury to several others.

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND LABOUR (SHRI RAVINDRA VARMA): Sir, on 22nd April, 1978 at about 1800 hrs. an accident occurred in the Kukra Lime Stone Mine belonging to M/s. West Suket Co-operative Labour Contract Society Ltd., Suket, near Ramgunj Mandi in the Kota District of Rajasthan. While a group of about 40 workers were employed at the bottom of the over hanging side of the top bench which was 7.5 m. high consisting of loose debris and alluvial soil of the open cast working, a side measuring about 7.5 m. 7.2 m. 1 m., fell down burying 15 workers. I regret to say that seven workers died on the spot. Two workers are being treated as out patients in the Jhalawar Government Hospital. The remaining six are seriously injured, and are under treatment in the same Hospital as in-patients. It is reported that all of them are out of danger.

The accident is under investigation. According to the preliminary report received from the Directorate General of Mines Safety who inspected the site of the accident, the cause of the accident is due to fall of side, and the responsibility has been fixed on the management of the mine. Necessary legal action is being taken against the persons held responsible.

The Director General, Mines Safety has ordered the stoppage of further work in the mine except in regard to making the mine safe by benching from top downwards.

The State Government of Rajasthan has made ex-gratia payments from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund of Rs. 1000/- each to the families of the deceased and amounts varying from Rs. 100/- to Rs. 500/- to the less seriously injured workers depending on the condition of each worker.

Government view the occurrence of this accident and the fatalities of the unfortunate victims as a matter of serious concern. The Government will take every measure to see that the persons who are responsible for the accident are brought to book and are given appropriate deterrent punishment. The Mines Safety Review Committee is shortly to meet to consider the steps to be taken for improving the conditions of safety in non-coal mines. Safety of workers in mines is of paramount concern to Government and we will take every step necessary to see that this is ensured. Our aim is not only to reduce accidents, but to achieve Zero Accident Potential in all mines.

श्री श्रीकान्त वर्मा : उपमहाधक्ष महोदय, सबसे पहले मैं, मंत्री महोदय ने 12 वजे इस मवाल पर वक्तव्य न देकर अब वक्तव्य दिया है इस दरी का विरोध करता हूं। यह सदन का निरादर है, आपका निरादर है और इसके अलावा उन सब का निरादर है जो इस दुष्घटना में मरे हैं।

श्री मनुभाई मोती लाल पटेल (गुजरात): यह तो सदन की इजाजत से हुआ है।

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI U. K. LAKSHMANA GOWDA): Mr. Verma, that has already been discussed. You can go ahead with your question.

SHRI MANUBHAI MOTILAL PATEL: A request was made that it should be taken up in the evening, after 5.00 P.M. But then it was decided to take up the Calling Attention after Lunch Hour.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI U. K. LAKSHMANA GOWDA): That has been disposed of already. Mr. Verma, I request you to go ahead and save the time of the House.

SHRI SHRIKANT VERMA: The Minister should have apologised for the delay. If he was not respectful to us, he should be respectful to the deceased. It is an insult added to injury to those people who have died in the accident.

SHRI MANUBHAI MOTILAL PATEL: On the contrary you are not respecting the House by making this demand.

श्री श्रीकांत वर्मा You are insulting me. **उत्तासभाध्यक्ष महोदय,** इस खदान की दुर्घटना कोई पहली बार नहीं हुई पिछले तीन सालों के अन्दर लगभग 500 लोग खदान में हुई दुर्घटनाओं में मर चुके हैं और यह रोजमर्रा की चीज हो गई है। लेकिन दुर्भाग्य की बात यह है कि इस दुर्घटना पर जो गहरी चिन्ता इस सरकार को व्यक्त करनी चाहिये थी वह अभी तक नहीं कर रही है। इसकी वजह यह है कि हमारी अफसर-शाही का दृष्टिकोण बिल्कुल ही इंसानियत के विरोध में है।

19वीं शताब्दी में ब्रिटेन में खदान के मजदूरों की जो हालत थी आज 20वीं शताब्दी में हिन्दुस्तान में खदान के मजदूरों की वही हालत है। क्योंकि यह चीज हमें अंग्रेजों से उत्तराधिकार में मिली है उन्होंने जिन हानन में उन्हें खुदवाया था उन्हीं हालत में वे आज भी हैं। सबसे बड़ी चीज यह है कि मजदूरों के प्रति हमारा दृष्टिकोण क्या है? अगर एक विमान दुर्घटना होती है और जो लोग मरते हैं उनके लिये एक लाख रुपये मुआ-

वजा का प्रावधान है लेकिन अभी मंत्री महोदय ने कहा कि मुख्य मंत्री की ओर से खदान दुर्घटना में मरने वालों को एक-एक हजार रुपये दिये गये। बड़े दुख की बात यह है कि एक मजदूर की जिन्दगी की कीमत केवल एक हजार रुपये है। यह वैसे तो पैसों से आंकी नहीं जा सकती लेकिन अगर आंकी भी जाए तो विमान दुर्घटनाओं में मरने वाले और खदान में हुई दुर्घटनाओं में मरने वालों में यह फर्क क्यों किया गया? इसलिये सबसे पहले मैं मंत्री महोदय से यह कहूंगा कि इस सवाल पर विचार करें और जो मुआवजे को रकम है उन्हें बढ़ाएं।

दूसरी बात यह है कि यह दुर्घटना इसलिये हुई क्योंकि जो सहारा देने वाले खम्भे थे वे कमजोर थे पिछले दिनों माइन्स सेंफ्टी रिव्यू कमेटी ने एक सुझाव दिया कि दीवारें जो है सहारा देने के लिये उनको इस्पात की बनाई जाए और वुडन स्ट्रक्चर को हटाया जाए। मेरा कहना है कि यह बात दूसरे खदानों में भी लागू होनी चाहिये क्योंकि वहां भी उतना ही खतरा है क्योंकि वहां पर उतनी ही दुर्घटनाएं हो रही हैं जितनी की कोयला खदानों में हो रही हैं।

तीसरी चीज मैं यह कहना चाहता हूं कि जो खदान में दुर्घटना हुई और उसमें जो लोग मर गये उसका एक कारण यह रहा है कि जहरीली गैस इन खदानों में प्रवेश करती है और दूसरा यह कि वहां वेंटीलेशन का प्रावधान नहीं है। यह जो दुर्घटना हुई इसके बारे में पहले से वहां के लोग चेतावनी दे रहे थे। और यह कहा जा रहा था कि यहां पर दुर्घटना हो सकती है क्योंकि यह खदान पुरानी हो चुकी है तथा कमजोर हो चुकी है इसका साथ-साथ यह भी कहा जा रहा था कि इसका स्ट्रक्चर टूट सकता है। लेकिन अफसरशाही ने इस तरफ कोई ध्यान नहीं दिया। हमारे देश में अफसरों और ठेकेदारों के बीच में बहुत वर्षों से एक मिली-

[श्री श्रीकान्त वर्मा]

भगत चल रही है और इन मिली-भगत में मुझे यह भी कहते हुए अस्सोस होता है और यह बात सही है कि मंत्रालय भी शामिल है, मंत्रालय के लोग भी शामिल हैं। मैं उनका नाम नहीं लेना चाहता हूँ वे बहुत बड़े लोग हैं जो अफसरों और ठेकेदारों को प्रश्रय दे जा रहे हैं और उनका बचाव कर रहे हैं। पिछले एक साल में जो दुर्घटनाएँ हुई हैं और जहाँ पर इस तरह की घटनाएँ हुई हैं उनके संबंध में सरकार ने कोई कार्यवाही नहीं की है। चाननाला की दुर्घटना हमारे सामने है। उस पर क्या हुआ? . . . (Interruption) : हाँ सही है कि हमारी गवर्नमेन्ट के समय में यह दुर्घटना हुई। लेकिन उस पर आपकी सरकार ने जिस तरह से लीपापोती की है वह अब इतनी बड़ी दुर्घटना हो सकती है कि आपकी सरकार ही चली जाएगी। इसलिए मंत्री महोदय से यह कहना चाहता हूँ कि जब उधर के समाचार-पत्रों में यह बात छपी . . .

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI U. K. LAKSHMANA GOWDA): Why don't you put your questions? It will make it easier . . .

SHRI SHRIKANT VERMA: The Minister has given no information. I am giving the information. He should be grateful that I am giving information which he has not given. वहाँ के तमाम समाचार-पत्रों में यह बात छपी रही थी कि इस प्रकार की दुर्घटना हो सकती है। ऐसी स्थिति में अफसरों ने और सरकार ने इस पर क्यों ध्यान नहीं दिया? दूसरी बात यह है कि अगर इस बात का जरा भी सरकार को अंदेश था कि आज से दो या तीन साल पहले से ही यह खदान इस योग्य नहीं है कि इस खदान में मजदूर काम कर सकें तो इन खदान को छोड़ने या उसकी मरम्मत करने के लिए कोई कार्यवाही क्यों नहीं की गई?

दूसरी बात मैं यह कहना चाहता हूँ और यह चेतावनी भी देना चाहता हूँ ना कि यह बात रिकार्ड पर रहे कि समाचार-पत्रों में इस आशय के समाचार छप रहे हैं कि आसनसोल और रानीगंज की कोयला खदानों में चासनाला जैसी दुर्घटना हो सकती है। मुझे आशा है कि इन दुर्घटनाओं को होने से रोका जाएगा और इनको रोकने के लिए कोई समुचित कार्यवाही की जाएगी। अगर ऐसा नहीं किया गया तो उस रोज मंत्री महोदय अपना बचाव करने की स्थिति में नहीं होंगे। आज हमारे देश में स्थिति यह है कि रोज ही समाचार-पत्रों में इस आशय के समाचार छप रहे हैं कि खदानों की हालत बुरी है और खदान इस योग्य नहीं रह गये हैं कि उनमें अब और अधिक खुदाई हो सके और ये खदानें इस लायक नहीं हैं कि उनमें कोई मजदूर खुदाई कर सके। ऐसी स्थिति में मैं जानना चाहता हूँ कि सरकार इस बारे में कोई कार्यवाही क्यों नहीं कर रही है? चौथी बात मैं मजदूरों के बारे में कहना चाहता हूँ। यह बहुत जरूरी बात है क्योंकि इसमें मजदूरों की जानें गई हैं। मजदूर लोग जिन्दा रहते हुए भी मृतवत हैं, मृतक के बराबर हैं। मैंने माइन्स सेफ्टी रिव्यू कमेटी की रिकमेन्डेशन पढ़ी थी। उसमें यह कहा गया है कि खदानों में काम करने वाले मजदूरों को निमोनोइसेज जैसी भयंकर बीमारी हो जाती है, इसलिए इसके इलाज का प्रबन्ध किया जाना चाहिये। लेकिन अभी तक इसका प्रबन्ध नहीं किया गया है। इसके अलावा यह भी कहा गया है कि मजदूरों को एनोक्सिया और प्लूरेसी जैसी बीमारियाँ भी हो जाती हैं। इनके इलाज के लिए भी कोई प्रबन्ध नहीं किया गया है। मैं जानना चाहता हूँ कि खदान मजदूरों के स्वास्थ्य की समस्या पर जांच करने के लिए क्या कोई प्रबन्ध किया गया है और जो लोग निमोनोइसेज से पीड़ित हो जाते हैं उनके इलाज के लिए भी क्या कोई व्यवस्था की जाएगी? आप जानते

हैं कि खानों के अन्दर मजदूरों को जमीन के नीचे काम करना पड़ता है। ऐसी स्थिति में उनके इलाज के लिए आपने क्या प्रबन्ध कर रखा है ? क्या उनको इसी प्रकार से रोज-रोज मरने के लिए छोड़ दिया जाएगा ?

SHRI RAVINDRA VARMA: How many questions?

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI U. K. LAKSHMANA GOWDA): Let him answer, Mr. Verma.

SHRI SHRIKANT VERMA: I will ask questions. Let me give the background. It is my right.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI U. K. LAKSHMANA GOWDA): You proceed. Already you have taken so much time.

SHRI SHRIKANT VERMA: Mr. Kalyan Roy is here. There are others who are experts on this subject. They will enlighten the Minister.

SHRI KALYAN ROY (West Bengal): We are not experts at all.

SHRI SHRIKANT VERMA: I am asking the questions. You do not give me time.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI U. K. LAKSHMANA GOWDA): You have already been given sufficient time. You proceed.

श्री श्रीकांत वर्मा : उपसभाध्यक्ष महोदय, सबसे पहले तो मैं मंत्री महोदय से यह मांग करता हूँ कि मजदूरों की कार्य-दशा में सुधार के लिये तुरन्त कार्यवाही की जाय और कनाइन सैफ्टी रिव्यू कमेटी से कहा जाय कि जहाँ-जहाँ भी मजदूरों की दशा इस लायक नहीं है कि वह ठीक-ठीक कार्य कर सकें, तो वह उनकी दशा की जांच करके तुरन्त उस पर कार्यवाही करे।

दूसरी बात, जहाँ भी दुर्घटना होती है, वहाँ तत्काल जांच कमेटी बिठाई जानी चाहिए।

प्रदेश सरकारों पर छोड़ देना काफी नहीं है। यह कह देना कि प्रदेश सरकार हमें सूचना देगी तब हम उस सूचना को सभा पटल पर रखेंगे, ठीक नहीं है। क्योंकि प्रदेश सरकारों किस तरह से चल रही है यह हम अच्छी तरह से जानते हैं।

साथ ही साथ मैं मंत्री महोदय से यह भी जानना चाहूंगा जो मजदूर मारे गये हैं, इस दुर्घटना में, क्या वे उनके मुआवजे की रकम बढ़ायेगे और दूसरे यह पता करेंगे कि इसमें कौन से आफिसर थे जो कि ठेकेदारों से मिले हुए थे। क्योंकि उन्होंने समय पर सूचना नहीं दी अगर उन्होंने सूचना नहीं दी तो वे क्रिमिनल हैं, अपराधी हैं। जो मजदूर मारे गये हैं उनकी जिन्दगी उतनी ही कीमती थी, जितनी कि उन आफिसरों की। उनके विरुद्ध तत्काल उनकी कार्यवाही करने के लिये वह क्या करे, इसके लिये मेरा सुझाव यह है कि वहाँ जो भी आफिसर है, उनको तत्काल सम्पेंड किया जाय ताकि और जगहों के आफिसर सतर्क हों और भविष्य में ऐसी दुर्घटनाएँ न होने पायें।

SHRI RAVINDRA VARMA: First of all, I would like to say that I am extremely sorry that the hon'ble Member chose to say that I insulted the House by not answering this Calling Attention at 12 noon today. Sir, I have the highest regard and respect for the House and its rules, and it shall be further from my mind to do anything which would even inadvertently affect the dignity of the House and the respect that I should extend to the House and its hon'ble Members. If at 12 o'clock it was not possible for me to be present here to answer this Calling Attention Notice there were valid reasons which were placed before the hon'ble House, through out, at that time. And it was with the Chairman's permission that I have been afforded this opportunity to answer this question at this time.

[Shri Ravindra Varma]

The hon'ble Member chose to say that the Government is not concerned about the serious accidents that have been taking place in this country. He was further kind enough to admit that these are not new, that such accidents have been taking place in this country for the last three or four years. I can assure the House on behalf of the Government that this Government is deeply concerned about all accidents and we are taking all possible steps to improve the machinery as well as the rules that must be observed to ensure safety. But the House very well knows that there are many mines in this country, coal mines and non-coal mines. Some of these are situated in very deep, dispersed areas. In spite of the best efforts that one makes it may take some time for me to achieve zero potential as far as accidents are concerned. What the House should be concerned with and what the Government should be concerned with is to see that every conceivable effort, every feasible step is taken to ensure safety in the mines.

Sir, my hon'ble friend referred to the difference in compensation paid to the victims of air crashes and the victims of mine accidents. I would have been duly impressed if it were for the first time that I was hearing this. I must plead that to the extent that I have heard this before I was not so deeply impressed as I might have been otherwise. Sir, I am quite sure the hon'ble Member as well as the House know that there is such a thing as accident insurance. But unfortunately, today in spite of our desire to cover all accidents it has not been possible for us to do so. But that does not mean that they are not giving serious consideration to its possibility.

Desirability is something about which there cannot be two opinions. But we are giving serious consideration to the methodology of achieving such an objective.... (Interruption by Shri Shrikant Verma): I can answer all the questions coming from his barrel

SHRI SHRIKANT VERMA: Are you going to increase the amount of compensation? We want a categorical assurance.

SHRI RAVINDRA VARMA: The hon'ble Member takes interest in matters with regard to workers as far as compensation is concerned. So he must be aware that the amount of compensation to be paid to workers is much higher under the Workers' Compensation Act than has been given in this case as ex-gratia. Now we will certainly consider the suggestion that the hon. Member has made for investigation, how it is possible for us to compensate more but, as he said, it is quite clear that the loss of life can never be compensated in full or assessed in terms of money. There are all matters on which there is no difference of opinion between that side of the House and this side of the House.

Now, Sir, he referred to other reasons for the accident like gas and ventilation; water level which he did not refer to also can be added. These are all general matters concerning the safety in mines into which we are looking and, as the hon. Member has mentioned, the Safety Review Committee is seized of this question.

Now he said a very serious thing, Sir, that it was known in advance that there was a possibility of the collapse of the side in this case. I am not sure whether the information that we have bears out his statement, but if one can read a report in the House, that does not mean that it can be authentically substantiated. Unfortunately or fortunately the Government has to go by substantiation. But after hearing the hon. Member, I shall certainly make further inquiry into this question. I will look into it. My hon friend, Sir, is a journalist. He may believe that every printed word is sacrosanct. I do not belong to that category.

SHRI SHRIKANT VERMA: They have referred to the Security Department. Unofficial sources said that the

Security Department of the Union Labour Ministry have declared the quarry as unsafe and ordered its closure. Your own Ministry.

SHRI RAVINDRA VARMA: This is because the hon. Member has picked up a piece from what appeared in the newspaper, but he will be right if he says that as far as this mine is concerned, in the past there have been reports that it was not fulfilling all the prescriptions as far as safety under the mines safety regulations are concerned and action being taken in the past. Perhaps the hon. Member may know, and if he does not know, after five years of litigation, the mine concerned was fined a paltry sum of Rs. 100. So this may be a reference to something which happened in the past but as far as the present is concerned, I shall certainly make an inquiry into the allegation or the statement that my hon. friend has made that officers knew, yet no action was taken. And I would also like to point out the difference between those who are responsible for running these mines because this mine is not a nationalised mine; it is operated by a co-operative society. Now, if any of the officers of the Labour Ministry or the Directorate-General of Mines Safety—for which we are responsible—have been in any way responsible, have been in any way guilty of neglect, or complicity—as the hon. Member has chosen to insinuate—then I shall certainly take action against them. There is no doubt about it.

Sir, he also referred to diseases in general. I do not think this is the occasion for me to answer in detail the question about diseases to which miners are vulnerable.

Then, Sir, his last point was about inquiry I wish to inform him that the Director-General of Mines Safety is conducting an investigation, the result of which will be known in the course of the next week or so, and I have already stated in my original state-

ment that we will take legal action against the management which, according to the information we have at present, is guilty.

DR. V.P. DUTT (Nominated): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, working in the mines, I am sure that Labour Minister would agree, is one of the most hazardous occupations in this country and therefore society has to be grateful to these people that they agree to work under such hazardous conditions, and it is the duty of society to ensure their safety and to do everything possible to not only ensure their safety but also to do something for their welfare if any accident does happen. Now, Sir, I have been during the last few years—that is why I am not criticising him—too many disasters taking place in the mines and it is a matter of serious concern. I would like to ask the hon. Labour Minister whether it is a fact or not that there is a disgusting measure of corruption in the official machinery which is responsible for looking into the safety measures in the mines. I would specifically like to ask the Labour Minister how many people are working in the Directorate of Mines Safety, how many inspections they make, when the last inspection was made and what the report of the last inspection was, because the general impression one is getting is that things are not going well. You may, of course, say that we are believing the newspapers. We are not always believing the newspapers, but I will say that we will have to go by what the newspapers say. Coming to the press I should say that the press should be a little more careful in describing our affiliations. This morning I read a UNI report where I have been described as a Cong. (I) person. It does not matter what they say. An onion will smell the same by whatever name you call it. Similarly, a rose will smell sweet by whatever name you call it. Anyway, the information that the press has conveyed is alarming and it is giving an impres-

[Dr. V. P. Dutt]

tion that there was an apprehension of a danger here. Therefore, this matter has to be looked into. That is why I asked certain questions: When was the last inspection made? How many inspections were made during a period of time? And what was the last report? I would also like to say that I do detect—I am not talking of today or this year, but the last several years—an alarming sense of complacency about these disasters. Therefore, I would like to suggest to the hon. Minister that the whole apparatus of safety mechanism should be examined thoroughly *de novo*. I would like to know whether he would agree to get this matter examined at the highest level, with his own participation, in order to achieve the goal that he has himself listed, i.e. 0 per cent of disaster. Finally, I would like to ask him—and in a way also suggest—whether he would consider making punishment much more harsher and stricter in case of human responsibility for these disasters. There could be natural disasters. Nobody can do anything about them. But for human responsibility, wilful neglect of responsibility, punishment should be harsher and stricter. I would like to support my hon. friend who raised the question of quantum of compensation. The quantum of compensation must be raised as a matter of general principle. Certainly one might say that those who suffer disasters in the mines do get more compensation than other workers. But then those who work in the mines also expose themselves to much greater dangers than others who are working elsewhere. Therefore, would the hon. Minister consider the question of raising the quantum of compensation as a matter of general principle?

SHRI RAVINDRA VARMA: Sir, I agree with the description which my honourable and learned friend has given. The mines are hazardous places. In spite of all the efforts that are being made even in the most

advanced countries, it is accepted that the most hazardous places of work are the mines. To work in the mines is one of the most hazardous professions. I entirely share his concern. He had said that he has a feeling that there has been an air of complacency in respect of mines safety for many years. I agree with him that this is a matter which we should not politicize at all. I can only assure him that, as far as this Ministry is concerned, we do not take a complacent attitude. I entirely agree with him that we must consider ourselves guilty even if there is an air of complacency in our attitude as far as accidents are concerned.

Now, Sir, he made some suggestions and asked a few questions about inspections. I am afraid, I may not be able to say the exact number of people working under the Director-General of Mines Safety at this moment, and I shall certainly send the information to him. But, as far as inspections are concerned I should say and I think, perhaps, the hon. Members are aware from the report of the Ministry itself, that the number of inspections is below the number of inspections that we should have, and in fact as the hon. Member himself perhaps hinted, there has been a fall in the number of inspections in the last few years, not only in this year but in the last few years also. I am seriously concerned at the fall in the rate of inspections. Inspections have to be much more frequent, although one must accept the fact that there is a difference between the frequency and efficacy with which you can inspect big mines and compact mine area and those in respect of small collieries and open cast mines which are located in dispersed areas in the country. There is bound to be a little difference as long as the communications are what they are in the country. I agree with him and I must accept the fact that the number of inspections has been going down in the past few years. One

of the reasons is that it is a fact that the Directorate-General of Mines Safety, which is responsible for inspection, has not been fully staffed for many years. In fact the House knows this, and my hon. friend, Shri Kalyan Roy whose volleys I am waiting for has not failed to point out in the past that as long as three years or four years, perhaps three years, the Directorate-General of Mines Safety did not even have a proper head of the organisation. We, after having taken over the responsibility of the Government, have taken steps to see that the posts that are vacant are filled. The top post has been filled up, and we are taking every step that we can to see that the number of staff is adequate so that the number of inspections is adequate. Very recently, for instance, when the hon. Members like Shri Kalyan Roy and others expressed concern, we wrote again to the Director-General of Mines Safety conveying the concern of the Ministry, the Members of Parliament and everybody else on the frequency of inspections, and the Director-General of Mines Safety has now fixed new norms for inspections and has asked all those who are concerned with implementation of the instructions regarding inspections to ensure an improvement not only in the number of inspections but also in the quality of inspections.

He has also referred to the question of compensation. I shall certainly consider the suggestion which he has made.

He has talked about punishment for those who infringed the laws regarding safety. At the moment we have under consideration amendments to the Mines Safety Regulations and the Act, and we hope to introduce more deterrent punishment as far as infringement of the regulations of mines safety is concerned.

SHRI KALYAN ROY: Sir, it seems the Janata Government has left the miners with an alternative either to die underground in accidents or to be shot dead on the surface. Only a few days back in the first week of April

a disastrous accident took place in the Eastern Coal Fields Limited near Asansol where seven miners were killed and the roof caved in in the Tara colliery. There has been no inspection so far. And on the 5th the police shot dead an unknown number of workers in the Bailadilla project. The only alternative is either to die in underground accidents or to get shot dead on the surface.

It would be wrong on our part only to confine to the accident. The question is whether the accident could have been averted. Was the Government conscious? Was the DGMS, the Director-General of Mines Safety alert? And there comes the responsibility. On that particular day the miners whether in coal mines or non-coal mines went down to dig out coal, stone or manganese or bauxite because they were told that the mines were safe. It is the duty of the Directorate-General of Mines Safety to ensure that when the miner goes down, his life is protected. Otherwise we do not need a department like this. So, Sir, the responsibility is not only the responsibility of the employer. He is not the only villain. The Directorate-General of Mines Safety and the Ministry which bosses over it, which looks after it, are equally guilty, the equally villains. They cannot absolve themselves of the responsibility by passing on the buck to the employer.

Sir, they are neglecting the non-coal mines. And it is unfortunate that things have worsened during this regime. I am not politicising. But your own statistics make me say so. For instance, in 1975 in non-coal mines, there were 668 serious accidents. In 1976 there were 794 serious accidents. In 1977, when Mr. Varma took over, the number of accidents shot up to 805. Sir, the serious injury rate per thousand of persons going down in the non-coal mines was 2.73 in 1975. It shot up in 1976 to 3.15, and after one year, when the Janata Government took over, it shot up to 3.19, which is the highest in the

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world. And nowhere in the world is the rate of death per thousand of persons so high in the non-coal mines as it is in our country. This is the sordid picture.

Talking of safety review conferences, I have been attending all the safety conferences in the last 10 years. The first safety conference was held after the Chinakuri disaster. The second safety conference was held after the Ahmedabad disaster. And the third was held after the Dhori disaster. And they gave certain recommendations. And what are the recommendations? The first recommendation is:

"The frequency of inspections by officers of the Directorate-General of Mines Safety should continue to be regulated in accordance with the recommendations of the first conference on safety of mines."

"That means two inspections.

"In order to increase the frequency of inspections according to safe norms, the present staff strength of the DGMS is not adequate. Early steps should be taken to strengthen the organisation suitably."

Sir, it was required that each mine should be inspected at least twice a year and preferably there should be definite inspections in the afternoon shift and in the night shift. And what is the record of inspections? Neither did Mrs. Gandhi follow the norms nor did the Prime Minister who came after her follow them. I will give you certain horrible facts. In 1972, there were 1,000 coal and non-coal mines and nearly one million workers were employed in coal and non-coal mines. Now the number of coal and non-coal mines has gone up to 2,000 and the number of employees working in the coal and non-coal mines is nearly two million. When you had one million miners, the number of inspections, particularly in the non-coal mines was 5,775 in 1972. It went down in 1975 to 4,134. And then

comes Mr. Ravindra Varma. He replies to me on the 22nd July, 1977 that the number of inspections in the non-coal mines has gone down to 3,796. Is this your concern? Does it show concern? Do you understand the gravity of the situation, or is it only for making speeches in the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha? If your concern had been there, at least the number of inspections would not have gone down from 5,000 to 3,000. This is your statement. And you say you are concerned. Please don't be a hypocrite at least. And not only that, which is the department which has to inspect? It is the DGMS. And about the DGMS, I shall give you the replies, first of Mr. Raghunatha Reddy and then of Mr. Ravindra Varma. I will give you figures. Now, in the category of Deputy Director of Mines Safety, there are 61 posts. How many are vacant for the last three years till today? Fifteen. In the Electrical Department, which is to inspect the mines, there are 14 posts. How many are vacant? Three. And these three are vacant for three years. In the Mechanical Department, there are five posts. How many are vacant? Three. And this is continuing year after year, particularly in the DGMS. You are not giving them the staff—the inspectors, the deputy inspectors, in the mechanical division, in the electrical division, and so on. How is it possible for them to go and inspect? And then, their salary is very low in relation to what is paid in the coal-mines or in other public sector or private sector undertakings. The DGMS staff get half of what others get. Naturally what Mr. Dutt said is correct—corruption increases. You have opened the gates of corruption. When an inspector goes to inspect a mine, he gets Rs. 1,000 per month; the manager gets Rs. 5,000. What else do you expect but corruption? And this is a disease which is continuing not today, but this malignant disease is continuing for the last five years and it is bursting out. You have seen the horrible number of accidents. This is the situation. Why do so

many accidents take place? The Minister has nothing to do except assuring the House that he is seriously concerned about it. Will he kindly do something? Is he aware that in non-coal mines, according to the DGMS, there are 300,000 workers? How many workers are entitled to boots? Over 100,000 are entitled to boots. How many have been supplied with boots? Less than 50,000. Has the Minister inquired whether these people, these unfortunate people, were supplied with helmets? Under the mine safety rules and regulations each miner who goes down the mine will have to be supplied with a helmet to protect his head. Have helmets been supplied in this particular mine? I know in the non-coal mines, particularly the stone quarries not a single pair of shoes has been supplied, not a single helmet has been supplied. If helmets had been supplied, Mr. Varma, perhaps the death figure would have gone down. So, the question is not that you are not investigating. You are investigating. And the investigation has already found out that the management is guilty. But that is not enough. We have seen the DGMS inspection does not lead to any results. I have got a question which I asked about accidents in the coal mines, in the eastern coal fields, which was replied on 3rd March by Mr. Ravindra Varma, where he gave names of 22 coal mines in the Eastern Coal Fields Limited, where responsibility for accidents was squarely fixed on the agent, on the manager, the assistant manager, the managing director and the general manager, from 1976 to 1978. The House would be surprised to know, not only no action has been taken against any of the officers, a majority of them have been promoted after they were found guilty for the fatal accidents. So, I am quite prepared to accept this that after this accident the manager of the particular concern is going to be promoted, because the DGMS is helpless; he has not been given the powers . . .

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINES (SHRI BIJU PATNAIK): Which mines?

SHRI KALYAN ROY: Swang Colliery, Damua Colliery, Bera Colliery, Chandametta Colliery, Jamehari Colliery, Madhuband Colliery, Siduli Colliery, Bistrampur Colliery, Khoodia Colliery, Poidih Colliery, Khaskajora Colliery, Gourandih Colliery and Gogla Colliery.

This was the reply given by the Minister on 3rd March. These officers were found guilty after investigation by the Director-General of Mines Safety. Yet not a single action has been taken against them. Then what is the value of your assurances? What is the value of your big speeches, loud proclamations? You are shedding tears. Are they real tears or crocodile tears? That is what the miner is asking you. What are you talking about the Mines Safety Committee? I am a member of that Committee. It does not meet at all. It meets once a year and that also not every year. And I describe to you what it does. It meets. The DGMS presides. We are provided with coffee and biscuits. We exchange pleasantries and then we disperse. Whenever the question of doing something for the miner comes, immediately the management and the DGMS speak up; We have no money. Where is the money to buy helmets? Where is the money to change the ropes? Where is the money to buy better timber? What is the use of talking about it? So, I want a specific reply from the Minister on these points. How many inspections have been carried out in this particular mine? That is one. I hope he is listening to me. How many inspections have been carried out by the officers of the Directorate-General of Mines Safety in this particular year? That is number one. How many inspections have been carried out in the mines? I would also like to know whether the Directorate-General of Mines Safety Department had imposed section 22

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prohibiting work in the underground before the accident? Lastly, are you satisfied with the DGMS staff? Questions have been raised about their *bona fide*. I know that wherever there are private sector mines, the DGMS office is bound to be corrupt. There is no way out of it. So, Sir, why not have an open court of inquiry? In Chasnala you had a court of inquiry. In Kesagarh mines you had a court of inquiry. In Sudamdj also you had a court of inquiry. In any mine accident involving more than five people a court of inquiry is the result. Now there is some hush hush affair. He said: After that, what will we do? We will prosecute the management. Then they will file a case in the Jaipur court. That will take six years. Then what will be the outcome? A fine of Rs. 70/-. Is that the answer to curb these accidents? If the Minister is serious, he should do this. I am not speaking in anger. I am saying this more in sorrow. If you are serious, please strengthen your Department of Mines Safety. Secondly, give them a time bound programme and see that no more vacancies are there and all the vacancies are filled up. Then, please build up more rescue stations. I would like to be told when the rescue team reached this mine. You have got a huge Mines Department and the rescue station is also nearby. When did the first rescue team reach there? How long they took to reach there? I am told that they reached there after 48 hours. Is it a fact? So, Sir, if you want to prevent more Chasnalas, more Kesagars and more Sudamdjs, then please do strengthen your Department of Mines Safety and give the staff proper salaries so that they are not corrupted by the private sector mine owners. Set up more rescue stations and see that no miner is allowed to go down the mine without boots and helmet. Sir, I am finishing, with a telling example. The rules and regulations require that no coal miner will be allowed to go down the mine with-

out boots or without shoes. In the Eastern Coal mines, after Mr. Ramachandra came, in Dheme Mine and Benali mines 2,000 workers refused to go down as they were not provided with shoes and helmets. What happened? The mines were locked out. Why? Because the workers insisted that the regulations should be compulsorily and fully implemented. The mines were locked out. When the mines were opened thereafter, the workers' wages for that day were deducted. This is the kind of response we are getting. How do you expect them to go down without helmets and boots? What I want to know is this. When was the mine last inspected? How many times it was inspected? Who were the officers who inspected the mine? Was section 22 prohibiting employment of people underground imposed? Was each of the workers provided with shoes and helmets? How much compensation was paid to the workers by the employers? Lastly, how many workers were involved? My experience is that in these kinds of quarries two or three sets of attendance registers are maintained by the mine owners. Under the Mines Act they are called 'B' form registers. Have the Department of Mines seized these 'B' form registers? How many permanent and badli workers were there? Are you satisfied with the casualty figures that appeared in the press? Often it so happens that all the workers are not shown in these registers in the case of private sector mines. All these should be investigated and court of inquiry is the only answer to this kind of accidents.

SHRI RAVINDRA VARMA: Sir, my honourable friend, Shri Kalyan Roy, has pointed out the various inadequacies in the machinery that we have as well as the measures that we have taken for ensuring safety. I do not quarrel with him and quibble on the number of accidents, because I entirely agree with him that the matter is too grave for anyone to quibble. I do not want to point out to him also that it might well be that

the number of accidents has gone up slightly, but the number of fatalities has gone down appreciably. I do not want to enter into these statistical quibblings, because I entirely agree with him that the matter is very serious and is one which should cause grave concern. I do not know whether there is any way by which one can distinguish between crocodile tears and real tears and it might well be that those who are unaccustomed to shedding tears might find it hard to distinguish one from the other. But I do not want to return his compliments to him. These words sometimes act as boomerangs and I do not want to look upon them as boomerangs. I know his concern is real and I would plead with him to believe me when I say that my concern is also real. So, let us exchange our compliments positively and not negatively which both are capable of doing.

Sir, he raised the question of the strength of the DGMS, the vacancies in the office of the DGMS, the salaries paid to the officers in the Office of the DGMS, etc. and all these are extremely relevant. But I hope he will agree with me when I say that in the last one year many posts have been filled up and it is not as if no step has been taken. I can understand the need to rely on exaggeration sometimes to create an effect. But, having granted that, I would request him to consider whether it is not a fact that steps have been taken to fill up some vacancies. He has very rightly pointed out the relationship between filling up these vacancies and the salaries and the conditions of service. So, it is sometimes possible that vacancies cannot be easily filled up and competent men cannot be obtained even if we make an attempt to get them through the UPSC because of the conditions of service that obtain today to which also he made a reference. Some of these vacancies have been filled up and the number of the vacancies today is far less than the number with which we started, the backlog with which we started, when

we took over. The second thing is to consider the conditions of service to see whether they can be improved upon to attract the right kind of competent men.

Now, Sir, he said something about the negligence and he wanted to know who conducted the inspection. He made a reference to the non-coal mines in general. I do not want to answer all the points that he has raised because that will take a lot of time and there may be many occasions when we can discuss the whole question, the comprehensive question, here. Unfortunately, now the Report of the Ministry is not being discussed and perhaps it is their misfortune which is responsible for more attention and time not being devoted to these questions.

SHRI KALYAN ROY: You have no objection to a discussion?

SHRI RAVINDRA VARMA: I have no objection at all to a discussion. I welcome a discussion, because every time there is a discussion, I receive very good suggestions from Mr Kalyan Roy alongwith some indifferent compliments also. Now, Sir, on this question of the last inspection, I am sorry, I will not be in a position to say the number of inspections of these mines and he has also not referred to any particular period for which he wants the figures, for which he wants the statistics, relating to inspection. But I should like to answer his last point because that is easy to answer. The last inspection was done on 8-4-1977 and the officer who conducted this inspection was Mr. Mukherjee, Joint Director of Mine Safety, Ajmer. Then, Sir, he raised the question of application of section 22(3). I would like to inform him that the Chief Inspector of Mines enforced the order under section 22(3) of the Mines Act in December 1976. But it is a tragic fact, which I have to admit, that in spite of all these, the mine has been working. Now, there are some legal arguments

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which are being trotted out by the management and though we gave a "Show-cause" notice to them asking them to explain as to why the mine was working in spite of the promulgation under section 22(3) of the Act on 21-4-77, it has not been possible to prosecute the then officers because it is a Co-operative Society and the Society's officers have changed. But that is not an adequate explanation and, when this came to my knowledge, I have ordered an inquiry to find out as to why we could not prosecute them. Then, Sir, he raised the question of helmets and shoes. That only shows his concern for the miners from head to foot. That is why he has talked of helmets and shoes. I know that there are occasions when, because of paucity of financial resources there is lack of proper equipment. But that cannot be the reason here. We will ensure that we have enough resources for this. Then, he made a pointed reference to the number of rescue stations and I can assure him that we are taking steps to increase the number of rescue stations.

SHRI KALYAN ROY: What about rescue teams?

SHRI RAVINDRA VARMA: As far as the rescue team is concerned, I will not be able to say exactly. But I can say that this accident took place in an open cast mine. It was a cast mine; it is lime quarry. The accident took place around 6 p.m., when the workers had finished the day's work and were actually leaving. This place, as I said earlier, is somewhat removed from the District headquarters; it is near Ramganj Mandi near Kota District. The accident took place on the 22nd April. The information was received by the officers of the D.G.M.S. in Ajmer only on the 23rd, and immediately the officer left Ajmer and he reached the site at 2 a.m. on the 24th; this means he started immediately and reached there even at midnight. The D.G.M.S. himself came to know of it on the 24th and he proceeded immediately

from Dhanbad by plane to the site of the accident and he has given a preliminary report to me. Therefore, I can assure the hon. Member and the House that when the investigation is completed, if it is shown that there has been negligence or it is shown that there is a case for a court of inquiry to be appointed, we will certainly do so. But that depends on the findings, of the inquiry.

SHRI KALYAN ROY: Why don't you do it now?

SHRI RAVINDRA VARMA: Not now.

THE PUBLIC SECTOR IRON AND STEEL COMPANIES (RESTRUCTURING) AND MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS BILL, 1978—Contd.

SHRI VIREN J. SHAH (Gujarat): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I was very happy to hear the Member from the Opposition, showing his great concern about the policies of the Janata Party, and I am very happy that we have such alert Members who draw attention to this whenever they feel that we have deviated from our policies. But may I say that this was a misplaced concern? The hon. Member from the Opposition, when he spoke, said that this particular Bill was contrary to the election manifesto and the economic policy and the statement made by the hon. Minister only two days back. Why did he think it was contrary? This is because he thought that instead of decentralisation, which is the policy of this party, this Bill was leading towards centralisation. I think that this particular conclusion is based on misapprehension. If one looks at the present position of the various organisations under the SAIL or the Ministry, one would find that today there are a large number of companies, though not directly related to steel-making, under the SAIL. And that leads to much greater centralisation. The purpose of this Bill, as it was mentioned, was to so re-structure that there is decentralisation in a concrete