

the Ministry of Agriculture (Department of Food) Notification G S R No 343 (E) dated the 18th July, 1972, publishing the Food Corporation (Second Amendment) Rules, 1972. [Placed in Library. See No LT-3366/72]

NOTIFICATIONS OF THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (DEPARTMENT OF FOOD)

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (PROF SHER SINGH) Sir, I beg to lay on the Table, under sub section (6) of section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, a copy (in English and Hindi) each of the following Notifications of the Ministry of Agriculture (Department of Food);—

(i) Notification G S R No 309 (E)/Ess.Com/Sugar, dated the 15th June, 1972, publishing the Sugar (Price Determination) Order, 1972.

(ii) Notification G S R No 310 (3)/Ess Com/Sugar, dated the 15th June, 1972, publishing the Levy Sugar Supply (Control) Order, 1972.

(iii) Notification G S R No 318 (E)/Ess Com/Sugar, dated the 20th June, 1972, publishing the Levy Sugar Supply (Control) Amendment Order, 1972.

(iv) Notification G S R No. 344(E)/Ess Com/Sugar, dated the 19th July, 1972, publishing the Sugar (Price Determination) Amendment Order, 1972 [Placed in Library. See No. LT-3367/72 for (i) to (iv)]

CALLING ATTENTION TO A MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

STRONG POPULAR DEMAND IN WEST BENGAL FOR THE REOPENING OF THE MARTIN LIGHT RAILWAYS

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA (West Bengal) · Mr Deputy Chairman, I beg to call the attention of the Minister of Railways to the strong popular demand in West Bengal for the reopening of the

Martin Light Railways and the steps Government propose to take in this regard.

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI T. A. PAI) Mr Deputy Chairman, the two Martin Light Railways in West Bengal viz Howrah-Amta and Howrah-Shaakhala Light Railways have been closed down since 1.1.1971. The nationalisation of these Railways or their management being taken over by the Government of India were not found to be viable. The Chief Minister, West Bengal, in the course of his discussions with my predecessor on 17.4.1972 expressed his Government's willingness to take over the management of these Railways. Draft notifications in terms of the Railway Companies (Emergency provisions) Act 1951, vesting the State Government with the necessary authority were accordingly sent to the Government of West Bengal. Subsequently as desired by the State Government, a Committee of Experts has been set up to examine the condition of track, rolling stock etc of these Light Railways.

The Chief Minister, West Bengal, in the course of his discussion with me on 11.8.72 has now stated that the State Government would not be able to operate the Light Railways. He added that because of the low production of heavy bus chassis in the country the Government could not get the necessary bus chassis for running additional bus services. It was explained to the Chief Minister that if the Ministry of Railways had to run these Light Railways, they would have to incur a much larger expenditure on account of higher scales of pay, employment of additional staff to conform to the provisions of hours of employment regulations, rehabilitation of assets etc. From the overall point of view of economy and efficiency of transport it would be better to widen the road and run the road transport services for such short distances, when the traffic is heavily passenger oriented. If necessary the road services could even be subsidized. The Chief Minister, however, urged that the issue may be re-examined and in particular whether by connecting these two Light Railways with the Burdwan-Katwa, Ahmadpur-Katwa and Bankura Damodar River Light Railways, a viable Light Railways system could not be created. It has been agreed to examine this.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : Sir, from the statement that has been made it is clear that the Central Government did not agree with the idea of having the Martin Light Railways reopened. It wanted the West Bengal Government to do it. Now it is saying something else. This is a serious matter. First of all I should like to point out in this connection that the Prime Minister, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, in her speech in Bagmati during the election gave a clear assurance that Martin Light Railways would be reopened, and during the debate in the West Bengal Assembly only a few days ago this matter was repeatedly referred to by a number of Congress members. The West Bengal Assembly adopted a unanimous resolution urging upon the authorities to reopen the Martin Light Railways.

Now, Sir, firstly the Government should consider it from the point of view of the convenience of the public, from the point of view of the economy of that region, and also, hoping in view other considerations. Two districts are affected, vast areas in two districts, namely Howrah and Hooghly. Such a public transport system in that particular region in the two districts covered by the Martin Light Railways in the old days has been very seriously affected as a result of the closure of the Martin Light Railways. The public transport there is far too inadequate, I have been there myself and many others have been, and it is not even suitable for running many buses and so on. Anyhow at the moment the public transport system by buses is very inadequate and it does not work at all to the satisfaction of the local public. When the Martin Light Railways were running they used to carry daily more than fifty thousand passengers. Most of them used to come to Calcutta and other industrial centres for work and they used to go back home. Now, they are greatly handicapped and you can understand what suffering they have been put to, the commuters holding monthly tickets, about twenty thousand or so. And as a result, the local trade is now being seriously affected, the small trade, and the economy of that region has also been seriously jeopardized. The cost of bus transport for 28 km comes to Rs. 46.60 and the monthly railway ticket for the Martin Light Railways came to Rs. 17.50. Now, see the gap. How the poor man can make up this thing, you can easily understand.

Great difficulties are being faced by the student community. There are no colleges there, in those areas. Many of them had to go some distance to Calcutta and other places. Now, it is said that a large number, some say, 50 percent—of the college students had to discontinue their studies as a result of the closure of the Martin Light Railways. Such is the situation.

Now, with regard to the finances. Before the closure, according to our information which has been also mentioned in the Assembly, the company used to earn about Rs. 44 lakhs, I am told. This can be found out. About the position of the stock, rolling-stock, etc. there are 33 engines. I am told that 18 are in running condition. Others require some repairs. One hundred and sixty-four coaches are there. Twenty per cent of them would require repairs. It is estimated that the cost of the repairs and the resumption of the railways again would not involve more than a crore of rupees. This is the financial aspect of it.

Now, Sir, I do not know why the Government of India should not undertake these things. Now, is it the contention of the Government of India or the Railway Board, for that matter, that every single track by itself must yield a profit. If this is the condition let them say so. The railway should be taken as a whole or a particular sector in the railway should be taken as a whole. Take the Eastern Railway as a whole and you judge whether the Eastern Railway as a whole would earn profit. Now if you say that in this particular area because of this thing it may not earn some profit immediately, then it is not the right way of approaching the problem. Then, Sir, developmental activities cannot at all start. In many places, even our steel plants are running at a loss year after year. We are bearing those losses. Why?

It is because it is for public good, for the convenience of the people. When so many people are suffering so much so the Prime Minister herself was impressed by the suffering and inconvenience of the local people that she gave a solemn assurance publicly at a public meeting which was published in all the newspapers in Calcutta that it would be reopened—why is this not being done? What comes in the way? This

requires a proper explanation. I do not know why the Central Government ..

SHRI K P SUBRAMANIA MENON (Kerala) : Assurances were given before the election

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : The assurance might be before the election, the assurance came from the Prime Minister I am not concerned whether it is before the election or after the election But she was Prime Minister before the election and is also Prime Minister after the election Now, Sir, having regard to the fact that the Prime Minister is Prime Minister both before and after the election and she gave that assurance, why should it not be honoured. I am not making a technical point of it. As I have said, lakhs and lakhs of people are suffering I have been there myself, many of my colleagues on this side, anyone in West Bengal, would tell you the same story. Any Congressman, any partyman, anyone belonging to the other parties, any public man in West Bengal, will plead for the same thing Why then is this not being done ? Are the Railways so bankrupt that they cannot take it up ? Many important projects go, accidents take place We are running into huge losses. We can bear those losses The public sector undertakings run into loss sometimes because of corruption of the officials. We have seen how in Durgapur moneys were lost because of the corruption and the bungling of the officials We had to find that money. And today when it comes to running that light railway making a small provision for it, immediately the question of financial viability is raised in this illogical manner in utter disregard of public interest and the interests of public transport and economy of this region.

Sir, I think this is an entirely wrong approach Mr. Pai has come now to the Ministry and would appeal to him that he should not go by the logic of the Railway Board I tell him very frankly that if he goes by the logic of the Railway Board and the mentality of that Board he will have done no service to the country. The Railway Board is manned by people who are callous to the needs of the people, who are cruel to the interest of the working people and to the passengers' interest also. We have pleaded with them for nothing. There-

fore, I say, this matter should be gone into in a larger perspective keeping in view the insistent demand of the entire people of Bengal which has been voiced unanimously on this aspect. It has not been heard. That is what I say. Why should it not be respected by the hon'ble Minister ?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN : Let the Minister answer.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : Therefore, I ask Mr. Pai to himself go to Calcutta for a quick look and find out. As sum of Rs one crore is not such a sum for the Government of India to invest in order that this railway should be operated again for the convenience of the people.

SHRI T. A. PAI : Sir, I sympathise with the problem of transport that has been created by the closing down of those railways In the matter of light railways wherever there was an understanding with the Secretary of State that the option to take over can be exercised from time to time it was exercised by the Railways in some cases and some of the light railways have been taken over In respect of these particular lines the understanding was with the District Boards and we could not interfere directly. Anyway, the point is how do they become uneconomic My hon friend has said that they earned Rs 45 lakhs or so But I find that up to 1966-67 together they used to make marginal profits of about Rs 1 to 2 lakhs every year. But subsequently, year after year, the losses have varied In one case, Howrah Amta section, from nearly Rs 20 lakhs it has gone up to Rs 70 lakhs, and in the case of another section, Howrah Sheakhala, it has gone up from Rs 0.5 lakhs to Rs 1.7 lakhs Now if we took over this section we would have to standardise the pay scales of all the workers on these lines Even now they were running at a loss, the loss incurred by the railways would be far greater. Anyway, I do appreciate the other viewpoint that while we will have to look into the profitability of a particular project the fact that nearly 60-62 lakh people travel on one line and nearly 27-28 lakhs travel on the other, to deprive them of a facility which they were enjoying and to replace it by a provision of a bus transport would not be advisable immedi-

[Shri T. A. Pai]

tely But if we look into the misfortune of these light railways all over the country we will find that the profit has been converted into loss because of indiscriminate issue of bus permits on these very lines. Therefore, if these railways have got to be revived under the auspices either of the Railway Board or of the State Government, it is inevitable that there should be a perfect understanding with the State Government that we cannot have it both ways, that there should be some kind of co-ordination between the bus transport and the railways so that either of them would not lose.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: You decide that.

SHRI T. A. PAI: That is why I have taken up the matter with the Chief Minister of West Bengal. He met me the other day and I told him that I would have an open mind on this issue. We will look into it and see what kind of organisation we can bring into existence. This question will be sympathetically considered, I told him. And so far as any assurance given by the Government is concerned, I may assure you that it will be carried out. There is no question of shirking the issue at all. But ultimately whatever losses we make anywhere will have to be borne by the people of this country and, therefore, certain principles will have to be accepted.

SARDAR AMJAD ALI (West Bengal): Sir, so far as the affairs of the Light Railways are concerned, I can only charge the Government with following a policy of back sliding, because as my friend has said and as I have also mentioned earlier in this House, reopening of this Light Railway was an election pledge of my party in the last elections. On the 8th March this year, the Prime Minister herself said in a public meeting at Howrah, the district in which these Light Railways operate, that these Light Railways should be reopened. But I am astonished that the hon. Minister for Railways now says that the Government is not thinking of nationalising it. May I remind the hon. Minister of the facilities which these companies were enjoying for the last few years? These Railways were started in 1897. This Martin and Burn Company, having their head office in Lal Bazar, used to operate five railways, two in Bihar, two in West Bengal and one in Uttar Pradesh. Sir, when they closed it down, they gave this

reason to the public that they were incurring a loss of Rs 7 lakhs a year and they had no other alternative but to close down. This is not a true reason that has been given to the public. When this Railway was started, there was some agreement with the District Boards of Howrah and Hooghly. The properties of the District Boards of Howrah and Hooghly were being utilised free of any charge. Only for the sheds and the station house, properties which were given by these District Boards, a very nominal rent was charged. The District Boards had an option that they could take over after a few years, but they did not do it. With the Government also there was an agreement and according to the Bengal Tramways Act, they could nationalise it. But they did not do it. Sir, the then Railway Minister made a statement on the floor of Parliament in 1968 during the Budget session that the Government was thinking of nationalising these Light Railways. But it was not done. Sir, now, I find that some contemplation is being given to the question of plying buses, as a substitute for these Railways, on the two routes. I wonder how it will be possible. These two Light Railways were running altogether 85 trains a day and 85 trains are equivalent to 685 buses. So, how is it possible to substitute the buses for these trains? Sir, let me remind the hon. Minister that it was considered at one stage whether buses can be plied on these two routes. The Director of Traffic, Railway Board, wrote in his communication on the 5th August, 1953, to the Home Secretary, West Bengal:

"Although the services provided by Light Railway Companies generally leave much to be desired, some of them are serving a very useful purpose and in their cases, at any rate, if they are to suspend operation, the road services will not, it is felt, be able to cater for the entire volume of traffic offered."

The honourable Minister has stated that these railways were not viable only because indiscriminate bus routes are being opened. I can tell you, Sir, I live in that area, not a single route of bus was there insofar as that particular railway was concerned. Now the state of affairs has gone out of control. Not only the West Bengal Assembly, but also the members of the Congress Party also

have taken it seriously and the Assembly has passed a unanimous resolution urging upon the authorities to reopen it inasmuch as it relates to the election pledge of our party, inasmuch as it relates to an open commitment of the Prime Minister of the country in a public meeting. May I ask the Government whether it will consider it again and whether it will see that the losses which have been shown by the company are not actually incurred? Because, I have got my statistics. The losses were due otherwise, I can show you, I have got a very big list they spend a lot on administration. They have at least 30 officers each getting a four-figure salary. May I ask the honourable Minister whether they would leave the idea of making this substitution, of plying buses on those routes, or whether they would reopen these railways?

SHRI T. A. PAI : I have been given to understand that plying of buses alone would not solve the problem. Therefore, I had assured the Chief Minister that the question will be looked into. I have not said that this is not going to be done . . .

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : We are here in Parliament. What you told the Chief Minister is a different matter. But please tell us in Parliament now . . .

SHRI T. A. PAI : This question has been raised in view of the discussion that I had with the Chief Minister. Therefore, it has been in pursuance . . .

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : I had raised it independently of your meeting with the Chief Minister. In fact, when I gave notice of it, I did not at all know that you had met the Chief Minister.

SHRI T. A. PAI : It is all right. Then I can assure you that the matter is now under the active consideration of the West Bengal Government as well, that we are now trying to find out a solution to the problem. I assure the House that the difficulties that have been raised on account of the closing down of these railways will be tried to be solved jointly by both the West Bengal Government and the Railways.

SHRI T. V. ANANDAN (Tamil Nadu) I feel it very strange today to find the honourable Shri Bhupesh Gupta, political

adviser and a close associate of the Government of the day, bringing this issue in the House instead of discussing it with the Prime Minister of India and getting this small thing solved or approaching the USSR to pressurise the Prime Minister to solve this small problem. However, . . .

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : What relevance has it got here? Sir, you expunge it. If it were so, then the Martin Railway would have been running.

SHRI T. V. ANANDAN : . . . the honourable Minister of Railways has explained the difficulty about the road transport competition. It is there all over India. We must admit it. One thing I want to say. Why should the Railway Minister refer to the State Ministry? Since out of the railway revenue you are distributing not less than Rs. 1 crore odd, out of Rs. 16.25 crores surcharge that is grabbed, why do you not reduce this loss of Rs. 7.5 crores and allow this Mar in Railway to run as it was running? Will it not be right that you would be encouraging the Prime Minister whose intention is to solve the unemployment problem to which the closing down of these railways has also added some more unemployed? Have you provided these 5000 odd people with any alternative employment? Is it fair today to transfer the Class IV people from their normal place of duty to the extreme south to Mysore, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala? Have you provided them with quarters or have you provided them with authorised scales of pay? This is another sort of exploitation that is going on of those retrenched Martin Railway people. Therefore, it is easier to run these railways and recover the losses from the contribution that you make to the State and you will satisfy the question and solve, to some extent, the difficulty of the Prime Minister. This is what we want. Will you please think over on these lines, Mr. Railway Minister?

SHRI T. A. PAI : There is no difficulty for the Prime Minister at all. The assurance that she had given is obviously to solve the problems affecting the people in that area. The suggestion given that the Railways might as well recoup part of their losses from the grant that they have given to the State Government will be looked into.

[Shri T.A. Pai]

Regarding the number of employees, out of 1300, about 1,000 of them have already been absorbed by the Railways. So, the problem of the employees has been solved in that way. But they might not have been provided jobs in the very same area. In any case the problem that has been raised about the difficulties of the passengers and their inconveniences will be looked into.

श्री जगदीश प्रसाद माथुर (राजस्थान)

उपसभापति महोदय, किसी राज्य के मुख्य मंत्री या स्टेट गवर्नमेंट को इसके बीच में लाने की जो व्यवस्था मंत्री जी ने की है, उसके संबंध में मैं मंत्री जी से पूछना चाहूंगा कि अपने देश में कई ऐसी लाइनें भी हैं कि जो घाटे में चल रही हैं और हमारी गवर्नमेंट ने एक कमेटी भी बनाई थी, जिसने इस बात की जांच की थी कि घाटे में चल रही रेल लाइनों को चलाया जाय या उनको बंद कर दिया जाय और उसकी सिफारिश के आधार पर जो घाटे में चलने वाली लाइनें थी बंद चल रही हैं और उसक बीच में स्टेट गवर्नमेंट नहीं आयी। तो बाकी की घाटे में चलने वाली रेल लाइनें अगर बिना स्टेट गवर्नमेंट की राय के चल सकती हैं और सेंट्रल गवर्नमेंट उनको चला सकती है तो एक ही रेल लाइन के संबंध में किसी स्टेट गवर्नमेंट की राय लेना और उसको जिम्मेदार बनाना कहा तक तर्कसंगत है ?

दूसरे, जो आपने कहा कि बसेज और रेलवे का आपस में कंपिटिशन है, मैं कहना चाहता हूँ कि रेल और बस का कहीं कंपिटिशन नहीं है। बस महंगी होती है, रेल सस्ती होती है। कोई यात्री बस में बैठना पसंद नहीं करता अगर उस को रेल मिल सके। आपकी रेल अगर ठीक नहीं चलती तो यह आपकी इन्फ़ीशियेंसी है और उसके कारण बस बीच में आती है और वे लोग मुनाफा कमाते हैं। बस वाले ज्यादा पैसा लेते हैं। तो बस को बीच में लाना और उससे कंपिटिशन की बात कहना अपनी इन्फ़ीशियेंसी को छिपाना है। यह कोई तर्क की बात नहीं है।

SHRI T. A. PAI : This is the problem not with this railway alone. There are other lines also. What the Government is worried about is whatever decision it takes in the matter of one railway line, will have to be applied to others as well. In this case we have seen that the competition also has resulted in a lot of traffic fall and with the result the profits of the light railways have been converted into losses. There is no gain saying that time has come when some kind of coordination is necessary at least in some sections between railways as well as bus transport. Nobody says that Railways should be given complete protection of the monopoly or inefficiency of one type of transport must be protected by shunning that inefficiency. But where direct encouragement is given for the fall of revenue, it will have to be looked into.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : On a point of order. An impression is being created that the attitude of the West Bengal Government is coming in the way. Nothing is coming in the way. Let the Government decide to start it. So far as buses are concerned, it is a different matter.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN : It is not a point of order. It is an information.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : The hon. Minister should concentrate on the opening of Martin Light Railways.

SHRI G. A. APPAN (Tamil Nadu) : Our friend Shri Bhupesh Gupta says : Run these Railways, whatever may happen. The hon. Minister has already said that though the first request of the Chief Minister was negatived, his second request is being considered. The matter should have been stopped at that. My other friend was giving the most valid reasons why they were incurring losses. There were 85 trains irrespective of passengers. The Minister said that in a particular year the loss was Rs. 3 lakhs and subsequently it ran into lakhs and lakhs of rupees. Another friend says that the employees should be given jobs in the same area. He should know that there are many people who do not have any job. I feel that the granting of licenses for bus routes was also mainly responsible for the loss because that generated competition with the Railways. The competition is on account of

the fact that the railways charge more and the buses also charge more. When such small units like the bus organisations could charge more and earn more, why can't such a big organisation like the Martin Light Railways? Further, the main reason for such heavy losses in the railways is the constant increase in the fare for third-class travel which affects the common man. I know, Mr. Deputy Chairman, that the Third Class fares have risen by three or four times of what they were before. For instance, in 1940 . . .

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN : Come to Martin Light Railways

SHRI G. A. APPAN : I am making a comparison of the fares now and before. I am talking about the indiscriminate rise in the Third Class fare. In 1940, I had travelled from Madurai to Madras by paying Rs 5 and 10 annas, that is, a little more than Rs. 5/- and now it is Rs. 17/-. With such a heavy increase in the Third Class fare, how can you expect the people to patronise your railways? So, I would put the blame for this deficit and loss on the indiscriminate rise in the Third Class fare. There is one more thing. These trains run very slowly.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN : Please wind up.

SHRI G. A. APPAN : They should run as fast as possible. I can walk faster.

AN HON. MEMBER : They are like bullock carts.

SHRI G. A. APPAN : Worse than bullock carts. Now can you expect the people to patronise such trains which move as slowly as tortoises?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN : Please conclude now.

SHRI G. A. APPAN : You should also reduce the running time. You should run the trains as quickly as possible and also regulate the timings of the trains.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN : That will do.

SHRI G. A. APPAN : Only one more point.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN : No, please.

SHRI G. A. APPAN : For instance I would like to know the views of the Government on the desirability of starting a corporation to run it without having any labour trouble or any "go-slow" tactics.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN : Yes Mr. Minister.

SHRI T. A. PAI : Sir, even before the Light Railways were closed down, there was a public grievance made to the Government that the trains were very slow, that they were over-crowded and that the fares on this railway were fairly high. On the other hand, the pay scales of those who were working on these railways were far lower than those of the people working in the Indian Railways and the maintenance was also not looked after. These railways were making losses. I do not want to enter into a controversy as to whether it is because of the high Third Class fares that they are losing in their competition with the buses or because of something else. In any case, as Shri Bhupesh Gupta has said that the bus fares are fairly high and therefore, the railways must now be restarted, I can only assure that in the light of the problem created by the closing down of these railways, the Government would look into it and see what action is necessary to re-start them.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN : Yes, Mr. Lokanath Misra.

SHRI LOKANATH MISRA (Orissa) : Sir, the honourable Minister's statement regarding his talks with the Chief Minister gives me the impression that it is an attempt to delay matters since it gives the impression that because the whole thing is in the process of consultation, matters can wait. Sir, the point of view that has already been expressed is probably enough to convince the Minister that it should be restarted. But, in addition to that, I would give him two more reasons : One is that 50% of the colleges have discontinued their classes

[Shri Lokanath Misra]

on account of the closure of these railways because the students purely depended on these two railways to reach their destination, that is, their colleges which they are not able to do now. Secondly, there is already a complaint on the floor of the Assembly that the Prime Minister has given such an assurance to the people in a public meeting and so, the Government of India cannot go back.

DR. BHAI MAHAVIR (Delhi)
It is an election promise

SHRI LOKANATH MISRA : What-ever it is. It might have been election promise made on the spot to the people and subsequently, they got the vote also from the electorate. But, the fact is that it is a promise from the Government. Mr. Bhupesh Gupta wants me to read out the sentence

He said Mrs. Gandhi in the Baghan election meeting assured the people of Howrah and Hooghly districts that Martin's Light Railways would run, and "we the MLAs in these two districts promised the electorate that the new Government would open the closed down railways."

DR. BHAI MAHAVIR : Is this not a corrupt practice?

SHRI LOKANATH MISRA : That is another part of it. Let us depend on this statement. The Minister said that the competitive spirit of the roadways stood in the way. The Government in West Bengal belongs to the same party which is ruling at the Centre, and so it can be sorted out in a conversation. Therefore, no delay should occur in the matter. No more time should be wasted. The Railway Minister should assure on the floor of the House that it is going to be reopened. The question is only when? Supposing it takes a month or two months because it has to do certain things, then the House will be completely satisfied. But you cannot give an evasive reply that you will look into matter. You should give an assurance that it is going to be resumed...

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : His predecessor Mr. Hanumanthaiya, also said that it would be looked into...

SHRI LOKANATH MISRA : He was worse than the Railway Board people. I am happy that Mr. Hanumanthaiya has gone.

SHRI T. A. PAI : I have already given my assurance. Whatever the Prime Minister has said, it is a real problem of the travelling public. This question will not be lightly brushed aside. I can assure you that if my predecessor has given any assurance, that assurance shall be kept—either in this House or in the other. What I am saying is that today we cannot just take it over and run it ourselves because it belongs to a private company and we have no *locus standi*, so far as the taking over is concerned, unless it is nationalised either by us or by the State Government. So, therefore, the question has got to be studied in all its aspects.

SHRI LOKANATH MISRA : Have you decided that you will run it?

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : In principle, you take a decision and make it known that you are thinking along this line and you will take the step. You have to nationalize it...

(Interruptions)

SHRI T. A. PAI : I have already given assurance that the feelings of the House will be taken into consideration in taking this decision.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN : Mr. Raha

SHRI SANAT KUMAR RAHA (West Bengal) : Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, now the West Bengal is in a bursting condition. And Martin Light Railway is one of the problems. The Railways is the largest Government concern. The Martin Light Railway line is only 116 KM. traction. It is very petty minded on the part of the Government, on the part of the largest Government undertaking, that they are not looking seriously into the matter and this bursting problem. I would request the Minister here to categorically assure the people of Bengal, specially the people of Howrah and Hooghly, that he will reopen this Light Railway and link it up with Katwa, and the question of viability will not arise. Then, regarding

the details of losses, I think these losses cannot be the basis for deciding the issue by the Railways. Therefore, I would like to have a reply from the Minister whether he would consider all these issues seriously, particularly the question of reopening of the Martin Light Railways.

SHRI T.A. PAI : In spite of the losses that have been pointed out, I have said that purely from the point of view of the passengers affected, this question is going to be sympathetically looked into and whatever steps are necessary will be taken.

SHRI PRANAB KUMAR MUKHERJEE (West Bengal) : Sir, I am glad that the Minister has assured the House that the whole issue would be considered sympathetically, but I apprehend from the first part of his statement, when he says that he is going to appoint an Expert Committee which will look into the Light Railways run in West Bengal, that by appointing a Committee of this nature it will dilute the whole issue, because I do not know how the Light Railways which are already under the Railway Administration can be treated at par with the Howrah-Sheakhala and the Howrah-Amta which are absolutely closed. The Ahmadpur-Katwa or the Burdwan-Katwa Light Railways are already running and I do not understand what is the purpose of appointing an Expert Committee to look into the affairs of these Railways. The burning issue before the Railway Ministry is to reopen these closed railways. I do not understand what the object of this Committee would be. I apprehend that by appointing a Committee of this nature, unnecessary time will be wasted and the whole issue will be diluted. The question is whether Howrah-Amta and Howrah-Sheakhala Light Railways would be reopened. The Government of West Bengal has expressed its inability to run the Railways and the Government of India knows it categorically that these Railways will incur losses. The question before the Ministry is quite simple, *i.e.* whether they will take the responsibility of running these railways even with the losses.

I entirely agree with Mr. Lokanath Misra that a categorical answer of the Minister should come now and then that it will be taken up. Let the Government agree

in principle and further details as to how it would be started, etc. could be determined later on. I think the Railway Ministry should look into it.

Another thing that that I would like to know from the Minister is whether during the course of his discussions with the Chief Minister, a proposal to the effect has come to the Railway Ministry that if the Government of India and the Railway Ministry runs this Railway, the Government of West Bengal will share the additional expenses which will be required for the revision of pay-scales of the existing employees. Has the Chief Minister given him this sort of assurance during the course of his discussions with him?

SHRI T. A. PAI : Sir, the object of appointing the Committee was to look into the question of the condition of track and the locomotives and not to see whether the Railways should be run or not.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : Here you are. The Committee is for feasibility; that is to say that you have decided that it should be run and expedited.

SHRI T. A. PAI : When it came to the question of viability of this Railway, it was suggested that the question whether this Railway could be linked up with other Light Railways in the area and whether the viability could be created, should be looked into. This was the suggestion which came from the Chief Minister of West Bengal and there has not been any suggestion from the West Bengal Government that they will defray the difference in the pay-scales. Anyway, since the House wanted an assurance in principle that this Railway would be reopened, I am prepared to hold out that assurance, but how it should be done and when it should be done you must leave it to the Railways and the West Bengal Government.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : Now you have said it. He has said that it would be reopened. Note it and underline it. It would be reopened. How it should be done and when it should be done; that is why Shrimati Indira Gandhi has brought you in. I am told you are a man with drive and do it quickly, please.