

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, no, I am sorry, Mr. Krishan Kant. I shall be very glad if you can explain it to me in my chamber, and then I shall see to it.

Next question. Mr. Chitta Basu.

UNDERGROUND RAILWAY IN CALCUTTA AND BOMBAY

*299. SHRI CHITTA BASU: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to refer to the reply to Unstarred Question No. 703 given in the Rajya Sabha on the 5th August, 1968 and state:

(a) whether the Study Team on Metropolitan Transport has since submitted its report on the feasibility of laying a network of underground railways in Calcutta and Bombay;

(b) if so, whether it has been examined by Government;

(c) whether any technical assistance has been sought from any foreign country for the project; and

(d) if so, the names of those foreign countries?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI ROHANLAL CHATURVEDI): (a) No, Sir.

(b) to (d) Do not arise.

SHRI CHITTA BASU: Sir, in a newsletter from Paris published in the Amrita Bazar Patrika of August 5 last . . .

SHRI A. D. MANI: Not a very reliable paper.

SHRI CHITTA BASU: He says it is not a reliable paper. But is Hitauda very reliable? Now, let me come to my question. In a newsletter from Paris published in the Amrita Bazar Patrika of August 5 last, it has been said:

"The Railway Minister, Mr. C. M. Poonacha, said India would seek Soviet technical assistance for laying a network of underground railways in Calcutta and Bombay."

May I know if this is correct and, if so, what has been the reaction of the Soviet Union regarding the proposal made by the Government of India?

SHRI C. M. POONACHA: Sir, the news item does not have any basis.

SHRI CHITTA BASU: Apart from the report of the particular news item, may I know whether the Government of India is contemplating to have any technical assistance from the Soviet Union in the matter of laying the underground railway in Calcutta?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Minister has stated that there is no basis for this question.

SHRI CHITTA BASU: Sir, he has said there is no basis for the press report. Let him reply.

SHRI C. M. POONACHA: Sir, this matter is still under the examination by a team called the "Metropolitan Transport Team" constituted by the Planning Commission. The team is still examining the whole question, its technical and other aspects. As such, no final proposal is before the Government as to whether there should be an underground railway system or an elevated railway system. These matters and other technical aspects of the question would be studied and when a final proposal is before the Government, the Government will be able to make up their mind as to whether they should seek some foreign assistance or whether they could undertake it on their own.

SHRI M. M. DHARIA: Mr. Chairman, Sir, this matter regarding the cities of Bombay and Calcutta is under the consideration of the Government as per my information, for the last 15 years. Every time it is being stated by the Government that the matter is under their consideration, that teams are appointed, etc. Is the Government aware that there is a heavy rush, a heavy congestion, in these two cities? An underground railway is the imperative and urgent need of these two cities. Will the honourable Minister assure this House that this matter will be expedited and that the Government will take a decision whether there should be an underground railway or whether there should not be an underground railway? Otherwise, the honourable Minister should make it clear

that there is no proposal now for an underground railway and that all the schemes are under the ground. Will he kindly clarify the whole position?

SHRI ROHANLAL CHATURVEDI: We appreciate the anxiety of the honourable Member. No doubt, this problem has taken a very serious turn—this transport problem—and we are fully conscious of this. As has been stated just now, the Planning Commission is studying this problem and unless it finalises we cannot do anything in the matter.

SHRI M. M. DHARIA: Sir, my question was very specific. I wanted a categorical assurance from the honourable Minister. Will the honourable Minister assure this House that these "two cities are suffering like anything because of the heavy congestion and that the Government will expedite the matter? The question of just studying all these things has taken 15 years. Why should not the honourable Minister categorically assure this House?

SHRI C. M. POONACHA: Sir, it is true that the transport system is assuming very serious proportions in both these metropolitan cities and the surface transport facilities do not permit satisfactory handling of the increased volume of traffic. This is accepted. But this does not rest at that. The technical feasibility of an underground railway or an elevated railway system has to be gone into by a team of experts, which study is on, and before that study is concluded—it is true that this has taken a long time because the problem is so complicated and it is not easy to find a solution that quickly . . .

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Sharma.

SHRI CHITTA BASU: Sir, what about my second question?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Sharma is standing for a long time. I will give you an opportunity to put your second question. I remember that. You have got the right.

SHRI ANANT PRASAD SHARMA: Sir, I want to know as to what is

under investigation. Is it the possibility of having a circular or an underground railway in Calcutta, or the possibility of not having it? What is it that is under investigation?

SHRI ROHANLAL CHATURVEDI: It is the possibility of having it that is under consideration.

SHRI CHITTA BASU: Sir, may I know whether it is not a fact that a French team was invited by the Government of West Bengal as late as 1949 to examine the feasibility of an underground railway system in Calcutta and that this team has submitted a report? If so, may I know whether the Government has considered that report and again whether the Government is in a position to spell out in the clearest possible terms about the present position of the scheme of the Government with regard to the circular railway system in Calcutta, without making any evasive answer?

SHRI C. M. POONACHA: Sir, this report seems to have been submitted to the Government of West Bengal and all these materials are now available to this Transport Team which is now examining the question.

SHRI CHITTA BASU: Sir, it is an evasive answer.

SHRI C. M. POONACHA: What can I do?

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: May I know, from the Government whether it has accepted in principle the need for an underground railway in Calcutta? Secondly, may I know whether it is not a fact that it has been shown that construction of an underground railway in Calcutta from the physical point of view was quite feasible? If so, what is the delay? The Government should make this position clear. First of all, a clear statement is needed as to whether it has accepted in principle that Calcutta must have an underground railway. And only after that we can ask questions. Anyhow, I should like to know, assuming that it is accepted in principle, whether we could have an assurance that within a set time limit this project will be carried through?

SHRI ROHANLAL CHATURVEDI: Sir, the necessity of an underground railway is fully recognised . . .

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Sir, I know the meaning of the word "recognise" the meaning of "appreciate", the meaning of "under consideration" and "active consideration". What I have asked for is a categorical answer. I wanted to know whether you have accepted in principle that Calcutta must have an underground railway system. Please note the words "accepted in principle" and the proposition. Will Mr. Poonacha kindly get up and give a reply to this question? It should be made clear.

SHRI C. M. POONACHA: Sir, as regards a technical matter which requires expert advice, there is no such thing accepting a position in principle. The fact could be that the necessity should be recognised . . .

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Sir, again on a point of order.

SHRI C. M. POONACHA: How am I to accept a position in principle where expert advice could be overruled and I should accept it in principle? This is a very wrong way of doing things. This can never happen.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Why not?

SHRI ARJUN ARORA: Sir, when the consideration of this project was undertaken, a young unmarried girl was attached as a Stenographer. She has now become a grandmother. But the Government has not completed the consideration of the project. May I know if the Government has set any target date for the so-called Transport Team to complete the consideration?

SHRI C. M. POONACHA: Sir, this matter is under the consideration of the Planning Commission. We await their decision.

DR. ANUP SINGH: WiU the honourable Minister please state whether the progress that has been made so far is the difference between "consideration" and "active consideration"? That is number one . . .

SHRI KRISHAN KANT: And "serious consideration".

DR. ANUP SINGH: Apropos Mr. Bhupesh Gupta's question, we have asked a very specific question as to whether the desirability of having an underground railway in Oalcutta— both the desirability and the feasibility has been accepted. The honourable Minister has stated that the technical study is being looked into. That is not the question. The question is whether in principle this idea of having an underground railway in Calcutta is accepted by the Government. The technical details can come later.

SHRI C. M. POONACHA: Sir, unless the technical details are studied, it is difficult to accept the position in principle because so far as Calcutta is concerned, the underground railway system is supposed to connect Howrah and Sealdah which would pass under the river Ganges. Now, that is a matter which requires a very detailed technical study by experts.

SHRI KRISHAN KANT: For how many more years?

SHRI C. M. POONACHA: The problem is such that it is not easy of solution quickly. Now, that is not in my hands. We are not making the study. The Planning Commission is engaged and they have been apprised of the need to develop the transport facilities not only in Calcutta but also in Bombay. Both in Bombay and Calcutta as I had an occasion to submit to this House, the increase in commuter traffic is going up at the rate of 10 per cent per annum and in about 10 years' time it would be double of what we are having now and for which the surface transport facility is totally inadequate. Therefore, some other system of rapid transit will have to be evolved with a view to cope with this increase in traffic. That very matter is being looked into by the Planning Commission and the moment some conclusions are reached, I am sure necessary programmes will be drawn up.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The question hour is over.