

(क) क्या यह सच है कि विशेषज्ञ समिति ने अजमेर को राजस्थान की राजधानी बनाने की सिफारिश की है ; और

(ख) यदि उपरोक्त भाग (क) का उत्तर हाँ है, तो क्या सरकार ने उस सिफारिश पर विचार कर लिया है और यदि हाँ तो उस पर क्या निर्णय किया गया है ?

†[RECOMMENDATION OF THE EXPERT COMMITTEE TO ADVISE GOVERNMENT REGARDING THE CAPITAL OF RAJASTHAN]

41. SHRI NAWAB SINGH CHAUHAN: Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to refer to the reply given to Starred Question No. 121 in the Rajya Sabha on the 25th November, 1957, and state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the expert committee has since recommended Ajmer as the capital of Rajasthan; and

(b) if the answer to part (a) above be in the affirmative, whether Government have considered the recommendation and if so, what decision has been taken thereon.]

गृह-कार्य मंत्री (श्री गोविन्द बल्लभ पंत) : (क) विशेषज्ञ समिति ने अभी तक रिपोर्ट नहीं दी है ।

(ख) प्रश्न ही नहीं उठता ।

†[THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI GOVIND BALLABH PANT): (a) The report of the Expert Committee has not yet been submitted.

(b) Does not arise.]

STATEMENT REGARDING EXPLOSION AT PATHANKOT

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI V. K. KRISHNA MENON): Mr. Chairman

†[] English translation.

the tragic incident that occurred at the Ordnance Rail Head Group at Pathankot on the 24th February, 1958 at 08.15 hours has claimed a heavy toll by way of loss of life and property. Six railway wagons containing ammunition and other defence stores which had arrived on the military siding on the 23rd February, 1958 within the premises of the Rail Head Group and were ready for unloading were being unloaded. Not long after the unloading began, there was a severe explosion. Two other wagons which contained ammunition and explosives were completely blown off and totally destroyed. Three others are badly damaged, but are still on the tracks with their unstable contents still to be disposed of. The sixth wagon appears at present not to have been seriously affected. Attempts are being made to deal with this wagon. The debris including elements and fragments of the wagons and some other casualties was thrown by the ferocity of the explosion blast to about a radius of a thousand yards from the centre.

The explosion is reported to have been heard even as far away as Gurdaspur, 23 miles from Pathankot. It instantaneously set fire to the considerable defence stores in the Depot of the Rail Head Group and over a wide area of it. The fire raged for about three-quarters of an hour destroying considerable defence stores and property. No lives were, however, lost as a result of the fire. Fire parties from all units in the station reached the spot in a few minutes. The civilian Fire Brigade also arrived. Despite the constant danger of further explosions occurring and the ferocity of the fire itself and the large areas over which it extended, the fire fighting crew together with the Defence personnel in the Depot and from the neighbouring Defence units along with the local civil Fire Brigade, carried out fire fighting and rescue operations with commendable speed, courage and efficiency.

[Shri V. K. Krishna Menon.]

The areas of the Ordnance Rail Head Group, including the Army Military Forwarding Organisation and the Vehicle Park was secured by civil and military guards. The area is still regarded unsafe. All civilians in the Depot were removed immediately after the explosion outside the perimeter of danger.

Road and railway traffic had to be suspended. Road traffic was however re-opened on the next day, the 25th February, and railway traffic has been re-opened yesterday, the 26th February.

The full extent of the casualties is still not known. Until last night the figures known and estimated with reasonable certainty are as follows:

Nine Army personnel are known to be dead. The total number of dead bodies; civilian and military, both identifiable and otherwise, are at present estimated at 34. Of these, three bodies are still in the wagons and cannot be removed without danger of further explosions as the contents of these vehicles are regarded by the experts as unstable. Among the 28 civilian employees who were regarded as missing on the 24th February, some must now be included in the figures of the dead already given. Five of those originally missing have happily been traced and found. There are still six missing according to present estimates and search for them in the locality of the neighbouring village continues.

Army Headquarters and the Defence Ministry were in constant touch with the military and civil authorities at Pathankot since the receipt of the report of the incident. Field ambulance with the necessary medical and nursing staff and blood donors from the Military Hospital also reached the spot within a few minutes of the explosion. The casualties, both Defence and Civilian, were removed to the Military Hospital speedily where the injured have been hospitalised.

On the morning of the 24th February, the Chief of General Staff of the Army, ammunition and explosive experts, Defence Ministry officials and myself reached the scene of the accident before 08.00 hours. They visited the Military Hospital and saw the injured. They also visited the families of the dead and injured and saw the relatives and associates of the casualties. The extent of the visible results of the bereavement and the tragedy caused appeared considerable and harrowing. The Defence and Civil Authorities have taken necessary steps to render assistance to the sufferers. The families of only two military personnel who alone were at Pathankot have been given advances of Rs. 600. The next-of-kin of the remaining deceased are being located and assistance will be given to them promptly. Prompt action is also being taken in regard to pension and other reliefs according to their entitlements so far as families of the deceased military personnel are concerned.

The Deputy Commissioner and his colleagues with whom we discussed the situation arising from the explosion were taking steps to give the immediately required financial assistance to the families of the dead civilians. Till yesterday evening, the Punjab Government had distributed Rs. 200 per family to 10 families. Enquiries about requirements of the sufferers continue.

It is not yet possible to estimate the total extent of the loss of life and property. It is also not possible at present to state what caused the explosion.

The consignment of these stores by rail to the military siding inside the Ordnance Rail Head Group and the unloading of them by Defence and Civilian personnel is fully in accordance with rules and well established practice and part of normal routine of supply and distribution to Defence Forces.

Government would like to pay their tribute to the Defence and Civilian personnel who lost their lives or suffered in the discharge of their onerous duties in the service of the country. The sympathies of the Government of India and I feel sure, of this House, go out in ample measure to the men, women and children who are bereaved today and survive in the shadow of this catastrophe.

Government have conveyed their sympathies to the fellow officers and men of the Defence personnel who worked with those who are dead and injured and feel their loss deeply. Government have expressed the hope that the next-of-kin and the widowed and orphaned will find the strength to make readjustments imposed upon them by the irreparable loss they have suffered and the human tragedy that is theirs as a result.

A Court of Inquiry has been instituted and has commenced work. No further particulars are available at present, nor can be given until the findings of the Court of Inquiry are received, as any such can only be based on speculation or inadequate information and will, therefore, not be fair or purposeful.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We express our deep sorrow at the accident and our sympathies for the members of the bereaved families.

SHRI V. K. KRISHNA MENON: I shall communicate to them, Sir.

PAPERS LAID ON THE TABLE

DELHI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION (ELECTION OF COUNCILLORS) RULES, 1958
AND AN AMENDMENT THERETO

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI B. N. DATAR): Sir, I beg to lay on the Table, under sub-section (2) of section 479 of the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957, a copy each of

the following Notifications of the Ministry of Home Affairs:—

(i) Notification No. F. 1/58-Elec D. M. Cor., dated the 1st February, 1958, publishing the Delhi Municipal Corporation (Election of Councillors) Rules, 1958.

(ii) Notification No. F. 1/58-Elec. February, 1958, publishing an amendment in the Delhi Municipal Corporation (Election of Councillors) Rules, 1958.

[Placed in Library. See No. LT-549/58 for (i) and (ii).]

THIRD ANNUAL REPORT OF THE NATIONAL RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION OF INDIA AND STATEMENT OF ACCOUNT

THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH (DR. MONO MOHAN DAS): Sir, I beg to lay on the Table, under sub-section (1) of section 639 of the Companies Act, 1956, a copy each of the English and Hindi versions of the Third Annual Report of the National Research Development Corporation of India together with the audited statement of accounts for the period ending the 31st March, 1957. [Placed in Library. See No. LT-550/58.]

THE INDIAN RESERVE FORCES AMENDMENT BILL, 1957

THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SARDAR S. S. MAJITHIA): Sir, I beg to move:

"That the following amendments made by the Lok Sabha in the Indian Reserve Forces (*Amendment*) Bill, 1957, be taken into consideration:

Enacting Formula

(1) That at page 1, line 1, for 'Eighth' substitute 'Ninth'.

Clause 1

(2) That at Page 1, line 4 for '1957' substitute '1958'."