

duration, generally after 4.30 p.m. So the viewers depending on such low power transmission centres are disappointed due to the non-transmission of full time programme. It is seen that adequate staff strength is not provided for the transmission of full time programme. This deficiency in staff strength and consequent reduction in the time of transmission and programmes is causing concern and disappointment among the viewers. The L.P.T. at Martandam, Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu is one of such stations which has no full time transmission programmes due to low staff strength and inadequate arrangements. So I urge upon the Government to take immediate steps to provide PTs with adequate staff strength and other arrangements so as to enable the viewers to get the opportunity of full time programme.

(vi) Need to restore the railway line between Kotipalli and Kakinada in East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh

SHRI T. GOPALKRISHNA: A railway line between Kotipalli and Kakinada in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh existed during World War time. During the war period, some lines like one being mentioned have been removed whereas many or almost all those rail lines were restored after Independence. This line which is about 50 kms. in length has not been restored till date. During the 10th Lok Sabha in one of his Budgets, the then Hon'ble Railway Minister was kind enough to include this line in his Budget proposals. I understand that a survey has been conducted. This line, when restored, will benefit the people of agriculturally rich Konaseema area.

At present due to increased operations of ONGC in this area, there is a lot of pressure on road transport. Further, Kakinada is one of the important educational centres with Medical, Engineering and other colleges, besides being a port and district headquarters. A large number of students, farmers, businessmen, employee, commute from Konaseema area to Kakinada daily. They depend only on road transport which is unable to bear the pressure. The businessmen/agriculturists of Konaseema can conveniently transport their products to Kakinada Port and in the process the Railways too can earn sufficient revenue.

I request the Hon'ble Railway Minister to see that his predecessor's promise to restore this line is fulfilled.

[Translation]

(vii) Need for early completion of by-pass in Lalitpur, U.P.

SHRI RAJENDRA AGNIHOTRI (Jhansi): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, The Construction work of a by-pass road in Lalitpur, Uttar Pradesh is going on. It was started 10 years ago. Foundation stone was laid by a Union Minister. For the last 5 years construction work is held up. Construction of bridges on the river and stream is yet to be completed.

Sir, Jhansi, Sagar and Jabalpur road passes through Lalitpur city which comes traffic jams for three to four hours

during the day time and 10-12 serious accidents take place there every year. Therefore it is quite necessary to build the road and bridges on the river and stream to reduce the congestion in the city.

I, therefore, urge the hon'ble Minister to issue urgent instructions for the completion of remaining work expeditiously

(viii) Need for early construction of a by-pass on National Highway No. 3 between Indore and Dewas, M.P.

SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN (Indore): An action plan is under consideration of the Government for the past several years to build a bypass and fourlanes of the National Highway Mumbai-Agra between Indore and Dewas. This Highway passes through the city and as a result thereof accidents take place every now and then. During the recent past a survey for this pass was also conducted under the aegis of World Bank. The cost of construction may also increase because of delay in taking up this work. I, therefore request the Central Government to start the construction work without any further delay.

14.29 hrs.

[English]

DISCUSSION UNDER RULE 193

Loss of Lives due to Heavy Rains and Landslides during Amarnath Yatra in Jammu and Kashmir

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: We will now take up discussion under Rule 193. The time available is two hours. Shri Sontosh Mohan Dev. .

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV (Silchar): Before I start, I would like to know since two days have elapsed in between, whether the Home Minister wants to add anything; because many news items appeared in the newspapers which are quite contradictory to what he has said. I being one of the Members of the supporting party, would like to know whether the newspapers are right or the Government is right. I will urge upon him to share the information with us so that it will be easier for us to react.

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, I do not know which newspaper report the hon. Member is referring to. But I can give you some latest information which we have received regarding different aspects of this tragedy.

It is with deep regret that I have to inform the House that the number of total deaths has now gone up to 194. Last time, when I made a statement in this House, the figures

available with us were of 127 deaths. This figure has now gone up to 194. These figures can be divided as follows:—

Pilgrim/Yatris died after the rainfall and snowfall began	165
Yatris died before this weather deteriorated	13
Porters who were engaged in carrying loads on the pilgrimage route and <i>ponywallahs</i> who give out horses on hire for people to go on horse-back	12
Security forces personnel	4

So, as per the latest information available with us, the number of total deaths is 194, out of which 165, as I said, was the number of deaths of *yatris*, once the rain and snow had begun and the weather had deteriorated.

The number of bodies identified is 112. Out of these 96 bodies are of *yatris*, 12 bodies are of local porters, etc. and four, as I mentioned, are of the security forces personnel. So, this makes the number of total bodies identified as 112.

As far as disposal of the bodies of the civilians is concerned, the number of bodies of *yatris* cremated is — 164; the number of bodies buried is — 12; the number of bodies airlifted is — 11; and the number of those bodies, which are at the time of the coming of this report early this morning, are in the process of being airlifted, is — three. This makes a total of 190 deaths. The four bodies are of the same security force personnel, to whom I have referred to earlier.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: I do not want to interfere. I would like to know whether all the 164 bodies, which have been cremated, have been identified by their relatives or not... (*Interruptions*). Some bodies which have not been identified have also been buried because, as you said, they were getting decomposed.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: As I stated the other day also, generally those bodies only were cremated or which consent was given by their friends or relatives. But later on, they may have cremated some more bodies because nobody came to identify them and the bodies were decomposed.

At present some search teams are further working and looking along the whole route. The Additional Director-General of Police has gone there today to make a survey of all the campus along the route. I do not want to rule out the possibilities of a few more bodies being found, especially between Panjtarini and the Amarnath Cave. It may be that a few bodies may be lying somewhere in that area. If so, of course, they will be located by the search teams which are working there.

But I cannot say definitely. According to the State Administration, this is their report conveyed to us... (*Interruptions*)

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI (Deogarh): What is the number of persons/pilgrims missing? The relatives of the pilgrims are searching for them but are not finding them.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: Do you mean 'missing and their families cannot find them and in that sense they are missing'? I think that is what you mean.

As far as I know, the names of all the people whose bodies have been identified, have been published. The full lists have been published in the Press. Of course, the identity of those bodies which are unidentified and have either been cremated or in case they were Muslims, they were buried, I suppose, is not known. I am informed that as of now, this morning only roughly 3,000 people remain at Pahalgam. The roads have been opened. The traffic is moving. All the rest, out of this huge number that was there, are now being moved by vehicles on the road to Jammu.

According to the State Administration, most of the deaths took place at the camps at Sheshnag and at the Cave and in the small camps in between, that is Panchtarni, Poshpatri and Mahaguna and on the road between these camps. It is also stated that wireless communications are available only at the camps at Sheshnag at Panchtarni and at the Cave. Therefore, information from the intermediate small camps like Poshpatri and Mahaguna had to be collected by personal visits. It is also said that in the first one or two days the dead were cremated by their relatives at the Cave itself and at the place of death. Later on, the dead bodies were left behind by the other *Yatris* and these were collected by the Administration and cremations were done at Sheshnag (46 bodies); at Manigaon (38 bodies) and at Chandanwari (25 bodies). This portion is the report given to us by the State Administration.

Sir, there are one or two other points which I might add, because some of the questions which were raised relate to these points. That is about the sequence of events. It started raining heavily on the night of 21st August. I was there till the evening of 22nd August. It had started raining the previous day, on 22nd morning. The Home Secretary and the Home Minister visited Srinagar to review the election arrangements. They also reviewed the arrangements for the *Yatra*.

The weather forecasting reports — this was asked about — were obtained by the State Government on a daily basis from the Indian Air Force station at Avantipura. This is the only weather forecasting unit or station in that area which operates from the Indian Air Force station at Avantipura. From there the reports have to be obtained. On 22nd itself at 9.00 a.m., orders were issued by the Director of Tourism who is camping at Pahalgam not to allow the pilgrims to go forward from the respective camps which they had reached. These instructions were repeated in the afternoon of the same day, that is, 22nd by the Deputy Commissioner, Anantnag who is designated as the Chief *Yatra* Officer.

Requisition of Air Force helicopters — this was also asked about was made on the 22nd itself when reports were first

received about heavy snowfall taking place on the upper reaches. However, aircrafts could not take off on the 22nd due to bad weather. Efforts were made by the Advisor on 22nd and 23rd to reach various camp sites by helicopter.

He could not do so because the helicopters could not take off. There is a trouble with the helicopter at the time of fuelling or refuelling that even if a few drops of water gets into it, I believe - I am not an expert on it; and this is what I was told by helicopter people - the whole thing is to be called off. On 24th August, the Advisor reached Panchtarni but could not land due to bad weather. He, however, landed at Pahalgam and reviewed the rescue arrangements. On 24th itself, most of the *yatris*, were shifted by road from the higher altitudes to the base camp at Pahalgam. On 24th August, the airborne relief operations were started. On 25th, 26th and 27th August, the concentration of the Administration was to clear the road blocks and to move the stranded pilgrims back to their homes. The retrieval of dead bodies from various upper reaches took time and every effort was made to recover all the dead bodies. These are the things relating to the sequence of events.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: Hon. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, with a heavy heart, we share the concern which has been expressed by the various parties in this Parliament. After the intervention of the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Home Minister, we have today gathered here to discuss the tragedy which has costed, according to the hon. Home Minister, 194 lives. He also mentioned during his speech now that he is assuming - God forbid - that some more dead bodies may be traced out during the next few days. This is the reason for which, before I started, I requested the hon. Home Minister to share with the House any information that he has with him regarding this incident.

From our party side we share the concern of this august House and the nation, I would mention that we are not here to pinpoint towards any individual, or for that reason to the Central Government, that this incident has happened because of the mistake committed someone. But we strongly feel that the tragedy that has happened, could have been avoided had there been more alertness on the part of the State Government, their officials and the hierarchy in the Jammu Administration *i.e.* the Governor, the Chief Secretary and the Advisor to the Governor. When this august House, irrespective of any party, tries to point out to the Government the information that has reached us, the Government, we have seen that day, gets a bit annoyed. Today it is proved beyond doubt. This is one of the points I wanted to raise. But I am grateful to the hon. Home Minister who has explained that on 22nd and 24th August the weather was very bad. In the past two days, before the Prime Minister and Shri Indrajit Gupta shared their information with us, they could not explain why the Advisor to the Governor, Shri Saklani reached there on 24th August. Today he has explained that efforts were made, but since the weather was bad, he could not land at the spot and went to Pahalgam.

Now, the Prime Minister has informed the House about the efforts that has been made by this Government that they have increased the number of tents, shelters and other things. He has also informed that his Government has done wonderful job. Well, whether or not they have done a wonderful job, but it has cost life of 194 people. I agree with the Prime Minister and the Home Minister that one cannot foresee the vagaries of the nature. The Prime Minister has explained that there was bad weather, heavy rains, snow fall, land slides and flooding of the roads. It was unprecedented what has happened. I know a little bit about the crisis management as I had the opportunity to work with the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Tourism as well as Ministry of Home Affairs. I had the opportunity to visit Siachin which is also in Kashmir. Here the altitude is 12,000 feet and in Siachin it is double that figure. The Army has got all the expertise with them to live with that type of temperature, namely, zero and minus degree atmosphere. Now, the other day, the Prime Minister had laid a statement which has been circulated as dos and don'ts, for the *yatris* of Shri Amarnath. In all the seven dos and five don'ts, there is no mention other than taking blanket and windcheater — that the situation may deteriorate to such a level that you may not be able to go forward and that you have to be careful about the weather. Fourteen thousand blankets were given and the Prime Minister said that 1,25,000 *yatris* had gone there. I would like to request the hon. Home Minister will you please let the House know what was the system for making sure that those 1,25,000 has gone with their tents, blankets, windcheaters and other materials. They were just saying that we have done it. Under what circumstances were you convinced? As per the newspaper reports in Delhi, these dos and don'ts state that children below the age of 12 years are not allowed. How many children were allowed to go? Who allowed them to go? I do not know whether the newspaper report is correct or not. You may not say it today but in future you have to verify where the lacuna on the part of the administration is and who allowed the children to go.

Now, the Prime Minister has said that contact was lost. My friend, Shri Rajesh Pilot has said the other day that in today's scientific age, it is difficult to believe that wireless system collapsed there. If you say, 'it has collapsed', it will not be easy for us to believe. Again I quote from today's newspaper that most of the pilgrims, after returning from the *yatra*, have narrated horried tales of miseries faced by them. They are not sorry for not having *darshan* of Shiva but they are happy to have come back safely and had they not kept on moving, it would have been their *samsadhi* there. According to them the death toll is likely to be 234. They further said that it is the porters who told them not to move up and not to go further because weather was going to be bad in the next 24 hours. From their experience they warned them. Those pilgrims who were not fanatic to go and reach the spot, took the counsel of these porters. They evacuated and saved themselves.

You just see. I am not blaming. But according to this newspaper, 'The Indian Express' front page — if somebody

challenges, I have kept the newspaper with me and you have also admitted to a certain extent in your speech — Rs. 15 was a cup of tea and Rs. 50 the cost of a breakfast, *roti* or something like that. As against that, you have said that "We have taken appropriate action to keep enough rice, wheat and other materials." Who was running this *Lungar Khana*? Was it sufficient for 1,25,000 people? Non-government sources say two lakh people have gone. I do not want to go into that. I would like to know why someone has not taken care. Now you have explained to us that on those fateful days, 21st and 22nd, you were in Kashmir. You went there to supervise the election arrangement and you also wanted to know about the Amarnath *Yatra*. You and the Home Secretary were there. It is very good. If your statement is correct, before you left, did you get the information of bad weather and the warning that had been sent to the Pahalgam Administration "Come back. Do not go further? If so, after coming back, what has your Home Secretary done? Why were the Governor and the Chief secretary not sent back immediately? What action has been taken after they went back? All these questions are not to pinpoint for anyone to be punished. I am raising all these points because Amarnath Cave is a historical and religious monument. In future also, people will have to go there and we have to learn from the mistake of today so that this does not repeat in future. This is my main submission. I am not trying to say that punish this one or that one. I will come to that afterwards.

A Sadhu has written a very very small item but a very valid item. He said that *yatras* are mainly done by people who are 50 years of age and above. Whatever arrangement has to be made in a *yatra* like this, Government fail to do. You were yourself there and you have seen people who were incapable of trekking that terrain. In that respect, I must congratulate my friend Shri Jagmohanji who is sitting here. I was then Minister of State for Home. Complaints came against him that he took over *Vaishno Devi*. I went there being sent by my Prime Minister then. I did not inform him that I went there. I visited the site. I saw the arrangements he wanted to do. I do not want to say but there was a caucus there. They used to earn money and spend that money for the villagers, not for you. I came back and submitted report. The intention with which he was doing was good. But time would spell out whether it is good. After three months when I visited, he was on the verge of going out. He did a very good job there. The other day Shri Biju Patnaikji gave a suggestion to try to improve the road and the arrangements on the road to Amarnath. I do not know whether he is participating. I think he should throw light. I think it is possible to do that improvement for future. It is needed. Come to Kamakhya. Twenty years ago, you could not have climbed that place. Today you can climb very easily.

Today very easily, you can climb. So, let us also, in this House today, take a decision on that it should not be the duty of the Kashmir Government alone to do this job. The Central Government, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Finance should take the responsibility for improving the facili-

ties and should take steps to correct what has happened. The Ministry of Defence should be involved in this task.

It is very surprising and it is very shocking to know about one thing. In the statements of the Home Minister and the Prime Minister, there is no mention of the local people who have done a wonderful job. They praised the Parliamentary Forces, very rightly. They have praised the Defence Forces, very rightly. But read the Calcutta newspapers. How many newspapers do you, Mr. Home Minister, read? Now, you have to tell me about it.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE: There is no time answering all these things.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: This is my habit.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE: He wants to poke his nose in West Bengal.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: The Calcutta newspapers have written that unless the villagers, the Kashmiri people and the porters had helped, there would have been more than 1000 deaths. In this House, today we must admit that the public have risen to the occasion and we should have a word of thanks to them.

I now come to my friends from the BJP. Their basic information is more than anybody's. I agree to that...*(Interruptions)* But I cannot agree with them. You want to take advantage of it and pinpoint that the Government is at fault. You want to move an Adjournment Motion. What happened to your Joshiji when he took a vow that he would go to Kashmir and raise the National Flag? It was a very good venture. At that time, our Government did not object to that. But could he reach there? The weather was against him. It was not his intention....*(Interruptions)*

SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA (Outer Delhi): He reached there. I was there. We hoisted the Flag at Lal Chowk.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: You are right. I am not saying that you had not hoisted the Flag. I am saying that weather in the month of August in Jammu and Kashmir region is always bad. Even your *Yatra* was affected.

SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA: In spite of that weather, we reached there.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: You reached there. I am not saying that you have not done a good job. What I was telling was that you had yourself experienced the bad weather there in August. I am only saying that aspect. I am not saying that your intention was bad. I am not saying that you could not reach there. But you wanted to go by helicopter. You wanted to go by air for the *Yatra*.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI T.R. BALU): Shri Sontosh Mohan Devji, he was airlifted.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: Yes, he was airlifted. You are saying that the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and the others are responsible for this. What happened to your *kar seva*? Thousands of people went there for a good cause. Let me tell it. You can answer later.

SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA: Sontosh Mohan Devji, if the road had not been broken, we would have gone there. The road was not there. Therefore, we went by flight. But we were determined to reach there....(Interruptions)

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: Sharmaji, I am trying to raise the point that the climate there in August is always bad.

SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA: I agree. But in spite of that weather, a good work can be done.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: My point is that the weather in the month of August was also bad. It stopped them from going there through their normal route. They were airlifted. Coming to my point, because of this weather, this has happened. I want to draw an analogy and a conclusion from this. I would request the senior leader and Home Minister to kindly take this into consideration for future Amarnath Yatra.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE: You control the number of pilgrims.

15.00 hrs.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: I do not know that particular thing. One thing is there. A man who does not believe in pilgrimages went half the way to Amarnath.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: Not half the way, only six kilometres from there.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: One of the officers said that it was intentional on his part. He said something like that. You deny it. But you did that. Why did you do that? It was for pilgrimage.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (Bolpur): He was praying to be saved from Shri Sontosh Mohan Dev....(Interruptions)

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: Killing of people in a religious function like this is not done by any individual. It was because of nature. And nature is beyond anybody's control. Indrajitji, I am standing here and speaking from a seat which was your traditional seat. Had you been here, what would you have said?

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE: 'Most inefficient Government.'

15.01 hrs.

[SHRI CHITTA BASU *in the Chair*]

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: I am grateful that another co-partner is saying this.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: It is a part of the game.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: The BJP member from Jammu is not here. He had raised a point: What was the function of the control room? You have not answered to that. How many control rooms were opened? What Jaswant Singhji said that day, that has come in today's newspapers. Even today you have given figures about the number of persons dead, number of persons buried, number of persons cremated and the number of persons air lifted. What will happen to those who were buried or cremated without their identification being made? I would like to know about that. There is a system about it, you had mentioned in your speech also, and I will request you, as the Home Minister, to take care of that. All those persons who have not been identified, all the information about their photographs, their body identification, should be kept by the administration there. That is because when a claim is made, someone like Shri Somnath Chatterjee should not make money by appearing before the Supreme Court and fighting out a case. You kindly take this into consideration. There is a system to deal with the natural calamities. Kindly keep a track of that.

I have been told by an Army friend of mine that the length of the route is 45 kilometres and the highest altitude at any point is 12,000 feet. And at that altitude of 12,000 feet, you will invariably get the problem of respiration. I am the sufferer. As the Tourism Minister, I had visited Amarnath along with my wife. I went on a pony back.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE: Did that pony survive!

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: Survived. What I would like to say is at that time, from the Tourism Ministry we offered to the Kashmir Government to have more *Yatri Niwas* on the route. The Tourism Ministry has got a scheme of making *Yatri Niwas*. But the argument given by the State Government was, "this Amarnath Yatra comes once in a way. What will happen to these *Yatri Niwas* of the Tourism Ministry?" If you have better roads, better facilities, it can be utilised for tourism purposes. This *Shiv Linga* cannot be seen always. This *Shiv Linga* gets formed only once. You do not know religion. It comes only once, unlike other *Lingas*, then it fades away and again it appears. Kindly take some steps. I do not want to speak for long.

I want to say one point. Your Government has taken all the credit for it. Probably you have forgotten that last time when the Amarnath Yatra was due, at that time, the terrorists

had given a threatening call. But our Government had accepted the challenge with the cooperation of all.

Not a single killing took place. When Shri Bal Thackeray gave a warning from Bombay that 'if one Amar Nath Yatri is killed, I will not allow any Muslim to go to Mecca from Bombay', we accepted that challenge also. And, nothing had happened. Shri Bal Thackeray had not done anything. But we accepted that challenge.

Sir, the Prime Minister is taking credit for everything. But who has to take the discredit for all that happened—neither Shri Indrajit Gupta nor the Home Secretary nor Shri Deve Gowda? We wanted magisterial inquiry. The culprits are the Governor, the Chief Secretary and the Adviser to the Governor. Is it possible for a magistrate to go and tell, 'Krishna Raoji, you are wrong'? No.

You have got two options. One option is, you kindly have a judicial inquiry. If you feel that judicial inquiry is not possible—you are interested to make JPC for Telecommunication — you make a Committee of Parliament. After the 13th, let that Committee go and visit all the areas, speak to the local people, speak to the officials. After three to five days, let that Committee submit its Report. Do not leave it like that. What has happened is very serious. What has happened is very grievous and what is happening in other pilgrimages is also bad. In India's religious psychology and philosophy, you cannot neglect the religious places. You have to take care.

Your Government might be supported by the CPI and CPI(M) but do not forget that it is supported by Congress (I) also. And, we want all the religious places to be protected because if the destruction takes place in the religious places, the obstruction takes place from the BJP. Let us not give that chance to them. Their apathy is correct and they should not be overruled. Whatever point has been raised by all of us, the Government should put their heads into it, try to take a lesson from it. I am repeatedly saying this.

I am not here to blame the Prime Minister. I am not here to blame the Home Minister on this issue. Everyday he gives enough point to criticize him. But on this point I will not criticize him. But I would appeal, let us put our heads together in spite of criticizing anybody and let us send a message that we, in future, will see that for the fault of the Nature, if there is any calamity, we in the 21st Century overcome this. And that can be done. That could have happened but it could not be.

What Shri Indrajit Gupta has said, was very correct and I also take note on it that 13 deaths were natural deaths as some elderly people died out of disease and other things. That may take place, I agree.

Sir, with these words, I will request the Home Minister and the Prime Minister, that those villagers and organizations who have done well, should be encouraged by giving some sort of rewards to them — not by cash but by building some community halls in their area. That is also written by *The Times of India* or other some other newspapers that if you

cannot make all these villages under IRDP, DRDA scheme, make for them some community hall. In future, in normal times they can utilize it for their functions and in some emergency times this can be utilized by the Government. For example, in Assam in flood-affected areas, our late lamented Shri Dev Kant Barua always used to give additional schools. He said that it would not only create an additional educated youth but it will also be of great help to be used as the flood relief camps for the flood-affected people because the Government may not have money. That was his idea.

Sir, with these words, I thank you for giving me a chance to speak. And as I said, I would expect Indrajit Guptaji, you take many decisions on your own without Cabinet, but today please give us a decision.

I might criticise you, but I feel happy that you are the first Minister of Home Affairs from the State of West Bengal. Secondly, I feel happy that I am in safe hands as you are a much more senior Member. Also, I am more happy that you have kept Shri Somnath Chatterjee out of the Government.

The Prime Minister has increased the quantum of money, but the beneficiaries should get the money. When the identification of those who have been cremated is made without tracing the relatives, a proper chart should be prepared and the people should immediately get the certificates. There should not be any corruption involved in that.

With these words, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to move this issue under Rule 193.

[Translation]

SHRI KISHAN LAL SHARMA (Outer Delhi) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, today we are discussing a very tragic incident in this House. We have before us the statement made by the Home Minister yesterday. My main objection is that the statement is not in conformity with such a big tragedy. It lacks terminology and the sentiments. On the other hand if some body goes through this statement, he would feel that it has hurt the sentiments of crores of people of our country. Instead of consoling the people it shows indifference with which the government has taken it.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I want to say with full responsibility that this tragedy has been termed as natural calamity and not a word has been said about the failure of Administration in the statement. It means that had it been possible for them, they would have court martialled Indira Dev on interrogated him as if the administration is not at fault at all. When Home Minister visited that place, he met one pilgrim, he made a complaint which has been incorporated on page 5 of the statement:

[English]

"At Pahalgam, one 'Yatri' complained of attempts by private shopkeepers to overcharge for food items." That means

he came across only one pilgrim, who complained to him. An effort has been made to minimise the incident. I am pointing out from the terminology of the statement. I would like the Home Minister to tell us whether he came across only one person during his visit, who complained to him. Shri Sontosh Mohan Dev was just now pointing out that people got a cup of tea for Rs. 15/-. I want to know whether none other pilgrims met him and whether only one person complained to him?

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, second objectionable thing is that it has been stated in the concluding paragraph that:—

'Although some minor lacunae in the arrangement could be seen.' This is the only indictment of the Administration, and I was astonished to read Hindi translation of the statement, I do not know who has translated it. The terminology used in Hindi version is such that I was amazed and I felt it very much. The Home Minister says that there were some minor errors of omission and commission on the part of the administration. What is meant by minor errors? Please let us know. ...*(Interruptions)*

Sir, you also know that it means negligible of which no notice need be taken. ...*(interruptions)* Sir, last year 70 thousand people visited the shrine and this time it was expected that number would be more. Now the first question is that whether arrangements were made in accordance with expected number of pilgrims. Bad weather is altogether a different aspect. The Home Minister has told during his tour that he visited base camp of the army in Pahalgam. Pahalgam is a standing point where pilgrims assemble in good number.

SHRI SHIV RAJ SINGH : Whether Home Minister is listening or sleeping.

SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA : He is listening. I can see. ...*(Interruptions)* This Yatra starts from Pahalgam. He has commented on certain arrangements made at Pahalgam. I would like to ask him whether any arrangements were made at other places like Chandanvadi, Sheshnag, Panchtarni and in between sacred cave? Whether there were any camps for medical aid? You can correct me. There were only 1000 tents and 8 persons can stay in a tent, which means that there was arrangement for 8000 people whereas lakhs of people were expected to visit the shrine. Complete details should have been given in the statement e.g. number of tents, other arrangements and number of vehicles etc.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA : All these figures have been given in the statement.

SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA : It would be better if you provide these figures. According to my knowledge, the arrangements made were for less than the expected number of pilgrims. If you do not take this factor seriously and give clean chit to the administration then in future also proper arrangements would not be made and such tragedies will continue to occur. These were two negative aspects this time: One aspect was weather and the other was terrorism. Shri Sontosh

Mohan Dev was telling me that all of us know about the uncertainty of season in the month of August, but Government should know better. Should we presume that all arrangements were complete in all the camps keeping in view the vagaries of weather and terrorism.

You have rightly pointed out that Genl. Saklani did not reach there. But had he been there, what could he do? In the absence of any arrangement, what could be do? Had there been some arrangements, he could streamline them, monitor them or do something else. I am astonished to observe that even in the event of this enormous tragedy, our Prime Minister was busy in touring Uttar Pradesh. The Home Minister went there on 26th when session was to commence. He did not go there earlier. The Governor of the State visited on the 25th. He was also in Delhi. Genl. D.D. Saklani reached there on 24th. Now I want to say one thing that elections in Jammu and Kashmir will take place soon but at present the State is under President's rule. It is governed by the Centre. I want to ask whether keeping in view the importance of Amar Nath Yatra, Central Government had no responsibility whatsoever? Whether everything was left to the State administration and Central Government had no role to play in making various arrangements. In so far as State administration is concerned, General D.D. Saklani, Deputy Commissioner of Anantnag, Governor and rest of the paraphernalia were camping in Delhi. There were only two persons to look after the arrangements. No doubt terrorism exist there, weather uncertainty was also there but then Amar Nath Yatra is also very important event takes place once a year. If something happens during this Yatra, possibility of its reaction is bound to be there throughout the country. What was the role of the centre in this Yatra? Had they done their job? Had the Home Minister or some one else visited and supervised the arrangements? The Yatra was to commence on 16th August. Whether Central Government took over some responsibility? During such events, Kumbh, Yatras etc. several arrangements are to be made, various centres and central rooms are set up. The Central room was in Srinagar. Whether any contact was established between the central room at Pahalgam with Delhi? Whether the Central room had some contact with State administration in Jammu and Srinagar? Had some monitoring arrangement made for this Yatra in the Ministry of Home Affairs, whereas the issue was very sensitive? I feel that the aspect of failure on the part of the administration has not found its place in the statement. We have no control over natural calamity. We have to bow and bear what has happened. But besides this aspect if we shall try to ignore the failure on the part of the administration then they will not do their party of duty in future also. I would like that the Governor should be asked to explain as to only was he camping in Delhi at such a time. It was said earlier that guilty officers would be punished but it appears from the statement that the Government is not inclined to do so and retracing this step. They want to shield them now. It will be a great injustice if such a decision is taken.

The hon'ble Home Minister has given some information today. He has confirmed that number of persons killed in the

incident can further rise. According to our information this number has already reached upto 234 and can go upto 400. He has said that search parties have already left for the job. Let them do their job expeditiously so that correct position is furnished to all concerned. There should not be any delay. In case you have found some loopholes, please let us know about them.

The hon'ble Prime Minister, while making a statement here, had said that the Home Minister has gone there on the spot and when he would come, we will have some additional information. We are very much disappointed after going through both the statements, because Home Minister has repeated the same thing which the Prime Minister had stated without visiting the spot. There is not significant addition which Home Minister might have seen there. I feel, it is not correct. It has been taken as the will of God. I do not know but it has been said that there was an alternative route from Pahalgam to Baltal. I want to know whether permission was given to the pilgrims to use that route and whether necessary facilities were available along that route had some tragedy occurred on that route. Atleast some arrangements must have been made, security personnel must have been deployed on the determined route. I want to know whether any such arrangements were made on the alternative route? On the pilgrims were allowed to go from any route and it was left to them. No body bothered whether some one has reached safe or not. It was not proper to allow the people like that.

Second thing is that it has been stated that 19 bodies were cremated because they could not be identified. I think, no effort was made to get them identified. Had you shown photographs of those bodies over television, some bodies might have been identified by the people. Some people might have reached there but no such effort was made. The Home Minister has said today that their photographs have been taken but if none of their hair would come forward, they will be cremated. I mean to say that why photographs are not shown on television. If some of them could be identified by their relatives they can go there and claim the bodies. But no such arrangements or efforts have been made. No announcement has been made that Government is in possession of photographs of certain people and if their relatives could identify them they can claim the bodies. I had suggested on the very first day that a team of opposition parties or all parties should visit the spot. Today our leader Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee alongwith our another colleague have gone there. On their return, the facts will be placed before the House.

Now, in my opinion, if any inquiry into this incident is to be conducted, it should be a judicial inquiry under the Commission of Inquiries Act otherwise people would not be satisfied and no body will believe it.

I would like to point out another thing. Some people might say such statements are politically motivated. An adjournment motion can be termed as politically motivated, but I want to

say that in so far as Kashmir is concerned, we have always treated it as a national issue and till date all the matters raised regarding Kashmir whether at international fora or in the House, all the parties have extended full cooperation to the Government. We have given our testimony, have conveyed this message to Pakistan and the world too that on the question of Jammu and Kashmir, the entire country stands united. But for the people who have sacrificed their lives, who have suffered and who have been struggling for it, if it is said that these things are being said to take any political advantage then it pinches. We do not want to take sermons for such people who themselves play political games in every sphere and advise others not to make it a political issue. This is not proper.

I want to say that Amar Nath is a sacred place and is a resemblance of our national unity and integrity. The people came here to offer 'jal' from West upto Rameshwaram. The people from North, South, East and West go there and it is a resemblance not only of our national unity and integrity but of our cultural unity also. All the people cooperate in such things. Such insensibility with regard to these matters cannot be appreciated. In spite of challenge thrown by terrorists, people from all corners of the country reached there at the risk of their lives to take part in the Yatra. They could have been killed by terrorists also. The Government should not take it as an ordinary thing, it would not be proper. An inquiry must be held. We cannot term the errors committed as insignificant. This is not simple natural calamity, it is failure of the administration which cannot be excused. I thought the Government would express some sort of regret, pain or grief in the statement that they have been aggrieved, or they have been hurt, but not a single word has been mentioned in the statement made by them. So can I hope that our Prime Minister and Home Minister would inhesitatingly ask the nation to forgive them for the inadequacies during Amar Nath Yatra and in future foolproof arrangements would be made during such events. In case Government behaves like this, I think people would appreciate it but they cannot show that much magnanimity.

I feel even today that Government should think seriously. Amar Nath Yatra is not an insignificant event. These errors and inadequacies are not ordinary one. They are of criminal nature. If no action is taken against the guilty persons of the administration, then justice will not be done to the people. The Centre as well as the State administration must own their responsibilities. They should ask the nation to forgive them, earlier the better.

Inquiry must take place and guilty persons must be awarded punishment. Main thing is that in future such tragedies should not recur. Irrespective of bad weather proper arrangements should be made in all the camps, people should be given medical relief and other assistance they require during the Yatra. The number of pilgrims can increase further. The Government should not presume that because of this tragedy less people would come next year. There will be more

pilgrims next time. They will come with greater devotion. We should all sit together, irrespective of party affiliations and discuss the manner in which we can make best arrangements for the next occasion. It can be done only if we punish the guilty and remove the inadequacies. An inquiry must be held and Government should go to people's court and ask to be pardoned.

[English]

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Mr. Chairman, Sir, we are discussing what I must describe as a human tragedy of great proportions.

At the outset, I wish to convey my sincere sympathies to the members of the families of those who have lost their lives and also those who have suffered in the course of this Yatra.

Sir, I had earlier said that this is an issue which should not be politicised but which should not be ignored either. It is a tragic event. Any unnatural death of any citizen of this country has to be mourned and when so many people have died — they had assembled there not for any antinational activity, but they suffered - it is a matter obviously the House has to take note of seriously and try to find out how in future we could adopt measures so that it would not result in the repetition of such unfortunate events.

Sir, so far, I have been able to get information from the materials that have been made available to us. So far as Shri Sharmaji is concerned, he has not challenged the veracity of the statements made by the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Home Minister. What he has said is that it shows that there have been lacunae or there have been failures or proper attention has not been paid to certain aspects. But so far as the veracity of the statements is concerned that has not been challenged. Therefore, we have to participate in the discussion on the basis of the materials that have been given by the Government and are considered to be correct.

Sir, we all know that these are hazardous journeys. I had the occasion to go to Kedarnath and Badrinath some 34 years ago when there were no roads there. But people used to go in huge numbers. Obviously, people do take certain risks and, as it is, the older people who go on such journeys run a greater risk with lesser and lesser availability of oxygen in the high altitudes and narrow roads where it is difficult to negotiate for even one person in certain areas. But still there are people who are going there. I appreciate that. Some are going there for religious purposes, many others might be going there for participating in what is termed as a national event. I am prepared to accept it as an event of harmony and an event of national solidarity because scores of people from all over the country assemble together in one place. I remember, people make very good friends during these journeys which are spread over quite a few days.

Sir, the question that really arises in my mind is that if this tragedy would have happened without the fury of the

nature, this time it has been on account of nature's fury, then certainly I would have personally preferred that arrangements for this type of journeys should be done by some sort of a Trust or a body like what is there is Vaishno Devi, I am told. I do not know if there is any such organisation in Amarnath or not. There is one such organisation in Kedarnath and Badrinath which is tandem with the Government provide facilities and look after the pilgrims and even many of the *dharamsalas* are run and managed by them. But if there was no such deterioration in the weather conditions, would such a tragic event have happened? The point is that we cannot minimise the importance of the weather conditions — in case of a bad weather when there was non-stop rain in that terrain for two days resulting in landslides and making negotiation on whatever roads are there, if we could call them roads at all, impossible. Therefore, risk has to be taken. That does not mean that I am exonerating anybody. I am not exonerating anybody. Could we say that there had been negligence of some kind and there had been failures of some kind in taking appropriate steps? That we have not known. It is very easy to be wiser after such a tragic event.

In the earlier days, I think nobody could have imagined that the Home Minister of India, with the help of helicopter, could get down at Panchtarni itself. Nowadays even pilots can take that risk. Unfortunately, the situation that suddenly developed there made it very difficult to tackle things in the way one would have liked to. I am sure everybody in India would have liked to give all protection and all facilities to all the 'yatis'. There is no doubt about it. The question that really has to be considered is, whether we should have some machinery to tackle such a crisis situation. What is the crisis management facility available with us? It is a crisis of great magnitude which came up suddenly. In such circumstances what sort of crisis management system do we have? There had been no proper appreciation of the worst that may happen when such pilgrimages are taking place in a difficult terrain.

Therefore, I must express any annoyance and criticise the absence of both the Governor and the Chief Secretary on the relevant date. Of course, they would not have gone personally and rescued the people but the presence of the head of the local or State Administration gives confidence to the people. He could direct or advise others. Both of them should have gone back immediately. I find fault with them on this score. Whatever urgent work they might have in Delhi, they should have rushed back even on 24th or 25th and should have personally tried to take part in the rescue or the relief operation.

Apart from this negligence on the part of the topmost officials of the local State Government, there has been contribution of the people who assembled there in such a great number. It is very easy to be little do's and don'ts but they have some relevance. The Government is giving advance warnings to these people to keep in mind certain things which are the must. We necessarily take some risk in going to that area in such a situation. In one breath we say that the Government did not warn the people about the weather. I

would ask whether the instructions regarding do's and don'ts— whoever issues them — were followed seriously or not. It seems some sort of a feeling of participation, attachment to the objective, namely seeing the deity on a particular date, so far as Amarnath Yatra is concerned, is the uppermost in people's mind. Many of the warnings that are given rightly, duly and legitimately, like we must carry adequate blankets or adequate ordinary medicine, food, etc., are not being scrupulously complied with. Had they been complied with, many people would have been saved. We should create an atmosphere where everybody should be welcomed to go there.

Naturally, people would go there on their own. Nobody is compelling anybody to go there. But those who go there should be aware of certain uncertainties and certain risks. They should try to follow the suggested do's and don'ts, and they should try and cooperate with the Government.

I do not know if anybody has suggested that there should have been a control on the numbers. At one place in the statement of the hon. Home Minister, it was mentioned that at Jammu, a request was made by some authorities not to go beyond a certain area as it is risky. I do not know whether that was heeded to. The point is, how can you control the number of people going there? Can you stop people from going there? Apart from the facts that it is the fundamental right of a citizen of India to go anywhere he likes in India, these are occasions which attract people. Therefore, what is the good of saying "you should have anticipated 50 to 60 per cent sudden increase this year"? I do not wish to say that I am exonerating anybody who is responsible for taking the steps but the question is we must adopt a practical attitude and see whether what should have been done was done or not.

The hon. Prime Minister has said that the nature's fury was of unprecedented magnitude. In such an event, how to control the situation, whether adequate number of trains are provided or not, all such things have to be considered. Probably in future, they would be more wise and will take additional steps to cover the numbers that might be expected.

We must convey our sincere thanks to the local population in many of these places for extending a helping hand. I have read in the editorials of quite a few newspapers that probably the administration was more concerned with providing security to the pilgrims. It was said that probably because of the last year's warning, security was uppermost in their mind. It was their duty to see that not a single death occurs from any anti-national or terrorist activity. Probably that was the reason why so much emphasis was laid on the security aspect. May be it was felt that the *yatris* will look after themselves and the managers will take care of them. They had apparently not realised that a little better or improved security position there would attract more and more people.

Here the role of the local people has been enormous as I found from various people. It is good of the Prime Minister that he said:

"All the arrangements were further strengthened by the wholehearted cooperation of the local employees and participation by all sections of the local population who provided various services for the *yatra* which was a particularly heartening feature of this year's *yatra*."

From 16th it went on eventlessly until 21st of August when the tragedy stuck."

Sir, as I said, the terrain is very difficult in this area. There is a proposal for laying direct and better roads. The expertise of the Border Roads Organisation can be utilised for this purpose.

15.49 hrs.

[PROF. RITA VERMA *in the Chair*]

I do not know how long Shri Sontosh Mohan Dev remained the Tourism Minister. Once I invited him to Bolpur when he was the Tourism Minister. I had arranged for a good reception with garlands. But the day he was to go there, he suddenly became the Minister of Communications. I asked him, "What do you know of communications except that you are running the Government which specialises in non-functional telephones?" This is a good idea. He could not translate anything, any good thing. But at least sometimes he gives good ideas.

Madam, I am sure you have been there, in that area also. I might not have gone to Amarnath my wife criticizes me all the time. Now being an old doddering man, I cannot possibly venture to go there.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA : Do not try to go. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (Bolpur): No. (*Interruptions*) The question is that maybe we can utilize these areas for tourism purposes also. There can be improvement of the area; people will be attracted if more facility like road etc. is available; also places to stay to facilitate these *Yatris*. Therefore, this is a good suggestion. Of course, these are on long-term basis suggestions. What I respectfully submit is that I do not agree with what Swami Agnivesh has said. He has said certain things. I will not say on that. But we have seen in many of these religious places where pilgrims gather, such incidents of different magnitude have occurred. Recently in Haridwar it was there; in Ujjain it was there; (*Interruptions*) Sagar *mela*, Kumbh *mela* and some other *melas*; (*Interruptions*) Rath *Yatra*... (*Interruptions*) Why am I mentioning? I am not belittling. I fully respect the sentiments of people who gather in those places. The only thing is that sometimes situation becomes such that these types of tragedies have occurred. How to solve this? When I say do not politicize—I said

that these are matters which everybody should think together and give suggestion so that such events do not occur. It may be Haridwar or Ujjain or Amarnath or anywhere also. These are probably too frequent in our country. Religion unfortunately is used for political purposes. Religion has importance in the country. Nobody is denying it. Yes, we have seen that religion has importance so long as it is not used for politics. Therefore, these are matters which should be looked into for having a little long time solution.

Therefore, I submit that if this hon. House feels that there should be an inquiry to go into such an aspect, where still there are grey areas, well, we would not stand in the way of an inquiry. Let that inquiry take place. But the question is what sort of an inquiry. Let there be a consensus. I would request the hon. Speaker to call a meeting, if necessary. I am not insisting on any inquiry. If there is an inquiry we will not object to it.

But, Madam, kindly see at what depth human beings can also go. We are extolling the activities of some people, local people there who have extended help. In today's paper—it is very moving—some statements have appeared in the newspaper, I do not know if they are correct, they say about the warm reception they received. Even the houses of local people who were suspected to be militants have shown hospitality. Newspapers have said about how hospitable they were. Even the security people were finding, were apprehensive about what will happen to some of the pilgrims. But they took the risk. They accepted the invitation of the people. They went inside those houses; stayed overnight also. They received an excellent human behaviour; a great hospitality.

This is the aspect which we wish to cherish. But, at the same time, we find that there were people who were increasing the prices of goods by indulging in blackmarketing and other activities which were creating problems for the people. Naturally, the administration has to be very strict with regard to these activities which I call anti-national activities.

Madam, on behalf of my Comrades here and on my own behalf I again express my sincere sorrow. I hope that such occasions will not arise in future when this House has to discuss a national tragedy of this magnitude and that ways will be found out by having a dispassionate discussion of looking into this matter.

One problem I wish to mention, which Shri Dasmuni has also mentioned, is the telephone calls which are coming from different places enquiring about the whereabouts of people. We have also received several telephone calls. Two Members of Parliament belonging to our Party have also gone there. The West Bengal Government have sent an officer, and others also have sent their officers of the rank of DIG there. Although they have been given certain facilities yet it is obvious that they cannot go all the way to search them. So, some sort of better mechanism to inform the people as to who is traceable and who is not traceable should be there. I

know if suddenly something happens at one place where so many people are there, it is not easy to contact them. But we must understand the anxiety of the relatives, their friends and their families. When such tragedies strike, it becomes so acute that everybody starts making enquiries. So, if a better information system is developed in future, that will definitely allay the fears and misgivings of the people. Unfortunately, 194 people have lost their lives. I am sorry that the security people, poor porters and ponywallahs have also lost their lives. Even before the rain started, thirteen pilgrims had lost their lives. When the news of 160 deaths came, everybody started worrying.

So, I again suggest that, at least, in future a better information system should be developed whenever there are such congregations. We must also lay guidelines for dealing with crisis situation, and as to how to manage a crisis. We must learn from experience in order to perform better in future. Let us hope such occasions will not arise.

I again convey my deepest sympathies to everybody, to the members of the bereaved families, and also to those who have suffered a great deal. I hope out of this discussion something concrete will arise which will help in solving this problem.

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE (Panskura): I thank you Madam, for giving me this opportunity to speak.

First of all, I extend my heartfelt sympathies to those *yatris*, ponywallahs and security people who met with accidental deaths, and I also extend my sympathies to those who are still lying in hospitals in an injured state.

When Shri Sontosh Mohan Dev was moving his Motion, he took it for granted, probably, that all Communists are atheists.

16.00 hrs.

Of course, I do not mind but for his information, let me tell him that it is not so. I know one of the most dedicated Communist leader sister who would not do anything before she could offer *puja*. But that would not deter her from being one of the most dedicated communists. I am saying that let us take it from any angle and not from that kind of angle. In his party also, I believe, there are atheists.

Here the question is not of religion. The question is, as I understand, of human problems that arose during this *yatra* because of this sudden and extremely inclement weather in a very difficult terrain.

I have been to Pahalgam but not to Amarnath. It is a difficult terrain and in such a situation surely, it is very difficulty to tackle. So, from that point of view, as things have appeared in the Press and just now have been referred to by my hon. colleague, Shri Somnath Chatterjee—I do not want to repeat them—there are stories of great sympathies of local

people as well as there are some stories of very bad behaviour. That is the human nature. We have to encourage the first and discourage the second in every possible way.

Here, I also feel that while this was a very unprecedented situation and it was very difficult to tackle, why the Governor and the Home Secretary could not rush. I am sure, the Government will inquire into it and such practice should surely be discouraged. I hope, proper explanation should be called from them. At the same time, those who rendered such great services should also be encouraged. We should not forget that compared to the huge crowd, the number of deaths could have been much more. Thank goodness, that it did not go to such an extent. But undoubtedly, this could not happen because they got help from various quarters including our *Jāwāns*, the local people and the administration over there.

Now, I would also like to raise this point, as Shri Somnath Chatterjee has raised it, that undoubtedly these religious functions give rise to great emotions and all that. But now and then, through this way or that way, big accidents have taken place, such as, stampede in *Kumbh-mela* etc. The question is how really can we prevent these mishaps? Can we find certain methods by taking precautions, etc. whereby if we cannot stop, at least we can reduce the possibility of any such happening? This should be the duty of all, particularly those who are connected with religious functions, to take necessary steps in this regard. We should seriously think over as to what kind of machinery and organisation can be set up for them.

In that, the Administration should take part in it. The organisations who arrange these *yatras* and *melas* etc. should take part in it; the local population should take part in it and also others should take part in it. For example, the fact that there was some blackmarketing in that very sad atmosphere, is a very bad thing undoubtedly. Such kind of things should be taken not as an ordinary blackmarketing but far more seriously. This can happen if all of us together try and give our suggestions for future. I hope that we shall try to do that and I hope that all the *yatris* who are there can come back quickly and safely.

Lastly, I would like to also support the point that Shri Somnath Babu raised because we are also getting a lot of enquiries. For example, my younger colleague here said that from his constituency, Sivakasi, 32 people went and up-till now their whereabouts are not known. Similarly, I have also received information from West Bengal. About those people who went from West Bengal, up-till now their whereabouts are not known. Of course, it is not easy to locate everybody within such a vast crowd but I do hope that some steps would be taken urgently to communicate the situation about those who are still there and about their coming down so that the representatives of the different States who have been sent there, can get back the message of their well-being or whatever the situation may be, in their own States.

SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA (Pudukkottai): I am sorry for the interruption. About those people who have gone from Tamil Nadu, we have received a message that they are all safe. The Chief Minister has announced that.

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE: So far so good. It is good that they have got the information. They came yesterday. Up-till that, they were worried. Naturally many others are still remaining there. From those who are remaining there, if we can quickly get the information, it would be good.

As far as fixing the responsibility, etc. is concerned, I am sure the Government will do its best to find out how that can be done. It can be done in both the ways—encouraging and discouraging. In future, let us try in a way so that we can minimise all these kinds of incidents. If certain norms are observed, this can be minimised. This was a very special situation. It was due to sudden inclement weather. Earlier the weather was not a problem. At that time, control over the things was the problem. So how best we can control over the things in such a situation, that should be thought over.

Lastly, I would like to point out one thing. The huge increase of *yatris* shows one thing. Those countries which are thinking that our Kashmir is not safe for elections and those who are thinking that the Kashmir situation will not improve, the very fact that so many people, so many Hindus went and they were also given shelter my Muslims will show them that they are wrong. This has happened there. It has come out before the eyes of the people from a tragic incident like this that Hindus and Muslims over there are trying to help each other when they are in difficulty. That is one good feature that we should also take into account. That will also help in future in solving all these kinds of problems.

SHRI JAG MOHAN (New Delhi): I would not repeat what has been stated by my distinguished colleagues here. I have a few points to make. Then I will come to the constructive suggestions that I think I have, because I have travelled in this area twice on foot, right from Pahalgam to the Cave. And I had certain suggestions with regard to what had to be done. I would like to share them with the House. But first I would like to ask a few questions.

One is that we know there is something called Disaster Relief or Disaster Management Units. The United Nations has been recommending to all the Member States that they must have Disaster Relief or Disaster Management Units and cells. Even some assistance is made available by U.N. Organisations. If, for example an earthquake occurs all of a sudden, how do you react to such a situation? When I was the Lt. Governor of Delhi we enacted an exercise. If there is a sudden earthquake in Delhi how will we react? When everything breaks down, no telecommunication, no man is available how to do deal? This is with disaster the first point. Has the Government of India a Disaster Management or Relief Unit? If it has not, why does it not have? If it is there, why did it not start functioning the moment it came to know that the

weather has turned so hostile? The calamity happened on the night of 21st itself and on 22nd. Anyone who has been there in the area, could see the nature of the cloud. It was said that some Ponywala asked the people to go back as the weather was going to be bad. He did not have any instrument. He was saying so on the basis of his judgement. I have myself been there, I would know its weather. When the weather turns bad one can easily anticipate the shape of things to come. So I do not understand why there is gap between 21st night of 22nd night and 25th. I would leave it. If there is going to be an inquiry somebody would like into it.

The second important aspect is that the Government of India has an intelligence Bureau. The State Governments have special branches. After all, all this necessary information would have made available to the State Government after people started moving from Delhi, from Bengal. I must say most of the pilgrims who go—a substantive number of them—are from Bengal because they hold Lord Shiva in great reverence and when I went there I saw a very large number of Bengalis travelling to the cave, even those who were 70 years old. I helped them in reaching the cave. There was some problem there. But the basic point is there are inner urges of various people to go there now. Everybody I see in Delhi, in Jammu and other State capitals, there is a large movement of people. The Government is supposed to have intelligence, supposed to have imagination and supposed to act on that information and make pre-planned arrangements. No, I do not know, They were not flying. Most of them were coming by buses. There is only one route. And those who had come to Srinagar and were going to Pahalgam, if the Government know that so many people were gathering at Pahalgam, and so many people were gathering there, they should have acted. I think there is a total lack of pre-planning so far as this Yatra is concerned. To what extent it was an act of God and to what extent it was a man-made tragedy nobody can say with any precision at the moment. But I have no doubt, because of my experience.

If you have any experience in this area, you can easily say—I can say with a fair degree of confidence—that the number of casualties could have been reduced substantially. There is a route which is from Sonamal, Baltal and to this Gufa. It is a route which was made by the Army. It is a jeepable route. I have travelled on it. It has, comparatively, an easy access. But it is not open to the people. It is not the traditional route, and people like to go *via* Pahalgam the traditional route. I will explain later as to why they go by the traditional route... (*Interruptions*) My point is slightly different, I quite agree with you. I want to say something else here. If there had been pre-planning, you could have repaired the Bal-Tak vati with very little effort. You could have kept—when you knew that so many people were coming—it read, you could have also a few lines of stops. Most of the people have died between the Gufa and at this Pushphar. At Panchtarni, when you go down, there is some descent and then you go down easily. The pilgrims were caught at that point. Those who had gone and were standing in the queue were affected. There were large number of people

who had gathered in that queue, who did not know how to move further or how to come back. I know of the case of three brothers. Two could return and one could not even return. Those of you who see television would have seen a person saying: 'My wife was left behind; I could not trace her'. It was because he could not go back. So many people were allowed to gather in that point. Most of the deaths have taken place here. I fail to understand why a responsible officer was not stationed at the crucial point.

Supposing I stand before the Cave—I have been there and I can tell you—if there is no movement, there will be stampede, there will be otherwise deaths and there is no way how to come back once you are caught in the melec. I do not know. People did not know how the movement could be controlled when there was no guidance what to do. If the route had been prepared, they could have at least been brought on the *pucca* road and so many deaths could have been avoided.

I am surprised. It has been said in a very general way that there was rain, heavy rain and heavy snowfall. Would any one tell me with precision as to what was the actual rainfall or snowfall? How many inches of snow fell on that day, on 22nd August? I had been in Kashmir for six years earlier. Can anybody say that there will be such a heavy snowfall that people will be buried underneath that snow? It is impossible. There may be half-an-inch of snowfall, one inch of snowfall or two inches of snowfall. It will vanish next day or a day after. How can people die of snow? They die of exposure. They die because of low temperature; they did not have anything to cover. They were drenched. There was no arrangements. There was no one to guide them. There was no one who could tell them that they could go by this or that route. Nothing was done. This was the state of affairs there.

Then it was said that tents were fixed. We are going by the number of tents, quarrelling about the number of tents. But nobody has asked what was the quality of the tents that were fixed. Somebody put two rods and some *chaddar* on it; they called it a tent! Such a tent will go away with your own breath. Did any one put plinth on this tent? You have to have brick plinth so that the water does not seep in. No, the plinth was not there. You go to any Army tent or the B.S.F. tent. They will have very high plinth so that the water does not seep in, if it rains. Otherwise no protection can be given. If you fix a tent on a *kuccha* road which will be all wet, you will yourself be caught in a tent of snow or water. You will be drenched; your clothes will be drenched and everything will be drenched. You have to stay like this throughout the night. What will happen? Such a tent does not give you any protection. This is, an important fact which has not been mentioned.

I do not want to be critical, only talking about the lapses and so on. Whenever an inquiry is held, these things will come out. But I feel about one aspect of the Indian situation. Shri Sontosh Mohan Dev is not here. He mentioned about

the Vaishno Devi temple. I can share with this House that in 1986 when there was a Governor's rule for a short time, I walked on this area. (Chandanwari-Cave) I prepared a scheme for it. There is, I can tell you, no more beautiful place in the world than this area. I had gone on the Ford Foundation Fellowship, when I was in service, practically all over the world, even Yugoslavia etc. There has been no more beautiful journey than the journey from Chandanwari to the *gufa*. The Shashnag area, the Panchtarni area and the area around Poshoha are just out of heaven. You cannot imagine how beautiful it is, how wheels rivulets and flow, how little streams flow, how there are mountains, how there are hillocks, how there is greenery around and how there are rocks. Every sign post has a mythology. The Sheshnag to Panchtarni area is just rooted in Indian culture and religion. When people talk of Article 370, I am surprised, because the relationship of Kashmir with rest of India is mind and soul relationship which has existed for 5,000 years. If you travel from Chandanwari to the cave, you will see hundreds of signposts of Indian culture, Indian religion and Indian mythology. It is saturated with all the attributes. If you write a book, you can write 1,000 pages just on these sign posts, what are they and what tied behind them, what are the components and such other things.

Now, at all those beautiful points, shelter nests could be created. You can have a stone-cum-glass structure. The stone gives you the strength and on that you fix the glass. It can stay in minus nine or minus twenty degree temperature and it is beautiful. Supposing, I am an old man and going there, I feel tired, I will sit in that place and get one of the most beautiful views of the world. I can have some tea, coffee or anything else because arrangements can be made in the side room or in the basement. I can keep all the stores. For medicines, I can keep oxygen cylinders. If the old fellows require a little puffs you can give the same to them. You can give them even medicines, you can give them extra woollens if you find that they are sick. Doctors can be posted there in times of rush. All such arrangements can be made. We are living in a modern technological age. Could you not fix some diesel engine there for lighting? Could you not have 'night viewing system' which all our BSF units have got at borders? Night viewing system is there. At every such point, 20 or 30 shelter units could come up as 'nests'. If there is an inclement weather like this, they could serve as shelter unit for most of the people. If all these facilities are provided, you will get shelter cum rest unit at some of the most beautiful spots in the world.

In 1986 I went there – I have all the photographs and other things – with the architects and engineers – to prepare a plan. The limiting factor in this area is that the working season is only two to three months – a little bit of June, July and August. When you draw the plan, it can be executed in the next two or three seasons or years. It was done by me. Unfortunately, immediately after that, the Governor's rule ended and the State Cabinet came. I had sent note to the State Cabinet, giving all details of the proposal scheme and the areas, how they could be financed, how things can be done, where units should be fixed and all that. I pursued the matter with the Cabinet, but unfortunately, as you know, the

attitude which we generally have one of casualness and refusing to do anything beyond the beaten path. The things just languished till I was drawn out of the State.

There is a scheme available, there is a pattern available of Vaishno Devi Shrine Board. Very few people understand that when during the Governor's rule. I took over this Vaishno Devi Shrine, how much opposition I had to face from the vested interest. All my officers said

[Translation]

What are you doing. These people would kill you. The people of Jammu would make lot of hue and cry tomorrow.

[English]

But you have to take some courage, you have to take some action. Now I will tell you why I am referring to Vaishno Devi. It has not been taken over by the Government. I made a Board outside the Government, a statutory Board, a legislative Board outside the Government because during Governor's rule I had the legislative power and I enacted the ordinance which was later ratified.

Now, what are the advantages? It is not a religious place in that sense and that we have to provide for those who are going for religious purpose. It has an all round effect. I would request the hon. Home Minister to kindly consider this point. Why does it have an all round effect? Now, you see the *Vaishno Devi* shrine. It was a negative feature of the Indian economy and social life. All along the route of 13 kilometers from Katra to *Vaishno Devi*, you had thousands of beggars and insanitary conditions. People did not have a place to urinate. Everybody was indulging in black marketing and so on. After visiting it for the first time, I had recorded that if you want to see the material and moral de-generation of India, all that you have to do is to walk from Katra to *Vaishno Devi*. So bad were the conditions. The vested interests were taking money and all that ill-gotten money led to prostitution, litigation, troubles and so on. All social problems were there. Since begging paid, nobody sent anybody to school. The child was put on the road from the very first day because he would earn Rs. 25 to 30. That area had the highest illiteracy rate in India. No one was sent to the school. So I took some action. I was determined to do so and I removed all the beggars. I gave them work. I developed the area with the same money which was put to the *Vaishno Devi* shrine and not a single penny was taken out of the Government revenues. Now, every year seven crores of rupees of the *shradhalus* are put into the development of that area. This is the real service. You may call it religion; you may call it culture; or you may call it Vivekananda's views that 'Jeeva is Shiva'. You serve the poor and you serve the God. That is the highest service to the God. He has said, May I be born again and again to serve the only God I know, namely, the poor, the sick, the dying! That is the actual translation which you see there. With all

that money, environment has been improved, sanitation has been improved and all the cooking is done by modern machines. Now, no one falls sick. Otherwise, earlier everybody who went there was suffering with dysentery. Miserable conditions were there. Now, all these children are going to school and the schools have been set up with that money. Dispensaries have been set up with that money and 18 lakh trees have been planted with that money. All these people in that area who were indulging in crimes are now engaged in construction work. They have become productive units of the Indian society. Leave it at that and go to the economic aspect of it.

Earlier three to four lakh people used to go there every year because they had some sort of *mannat* or because their forefathers have said that you must go there. But they feel very upset when they went there. Now, 40 lakh *yatris* go there. They go there happily as the environment is good. Everybody even if he is a scientist or a person like my distinguished friend, Shri Somnath Chatterjee, will feel happy because the environment is good. My distinguished friend, Mr. Justice Krishna Iyer once went there. Some people get spiritual elevation by the atmosphere itself. You may not believe in the *murti* but you will have some inner satisfaction. It is this scientific attitude that matters. You are generating that temper in the nation and combining your spiritual energies (*shakti*) with our tradition, with our history, etc. My point is that, if you go to the Jammu, you will find what difference 40 lakh *yatris* have made to the Jammu economy. One hundred forty hotels have come up and transport has increased. It has a multiple effect. All those ladies who were doing nothing, I had put them in a unit for manufacturing *chunnis* because every *yatri* who goes there, buys *chunni*. They sell them and earn Rs. 600 to 700 a month.

Everybody is employed and the economy has changed. Even when I was the Governor, my friend Shri P.R. Dasmunsi was coming there and he was having free lunch at Raj Bhavan, no doubt. But while going back, he would buy a few *chunnis* for his daughter and friends. He would buy something which is special in Jammu. This way, the sales of the Jammu shopkeepers have gone up; the sales tax of the State has gone up and transport arrangements have gone up. Everything has multiplied. So, what I am saying is, what was an item of social regression, what was a monument of national shame, has now been converted into a resurgent unit of our social and cultural life and not a single penny has been taken from the Government. More than Rs. 80 crore has been invested in that area. Just imagine a poor area getting Rs. 80 crore. We can generally think of raising resources only by going to the International Monetary Fund and to the World Bank. If your mind is inventive, if you are prepared to leave the beaten track, you can always find resources in your hands and this is a typical example of that. You have generated resources, what were your liabilities you have converted into assets? So follow this pattern in Chandanvari—cave area. There are very many beautiful spots. There is no comparison between *Vaishno Devi* and this area. In fact, to meet the additional difficulty of funds, I had planned to link both the

Boards so that I could utilise the funds in this area because this area has yet to come up. There are innumerable sites which could be developed and people who are not even interested in religion or other things could go there. They would find some of the most beautiful spots. I am sure various trekkers and foreigners will go there and you can make various arrangements. I am no longer in a position of authority. But if the august House thinks that I can deliver some good, I would be very happy to lend my helping hand and I will help in making an institutional arrangement that would make this place one of the most beautiful places in the world, the most attractive places in the world, and it will give rise to forces which will create a renaissance in India. After all, we must understand our tradition. What were the inner forces that brought Vivekanandaji from Calcutta to Kanyakumari; and from Kanyakumari to Amarnath *Yatra*. Do you know what was his reaction? I have written some articles about it. I had produced what Vivekanandaji's impression was. You just cannot imagine how thrilled he was when he went to this shrine. What is the significance of this *Yatra*? I do not want to mention it hard for want of time But I have mentioned it in various newspaper articles some time back. If its significance is grasped our national reconstruction will take place, real integration will take place and people's minds will go up. Mention has been made — I would like to make that point also clear — that our Muslim friends were good enough to give shelter. This is a very good gesture that they have shown and that is a part of the Kashmiri tradition.

I would like to mention another point for your information. The Kashmiris are all very friendly and *Charar-e-Shariels Saint Nund Rishi's* philosophy, is nothing but a type of Vedantic philosophy in Islamic terms. He also says that there is God in every blade of grass. So, it is, unfortunately narrow politics, which came after 1947, and that has fundamentalised Kashmiri Islam. But Kashmiri's hearts are of gold. They responded to me like anything during my first tenure. It is only Pakistan and our narrow political outlook in certain areas, our negative outlook, that has helped them or helped the major part of Kashmiri population to acquire fundamentalist outlook.

That is not there in them. If you go to any of their *khankhas*, you will find one thing. In fact, in Charar-e-Sharief, they even honoured me. I was the only Governor who was given the *distare bhandhi*, as they call it. Their heart is that of gold. It is our narrow politics that has made them do what they are doing at the behalf of Pakistan and other factors. In 1990, of course, it was a different situation to which I went. I think our people did not understand, did not support my right cause. Anyhow, that is a different aspect. So, I do not wish to take much of your time. You have been very kind and patient enough to me in hearing my long story. I do not want to say anything more. Of course, I have got a few more points. But the other friends have to speak. So, I would stop it.

SHRI P.R. DASMUNSI (Howrah): Madam, at the outset, I would like to say that the Amarnath *Yatra*, as many of the hon. Members have already stated, is not merely a journey

but a significant moment and occasion for all the people of India to mark an occasion that projects the unity of the people every year centering around the *Yatra*. It is a *Yatra* which is performed in the Holy Cave mostly by the Hindus by their own religious faith supported by the Muslims in Kashmir on all the occasions. The unique concept of the unity of India's culture lies in the Amarnath *Yatra*. Therefore, the tragedy, when it came, is not merely a tragedy which came to one family, whether he is a Hindu or non-Hindu but it precisely hit the very journey for which people wait for the whole year and take the momentous journey on a particular occasion when the time comes.

I was really shocked about the whole arrangement and the manner in which, this time, the *Yatra* was taken care of. I am not here to pull up the Government. I am not here to take advantage of the Amarnath tragedy and to make any political issue. I am very much here to support the Government. Since I want to support the Government. I also want to alert the Government to avoid the mistakes, in future, that have already been committed. What are those mistakes? Some confusion has started.

The House may recall that the former Prime Minister Shri Chandra Shekhar once raised an issue concerning a few deaths of Ballia people in Kashmir. We hold the Home Minister in very high esteem. I have a personal regard for him, for his ability as a parliamentarian. I think he is a very genuine thinker for the people. Also, in the Administration, he is very outspoken. From that Bench, the hon. Home Minister made it abundantly clear in this House that special care would be taken for the Amarnath *Yatra*. At that time, there was a grave threat of the terrorists. Many other conspiracies were surmounting the Government in Kashmir. I shall not discuss the conspiracies at this moment which are hatched to destabilise India, to create more embarrassment for the Government and also to take advantage of the fact that election cannot be conducted peacefully. At that stage, while the Home Minister had stated that special efforts had been taken for the *Yatra*, I was confident that the Government was really making some special efforts in all the matters. Unfortunately, those special efforts have not been properly coordinated. Now I come to a specific point. When the Lok Sabha Bulletin was circulated first to us to identify which Minister will look after which Department, it was found that Jammu and Kashmir would be looked after by the Prime Minister exclusively. While it was stated that Jammu and Kashmir would be looked after by the Prime Minister exclusively, I thought of, as a Member, that matters pertaining to Jammu and Kashmir would first be handled by the PMO in close coordination with the Home Ministry and in between them, Jammu and Kashmir Government, now under President's Rule, shall have a regular liaison either with the PMO or with the Home Ministry and somebody will coordinate on their behalf.

Now the basic point starts about the weather.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The time allotted for this discussion was two hours. Shall we extend the time by another half an hour, if the House so permits?

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI: We can extend the time by one hour.

SHRI P.R. DASMUNSI: One hour will be all right.

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI: We can go up to 6 o'clock.

MR. CHAIRMAN: It is all right.

You please continue, Dasmunsi.

SHRI P.R. DASMUNSI: In the statement of the Home Minister, it was stated and today also the Home Minister further clarified that the alarm about the weather report was given from the Avantipur Air Force station and based on that the Director of Tourism alerted *yatris*, on 22nd morning at 9 o'clock from Pahalgam, not to proceed further. This was stated by the Home Minister. In the first instance, I would like to know whether the alert was given from Avantipur Air Force Station on 20th or 21st. So far as my knowledge goes—I am not the Home Minister—the Avantipur Air Force station did alert about the weather condition on 20th and it took time to alert the *yatris*, on 22nd morning the alarm was given. Even on 22nd morning the alarm was so given when the Home Minister was very much in Kashmir. The question is whether the Home Minister knew about the alarm or not. If he did not know about it, then it is established that there was no serious coordination between the J & K Government and the Home Ministry. If there was a coordination, what steps did the Home Minister take on that day? My point is, Amarnath *Yatra* was not taken seriously. The terrorists could have hit people. What was the seriousness about the Amarnath *Yatra* this time? They knew that one lakh *yatris* would come. The Prime Minister in his statement had said that in 1994, the number of *yatris* was 40,000; in 1995, it was 70,000. That means, in 1995, the number of *yatris* was double than that of 1994 this time it crossed the one lakh number. It was said that they had made arrangement four times than that of last time. What is that four times arrangement? It was said that elaborate arrangements had been made for one lakh twenty thousand *yatris*. But only 14,500 blankets were arranged for the pilgrims to supplement the bedding needs. There is a peculiar thing in the statement. I do not know whether the Home Minister has observed the statement of the Prime Minister as also his own statement. The Home Minister says that on 22nd morning at 9 o'clock, an alarm was given to *yatris* not to proceed any further. And the Prime Minister in his statement said, 'on 21st August, when the weather took a bad turn, by that time, around 1.2 lakh pilgrims had left Jammu for Amarnath. And till then, *yatra* had been proceeding smoothly.' On 21-22nd August, weather took a turn and heavy rainfall started. Then on 23rd August, about 50,000 pilgrims had got stranded in three places at Panchtarni Upper Ridge. That means 52,000 *yatris* out of 1.25 lakh had reached Panchtarni Upper Ridge on 23rd morning leaving

Jammu on 21st. Is it possible? Shri Jag Mohan was the Governor there. I had the privilege of walking from Pahalgam to Chandanwari only. I did not go beyond that. Is it possible to reach Pahalgam on 23rd morning by leaving Jammu on 21st? And the statement of the Prime Minister says that the weather started taking a turn on the 22nd night. But the actual thing is that there was no coordination among the Prime Minister's Office, the Governor's administration and the Home Ministry between 22nd and 24th August as to what was happening in regard to Amarnath Yatra on the soil of Kashmir.

That is my precise point, I am sorry to say it.

Some statements had been made that the Home Secretary was working on 24th, the whole day. Very nice! On the 23rd morning, I was busy in a place when I got the first news that 20 young men of my constituency were untraceable, 10 people of Uluberia including the brother-in-law of our Party MLA, Shri Sanjeev Das, were untraceable and also 60 people of Bara Bazar were not traceable. Then I rang up Delhi, the Home Ministry but no response came. Then I sent the fax to the Governor and I was told "why are you sending the fax the Governor is in Delhi". But the Governor could not be contacted. Then I contacted the Chief Secretary. He was sleeping; at 10.30 he was sleeping. I got his telephone number, he was sleeping in Defence Colony. But when I contacted, he was not available. Then I sent my people with ticket, to go to Jammu and one group to Srinagar to contact and find out.

Till this morning, the gentleman who was in Jammu again rang me and said "This is my 10th visit to the Superintendent of Police and even now he could not tell me whether in the unidentified bodies, our relatives are there." Then he said, "Can you show me the photographs?" But he was replied that he could not bring the photographs. Then our gentleman said if he could be taken there. But it was also not done.

I am not blaming Shri Indrajit Gupta, the Home Minister, I am only talking that unfortunately, on 22nd, 23rd and 24th, there is no operational existence of the coordination machinery of Jammu and Kashmir Government and Delhi in so far as Amarnath Yatries are concerned.

Madam, I entirely agree with Shri Jagmohanji. I am not going into the details as to how the pilgrims have died, but precisely the casualties at the higher range have been exposed. Precisely, it was an exposure due to shortage of blankets, for example. For everytime, the Prime Minister had said and the Prime Minister should have said rightly. Every Government should take credit as to how much they have done better than the previous Government, it is not a fault. If the present Government had done four times than the previous Government, at least yatries had not gone four times. The yatries had gone double. In their four times arrangement, 14,500 blankets cannot take care of the 52,000 people in that cold wave.

My submission to you, Madam and, through you, to the Home Minister is this. Please inquire and make special investigation by yourself. I am not using any political tune in it – may be, there is a deliberate attempt on the part of the bureaucracy even to let you down, Mr. Home Minister. Even there is a deliberate attempt by the bureaucrats of Kashmir to let down the Prime Minister. There is a definite attempt. When on 20th, Avantipur gave intimation from Air Force Station why did the alarm was given on 22nd morning? On 22nd morning you gave the alarm from Pahalgam. From Pahalgam to Chandanbari, in the walkie-talkie with the military wireless system, how much times does it take? As I understand, you had also taken a special care so that the yatries are not intercepted by the terrorists. You might set a special attempt by the Intelligence Branch who have special type of wireless system to give them security support. Did those wireless system functions. How did they function from Chandanbari to other parts? The entire thing could not have been collapsed if you had proper arrangements. The death toll started from 22nd morning and the operational rescue had started – according to your statement – only from 24th. So, I request you to please investigate as to why it happened.

About the Governor, I feel very bad to accuse him because he was the General of our Army; he did a wonderful job in the Indian Army; he made a significant contribution for our country. But after having seen his role as a Governor, I personally feel – whenever we were in power, we were responsible for all these things, I admit – that there should be a policy, Mr. Home Minister that the glorious General of the Army, Air Force and Navy – such great people – should not be appointed any more as Governor for such ticklish job. Sometimes if they get people's criticisms and problems, their contribution in the Army, Air Force or Navy, whatever the case may be, becomes absolutely diluted and in the estimation of the people, their image gets shattered and I feel sad for them.

The General did a wonderful job for the Indian Defence and the job he did in Kashmir is very very sad, uncalled for and unfortunate.

On the Amarnath Yatra the final point that I would like to highlight is that the Government possibly took is casually. The Government possibly thought that everything would be taken care of. But I must say that the Government could have deputed their own Minister of State for Home, Shri Maqbool Dar, who is from Kashmir, to coordinate the entire affairs. He could have been stationed in Kashmir to look after the entire arrangements.

In Bengal always I see in Gangasagar Mela that the State Government deposes not one, but two-three Ministers not for one day, but for fifteen days. They stay there – I have seen Shri Subhash Chakraborty and others – till the last *yatri* departs and look after the arrangements. I am thankful to them for the *bandobast* that they make. Recently in this matter also that they have sent a team to Kashmir to find out about the people of West Bengal. Why did they not depute Ministers

in Kashmir when the Government knew the threat of terrorists, when the Government knew about three American agents, when the Government knew that all kinds of conspiracies are going on? Why did they take so lightly the Amarnath Yatra in the face of all these things and sit casually here and there and get busy in the election schedule? I take strong exception to this casualness. I am fully for the Government. I am not in a mood to encash this Amarnath imbroglio for political purposes. But there are people in this country who will misunderstand you. Therefore, please take a very firm line, very strong line. If you find Mr. Home Minister that the Air Force information was given long ago from Awantipur – the place that I remember very much because I heard the name of this place on 3rd December 1971 in Calcutta Maidan when Indiraji announced that.

[Translation]

A bomb has been dropped in Avantipur and Pakistan has started the war.

[English]

Because it is my information that you got the alarm signal on 20th, it took so much time for you to alert the *yatris* on 22nd because there was no Government worth the name functioning in Kashmir after 21st to give directions. All were busy here. Though that is not the reason for the tragedy, at least the post-tragedy operations or the operations to reach the place of the tragedy could have been handled in the manner it should have been handled.

I urge upon the Government to please reassure the pilgrims of India, the people of India that such things shall not be repeated. I am not talking of natural calamity but at least the *bandobast* can be handled better. Still people are untraceable. At least make some arrangements in this regard. Everyday TV announcements with photographs should be made about the unidentified bodies which have been cremated or buried, so that the relatives know that at least their relation is dead, they will not get him, the photograph being shown is his. They are stranded everywhere. Police cannot help them and nobody can help them. There are 68 people missing from my constituency and more than one hundred people from Barabazar. Shrimati Krishna Bose was telling that from Jadavpur constituency alone one travel agent took fifty people. How do you answer them? They say that you are so close to the Government in Delhi, at least ascertain this much information. They do not know anything; they want to know the truth, so that they can perform the rites.

I am not saying that Shri Indrajit Gupta will do everything. Please make one thing clear. The registered *yatris* are registered in a log book in Srinagar, Pathankot and Jammu. In the log book those who have been already identified, they have been reported also. But the people who are not traceable

either are dead or are unidentified. Somehow an intimation should be given to every police station, so that people who are going there can see from the catalogue that these are the total 1,20,000 people Statewise and these are the people dead; these are the people alive; these are the people unidentified; and these are the people cremated, so that at least those people can come back with some peace of mind. Otherwise all the MPs from different parts of India will be bothered everyday on this that this is how things are being managed.

With these words I conclude. I thank the Indian Army, the people of Kashmir, the Border Security Force and other people who did their best for the rescue operations. Though Indrajitbabu had gone there on 26th, he could have gone there a little earlier. But my only plea is – I hope that the Government will not take very rudely this comment of mine – that when such a grave calamity as this tragedy has happened, it would have been proper if, instead of the Home Minister, the Prime Minister had personally gone there, so that the message would have been loud and clear to the nation as to how seriously the Prime Minister took this tragedy.

MR. CHAIRMAN (PROF. RITA VERMA): Now we have roughly 45 minutes left for the discussion and there are seven speakers. Shall I request you to be brief and try to finish your speeches in five minutes? There is a limit to the time allotted.

Now Shri Virendra Kumar Singh.

[Translation]

Please try to finish within five minutes. The time for this discussion was upto 4.41 p.m. and it has been extended upto 5.41 p.m.

SHRI VIRENDRA KUMAR SINGH (Aurangabad): Mr. Chairman, Sir, several hon'ble Members have expressed their views on Amarnath Yatra tragedy and Shri Som Nath Chatterjee has also given many good suggestions. First of all I would like to express my heartfelt condolences for the tragic death of pilgrims of Amarnath yatra and send condolences to the bereaved families as well. This yatra concludes at the height of 13,500 feet and one has to trek a route of 46 kilometer. There is so much height and a passage of 6 kilometer remains covered with snow. The government has been issuing instructions that pilgrims should carry woollen clothes with them but nearly 1.25 lakh people went there and most of them were not wearing woollen clothes. They had neither blankets nor woollens. We should consider this aspect also that why people go at such a place without woollens. There are such terrains where snow falls are often and there is always possibility of inclement weather. Even then people go on such heights without woollens. Why it happens. Our people have nourished such a faith in Daharma that a person who visits religious places

after passing through innumerable difficulties in blessed
 17.00 hrs. more and he attains salvation. This is what they
 believe. I, therefore, suggest that when such
 people embark on such journeys, the government should ei-
 ther provide them woollens or stop them for going further.
 Second thing is that the Prime Minister has already said that
 the officials and other people who remained negligent in
 performing their duty would be punished. Besides, we should
 appreciate the services of the personnel of Air and Army
 who came to the rescue of the people in distress.

I would also like to suggest that at various places where
 snow falls so often and such incidence occur owing to rains,
 guest houses should be constructed in order to avoid
 recurrence of such tragedies during the yatras undertaken in
 rainy season.

SHRI ANANT GANGARAM GEETE (Ratnagiri): Mr.
 Chairman Sir, the pilgrims of Amarnath yatra had to face a
 lot of problems and many of them became victims of this
 tragedy. Our Home Minister has made a statement and prior
 to this hon'ble Prime Minister had also made a similar
 statement. The leader of the opposition Shri Atal Bihari
 Vajpayee wanted to initiate a discussion on this tragedy and
 then our senior member of Parliament Shri Jaswant Singh
 also gave a notice of adjournment motion and now the matter
 is being discussed under Rule 193.

17.03 hrs.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

(Interruptions)

SHRI SHIVRAJ SINGH (Vidisha): It is not proper to
 indulge in talking. The matter is serious and you are talking
 like this. It is not good.

SHRI ANANT GANGARAM GEETE: Had this discussing
 been taking place in the form of Adjournment Motion, hon'ble
 Member would have not been indulging in gossiping. We are
 discussing this matter under Rule 193. I want to know whether
 government would realise after this discussion that they had
 some responsibility for this tragedy. unfortunate aspect is this
 that this is third tragedy in two months in which pilgrims were
 involved. First tragedy had occurred in Ujjain. In that tragedy
 also, many people lost their lives because of laxity in making
 proper arrangements. Thereafter several pilgrims died in
 Haridwar because a bridge collapsed. The reason was some
i.e. laxity on the part of officials managing the affair. During
 the reply to the demand of adjournment motion, the Prime
 Minister had observed that the Home Minister had gone to
 Kashmir and on his return, honourable Members would come
 to know facts of the incident. He will make a statement based
 on facts. But the statement made by the Home Minister has
 not revealed anything new. Several hon'ble Members have
 pointed out that indications of inclement weather were being
 received before August 22. The Home Minister has stated in

the statement that he had asked the State authorities that
 what precautionary measures were taken in the context of
 inclement weather but what he has stated in his reply, one
 could gather that the statement made by the Home Minister
 on Amarnath Yatra has been prepared at the instance of some
 official or some Advisor to the governor it is based on hearsay.
 It is strange that he come across only one pilgrim and none
 else to register his complaint even after occurrence of such a
 big tragedy.

Shri Chaman Lal Gupta M.P. is not present in the House
 today. He has perhaps, gone to Kashmir alongwith Shri Atal
 Bihari Vajpayee. He had cautioned the Government much
 earlier that the number of pilgrims for Amar Nath Yatra may
 be more than the previous years and therefore elaborate
 arrangements should be made. But his suggestion was not
 taken seriously. Even after such a disaster, the Government
 is not taking it seriously. An hon'ble Member narrated Hindi
 version of that statement that some ordinary lapses can be
 seen in the arrangements keeping in view such a big number
 of pilgrims. It shows that even after this tragedy the Home
 Minister is not prepared to concede that there were serious
 lapses on the part of the administration.

Mr Deputy Speaker, one can easily gather from the
 statement that government is not serious in so far as this
 tragedy is concerned. It has been mentioned in the statement
 made by the Home Minister that 127 pilgrims have lost their
 lives. Later on it was stated that the actual number was 194.
 But the number of pilgrims died is more than 234. Some
 people say that number of dead is 400 approximately. An
 M.P. from Kashmir says that the number of persons who died
 was more than 500. There are several hundreds of people
 who are still missing and our government has no information
 about them. The Home Minister has stated in the statement
 that it was informed on 22nd that weather conditions are going
 bad. When this warning was issued them pilgrims had started
 for the next camp. It shows incapability of the government.
 Had this news reached the pilgrims in time, number of the
 deceased could have been much less.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the people from all corners of
 our country join Amarnath Yatra. They come from all States
 from South to North, and join this Yatra. This Yatra looks like
 some national festival. The pilgrims come with great devotion.
 Before commencement of terrorism in Kashmir people of
 more than 50 years of age used to go on Amar Nath Yatra.
 When terrorists of Kashmir tried to prevent the Yatra and
 challenged the country, then youth of the country accepted
 the challenge. Thereafter young men also started coming in
 the Yatra. Now a good number of young people participate in
 the Yatra. Their number goes on multiplying every year. It is
 in reply to the challenge thrown by the terrorist. We must
 appreciate their courage. When number of pilgrims increases,
 responsibility of the government also enhances. But
 unfortunately the government has not shown that seriousness
 towards Amar Nath Yatra and everything left to the nature.
 This Yatra is an annual feature. Natural calamity can take

place any time. Had this yatra been successful, the government would have claimed the credit. But test of the government begins when natural calamity takes place and the government has to swing into actions and take steps to save the lives of the people who are stranded at various places and provide relief to the victims.

Today the matter is being discussed under Rule 193. I do not think anything will come out of this discussion. We should learn something from this discussion. The government should have express regret. Had they taken over the responsibility, number of the dead would not have been so high.

Had our Home Minister realised his responsibility, the method of probing the incident would have been different. He would have met the victims and not the State authorities. It was decided in the first instance that it is not the responsibility of the new government but that of nature. That is why the statement has been made on those lines. The facts may not be placed before the House but they cannot be concealed. The people who participated in the Yatra and suffered all sorts of problems but came safe will tell the true story. Of course, the dead will not speak. The pilgrims who have returned safe will tell every thing. I want to say that government should have taken the Yatra seriously and made foolproof arrangements but they have not played their role efficiently and that is why so many casualties have taken place. The devotees of Lord Shiva could not have his blessings and left the world and their family members are in distress. Our Prime Minister has announced a sum of Rs. 50,000 to be given to the family of deceased persons. I do not know when the amount would be disbursed to them, although we want that more relief should be given.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Rs. 2 lakh has been announced.

SHRI ANANT GANGARAM GEETE: All right, 2 lakh but the amount should be disbursed immediately. Some State government have also announced e.g. the government of Maharashtra have announced a relief of Rs. 25,000 for such families.

[English]

SHRI SANAT MEHTA (Surendra Nagar): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would be very brief because so many points have been made and I do not want to repeat those points. The agony has not been recognised by the Government. The largest number of pilgrims—more than 42,000—had gone from Gujarat. It is such an agony that it has spread to the whole State because no information is available. Even yesterday night, after ten o'clock, I received a telephone call from my constituency enquiring about ten people.

Now here, a case is being made that adequate arrangements were made. A total of 1,50,000—or even say,

two lakh—pilgrims had gone there. Is it not possible in today's age of computers to have two lakh names computerised and sent to each State? When the pilgrims were coming in advance, going to Jammu, taking buses, taking different ways, I think, it was very simple process. Not only that, I went through the list of those who had died. I found out that none of the names of the Gujaratis, who had died because of this calamity, could be traced properly. The names are absolutely faulty. You cannot make out what kind of a name it is. This kind of callous attitude cannot be tolerated. This is not the callous attitude of the hon. Home Minister or of the hon. Prime Minister. What hurts me most is, why we are apologetic towards the callousness of the administration.

Hon. Shri Jagmohan has narrated the instance of 'Jammu Devi'. There are such instances in Gujarat. Take the instance of 'Palitana' shrine which is one of the biggest Jain shrines. What kind of arrangements is the Trust making there? I fail to understand why a sovereign Government, having such a vast machinery with the State Government, cannot make such a beautiful arrangement. A private trust can make arrangements for thousands of pilgrims round the year. They make roads. They make all preparations. They supply food, etc., free of charge. I feel that the basic question is of attitude. It is called 'disaster preparedness'.

There are two aspects. One aspect is disaster preparedness. If you have a proper concept of the disaster preparedness, then the follow-up action becomes very easy. Here I think it was presumed that arrangements for Amarnath pilgrims had to be done by pilgrims themselves; that they had not to do any arrangements, and that they will go and they will come. That kind of attitude of the State Administration has created this situation. I feel that if somebody is feeling that the number of pilgrims will be less next year, they are mistaken. India is advancing more and more, and more facilities are created in our country. Even the other day, in the Himalayan rock climbing expedition, I met a young man and simultaneously a man of the age of 60 who is a professor in Surat. He was saying that he was going in that expedition. So, people from all over the country have started this kind of activities. At the same time, such a huge Government is not able to give proper names of the people who have died. What expectation can we have further from the Government?

The second point which I want to make is about the inquiry. The approach of inquiry in the House is of two types. One approach is, out of the judicial inquiry or whatever type of inquiry you want to have, you want to punish somebody. If that is the type of inquiry, then, I think nothing will come out of it. It is because in all these inquiries, even if it is done under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, my personal experience is that big people go out of the inquiry and small people here and there are punished. That is not the purpose of the inquiry. The purpose of the inquiry should be on two things. One is to find out where the State Administration has failed. Second is, what comprehensive measures can be taken. A type of blue or red book can be permanently prepared

for the Amarnath Yatra so that, in future, calamity can be avoided.

The third point that I want to make is this. The people who came back right after going up to the Shrine gave a number of press interviews. In Gujarat, I have read so many people giving their experiences. One thing is common, that is, no pilgrim had any complaint against Army men. They have all praised the work of the Army. It means that when we talk of the callous attitude or the failure, let us be very clear in our mind that there was no failure on the part of the Indian Army which was helping the pilgrims. If you come to that conclusion, then automatically you come to the second conclusion that the failure was of the State Administration. I do not know why we should hesitate in finding out the failures of the State Administration. Can we imagine a situation that a Relief Commissioner from the Gujarat Government reaches earlier than some of the senior officials of the Government of India? I cannot imagine that. Press people came to know about the calamity; they were in different parts of the country. My own friend who is a journalist is there long back to find out what has happened there. The question is of the will. Sometimes, when somebody talks about the *prakop* of Indra, I feel that the *prakop* of Indra has defeated Mr. Indrajit. That is the tragedy of this House. I hope that Mr. Indrajit will see that in the next Amarnath Yatra, if there is a *prakop* of Indra he cannot win over Indra but at least he will find ways and means to face it. These are some of my suggestions which I have made. Let us hope to have a very clear concept about this. I leave it to the Government. Mr. Indrajit Gupta has agreed that there will be an inquiry. I request that it should be a comprehensive inquiry going into the failures as well as the steps that can be taken in future. It can also include some of the parameters which were suggested by Mr. Jagmohan. It is the history of the country which he has narrated.

Tirupati is not only making money but also abolishing the evils around religious places and developing the surrounding area. The second incident is there about Jammu Devi and the third incident is there in Palitana. So, let us take lessons from the effort of the people.

Sometimes the efforts of the people yield greater result than the efforts of the Government. It is unfortunate that we leave everything to the Government. I hope that next time or whenever such *yatras* are organised, there would, at least, be some coordination between the States from where the pilgrims are going in large numbers.

Shri Indrajit Guptaji told me that the Government had issued many instructions to the States but the States are not abiding by those instructions of the Central Government. The question that arises is that if the hon. Prime Minister had said that whatever had happened in the Amarnath Yatra accidentally, intentionally or unintentionally—the Governor was here, the Chief Secretary was not looking after it—he disapproves of it then that would have sent a great message to the concerned Administration. We shirked that responsibility. If the Governor fails, we do not speak; if the

Administration fails, we do not speak and we find out some small people to punish under the name of an enquiry and this deterioration continues. I hope this kind of a tragedy would be treated as a national tragedy and it would be viewed as a national problem and ultimately it would be transformed into a national pride in future. With these words, I appeal to Shri Indrajit Guptaji to take lessons from this and have a comprehensive enquiry done into the matter.

Sir, I would also like to remind Shri Jagmohanji that the conference on International Disaster Preparedness was held in Delhi. Many senior officers of the Government were present. I was also one of the delegates in that conference. They are having a full-fledged plan for volcanic areas and earthquake prone areas. The State of Gujarat has set an example in this regard. When there was an earthquake in Bihar, people from the State of Gujarat went there and organised relief operations. Why are we not taking such initiatives when there is an occurrence of such worst natural calamities? We only have piecemeal information. I collected information about the names by consulting three newspapers and tried to find out the names but I could not make out any name and find out whether the persons was he or she or whether he was a Gujarati or a Punjabi. I could not make out anything.

Let us try to understand the agony of the people. 40,000 people went from one State and scores of other people went from different parts of the country. If their relatives are not able to get any information about whether the pilgrims are alive or not then it creates a very very bad impression about Government. Let us at least care for the image and the ability of the Government.

[Translation]

SHRI HARIN PATHAK (Ahmedabad): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Thank you. I have just come from Srinagar at 4.30 p.m. I was in Srinagar for 3 days from the 26th August. I have arrived here, half an hour ago. I came to know that a discussion is taking place on the tragedy occurred during Amar Nath Yatra and I requested you to give me time for a couple of minutes to speak. This is a national tragedy. All the States are very much anxious to know about the pilgrims of Amar Nath Yatra. The people, whose relatives had gone to participate in the Yatra, are worried very much as they want to know whether their relatives are dead or alive, if dead, whether they have been cremated or not and how many persons have died. I have been there for 3 days to see all this. We learnt on 25th that thousands of pilgrims have been buried because of heavy rainfall and snowfall on 22nd August between Panchtarini and Sheshnag. The Government of Gujarat sent Relief Commissioner of Government of Gujarat and myself as a representative of the Government to Srinagar. We reached Srinagar by helicopter. We stayed there for three days. Besides, Shri Lahiri also arrived on 27th August from West Bengal. Earlier Shri Mohammad Saleem had also arrived from West Bengal on 26th August. I am sorry to say that there was no administration worth the name.

[English]

There is a total failure of the administration.

[Translation]

There are more than 200 bodies still lying between Panchtarini and Sheshnag even today. I went there by helicopter with permission of Gujarat Government but Shri Lahiri and Shri Mohammed reached there by car. The people told us that many people have died because of heavy rainfall and snowfall from 22nd to 24th August. It is very tragic but I do not want to go into details nor I want to make it a political issue. I stayed there for three days and left the Relief Commissioner there. We could not get the list of the dead so far.

[English]

No body knows how many persons have died. No body knows whether they have been cremated or not.....
(Interruptions)

[Translation]

Please let me speak, I am just coming from that place. Sometime they say that number of dead is 130 but after 2 hours they say 140, sometime they say 205 and then announce 300—A list of dead persons has not reached Srinagar so far.

[English]

I was in the headquarters of Jammu and Kashmir.

[Translation]

They say that it is likely to be received from Pahalgam but others say it will come from Sheshnag. There are no photographs of the dead available, their names are not known. Telephone calls from hundreds of people are being received from all the States of our country but there is no one in Srinagar, Jammu or Pahalgam to reply to their queries.

I may submit that lives of the pilgrims who are still alive, are in danger. National Highway is still blocked. According to Government figures, there were 12 thousand people in Pahalgam till yesterday noon, prior to this their number was 70 thousand and now they are proceeding slowly towards Jammu. This Yatra has not taken place for the first time—

[English]

but no precautionary measures were taken.

[Translation]

Anantnag is situated at a distance of 240 kilometer from Jammu and from there Pahalgam in 43 kilometer and

Sheshnag is 26 kilometer from Pahalgam and Panchtarini is at a distance of 13 kilometer from Sheshnag and total distance of Amar Nath Yatra is 325 kilometer. This Yatra commenced on 16th August and every one know that lakhs of people will be coming for this Yatra but no arrangements were made anywhere. Even tents could not be opened, everywhere there were complaints of

[English]

inadequate facilities—There was no communication system to give information about the pilgrims. There was no control room. This was the condition in Srinagar and on the route as well. I demand that inquiry should be held as no communication facility was provided. The Jammu and Kashmir administration has proved to be a complete failure. Even after three days we were unable to contact any officer. Although we went there on behalf of Gujarat Government by Helicopter worth Rs. 22 crore, we had medicines with us to help the people in distress not only people from Gujarat but for the people of the country as a whole. Our helicopter was at the air strip for three days. We told the authorities to make use of the helicopter to carry the sick people to proper place for treatment

[English]

but no body listened us. I could not contact any responsible officer there, though I was myself in Srinagar.

[Translation]

It is very state of affairs. The telephone of the Rest House, in which I was staying, was cut off on the plea that Government has not paid the Bill. We wanted to talk to Tourism Commissioner and we carried an Ham Radio from Gujarat—we put its one set in our room and the other in Gandhi Nagar. It was very difficult to talk to any officer in Srinagar. First I had to talk to the people in Gandhi Nagar on Ham Radio and then Srinagar was contacted from Gandhi Nagar and then I could talk to the authorities. The Home Minister should take the incidents seriously and detailed inquiry should be held. I have 2-3 demands. A list of those persons has not been made whose bodies have been cremated. I have just now received a telephone call to know about the fate of Nagdan Bhai who is very famous in Saurashtra. I came across one Ramesh Thakur. His 40 year old father is missing. He told me that it has been announced on T.V. that he is dead but he asks where is body of his father. No one knows this thing. The Government is not aware whether dead body has been cremated or it is being preserved. This is the story of thousands of people. Therefore I demand that correct figures of the dead persons should be supplied to us.

Secondly, whether cremation of the dead persons has taken place or not. In case it has been done then whether their identification was made or not? I may tell you that 19 persons died on 21st August. Bodies of there 19 persons were cremated without taking any photograph or any identification. Everyone is working in arbitrary manner. When I contacted the authorities, they said that they were sending the pilgrims to Jammu free of charge on the evening of 27th, when the

road was opened we contacted the authorities that how there 50 thousand people would go. They are penniless. When we visited 92 Base Army Hospital on the night of 26th August at 8.00 pm. there were 140 persons. All were penniless. There were 80 thousand people in Pahalgam. When I contacted the authorities they replied that the Government have buses for this purpose. There are private buses as well as government buses and they will carry all of them to Jammu. Rs 300 per pilgrim were demanded but how many of them could afford to pay. The people having money paid them. It was noon on 27th August. The people sat in the buses after paying Rs 300/- . The capacity of the bus was 50. The conductor announced that people having Rs. 500/- can board the bus.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Were they Government buses?

SHRI HARIN PATHAK : Yes, they were government buses.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA : They were private buses.

SHRI HARIN PATHAK : They were not private buses.

[English]

I was told by the Secretary there.

[Translation]

I was there at Pahalgam. There was acrimonious discussion in my presence. It was said on the night of 27th August that—

[English]

Today is the last day.

[Translation]

It was announced on 27th in Pahalgam that 140 Government buses have come from Srinagar. Today is the last day.

[English]

You have to leave Pahalgam at any cost before 7 o'clock in the morning, otherwise the government will not provide any security.

[Translation]

It was announced at 8.00 p.m. There was total confusion as 50 thousand people started moving restlessly. They reached the bus terminal which was at a distance of 1½ kilometer from the camp. There were 50 buses. I am talking of private buses. I don't mind if crew of private buses behave like this. Free kitchens were closed on 27th August. We need not talk of all the incidents. We are so sad and moreover my other friends would also like to speak. There is no question of criticism. This is not the way of running an administration.

I am in politics for the last 27 years. I was chairman of the corporation also and I am here for the last three terms. This is a government which has no responsibility whatsoever and people have died. Even after 8 days, no one knows whether his father, sister or brother is alive or dead. In case he/she is dead, where his/her body is lying. Even the authorities sitting in Srinagar cannot furnish this information.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir there are our sentiments. I may tell the hon'ble Home Minister that I was there 2 hours before his arrival on the same day when he visited that place. But he came back very soon. Had he stayed there and made enquiries, he could know the facts. I can say that you will not be in a position to tell the House even tomorrow that how many deaths have taken place, how many person have been cremated and how many bodies are still lying.

Mr. Chairman, the government should have express concern on such a big tragedy I reprove this government severely. This Yatra is an annual feature. The government should have taken precautionary measures in advance. A telephone booth should have been set at a distance of every 10 kilometer when a person like me can bring a radio station from Gujarat and can communicate with the people of seven districts of Gujarat while sitting in a guest House in Pahalgam, can't this Government of India manage together and send information. Can't they find out as to what is happening in Pahalgam, Chandanvadi, Sheshnag or Panchtarini and inform the citizens of our country?

Madam, it is not the question of individual or State. Two members are sitting on the other side and I am on this side, who have visited the spot and know the actual position. I demand that high level inquiry should be held and details of the people who are still stranded should be made known to the public. How many people and the places where they are stranded. This information should be made public. I had given a ring to Shri Ram Vilas Paswan.

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN): I have mentioned your name.

SHRI HARIN PATHAK: In the context of Railways I would like to tell Shri Paswan that the pilgrims do not have money.

They are hungry for the last 4 days. They do not have cloth to cover the dead body. I have seen 18 bodies. They had Banian and Nicker only. They did not have proper clothes in such conditions when these was snowfall and heavy rainfall. Thousands of pilgrim are penniless standeñ in Jammu. The Government should arrange to send them home. They belong to different States of India. The Government should arrange to send them to their destination free of charge.

[English]

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV (Silchar): They have gone to this spot. I think that he and the other two hon. Members—

whatever they have said—should put up in writing and give it to him. (*Interruptions*) Because some of the things he can check up and take appropriate action. It will be very good because on the spot visit will give more information. He is getting a fresh information from the second source.

SHRI JAI PRAKASH (Hissar): First of all I would like to express my condolences for the tragic death of pilgrims to the families whose near and dear ones lost their lives and at the same time thank the people of Kashmir and other friends who saved the lives of Amarnath pilgrims and rendered them all assistance. I have heard Shri Pathak with rapt attention. I associate myself with the views expressed by him and constrained to reprimand the State Government as well as Central Government because the State is under President's Rule and Central Government is directly responsible for any act of omission on Commissions there. The Prime Minister is holding charge of Kashmir affairs and he should be held responsible for the negligence. The Governor and the Chief Secretary of the State should be replaced.

The hon'ble Home Minister had pointed out on the day before yesterday that leader of the opposition has not visited the State but two hon'ble Members from that side and one from this side have visited the spot. The version given by these hon'ble Members and that given in the statements made by the Prime Minister and Home Minister are quite different. This is great injustice. The Government does not explain the real or factual position in the Parliament also. This great fraud with the people. I hold the Central Government responsible for this situation. Many people of Haryana have been failed. I had talked to the Home Secretary on telephone. At least you should provide us a list of persons who have died, who are alive and who are stranded on the way and also where they are stranded. The people of Haryana can reach Pahalgam by car but officials of Kashmir sitting in Srinagar cannot go beyond Pahalgam. It is shameful.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, in the event of such a big tragedy our Prime Minister was busy in political engagements and preparation of elections. The Home Minister remained sitting here. The Governor has also been camping here. He said that he has come to see the Prime Minister. Such Governor should be replaced. There is no need for every inquiry. The officials who have not performed their duty or who have been careless should be suspended forthwith irrespective of their rank or position. The Chief Secretary and Governor should be replaced and the inquiry should be held.

Some hon'ble Members have expressed their view that if inquiry is held, only employees of lower rank would be brought to look. That is true. I would suggest that first of all the Governor and Chief Secretary and/or any other officer handling the task should be transferred from Jammu and Kashmir. Then a Commission should be constituted to hold an enquiry. Secondly a team comprising Members of opposition should be sent to the State so that we may present true picture of the

whole affair. Our senior parliamentarians often say that we should not bring politics in such situations. I do not understand this. All of us have come here to solve the problems politically we have not come here to boost fanaticism. But they say that we take some political advantage. We have not come here for the purpose I have come in this House to represent 11 lakh people. We being a Member of opposition party have same responsibility. We have to tell the Government that they should not betray the people. We have to serve as watchdog.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, Members of other parties were discussing that a list has not been made available. No body known that who has died, whose bodies have been created and who arranged medical assistance. When Government of Gujarat and Haryana can provide medical assistance, why Central Government could not make any arrangement for this purpose. This is very shameful.

SHRIMATI JAYAWANTI NAVINCHANDRA MEHTA (Bombay-South): A Minister of Maharashtra has also visit Jammu and Kashmir.

SHRI JAI PRAKASH: The private buses have charged fare upto Rs. 500. The Government should have exercised control over every thing whether it is Government, semi-Government or private. It is the responsibility of the Government. If some shopkeeper charges Rs. 50 for an article worth Rs. 5/ will the shop inspector not stop him? Why a private bus operator charged Rs. 500/- from the persons were in distress. Therefore maximum responsibility is that of Government. The burden of expenditure on parliament and the Cabinet lies on the people. So is it not your duty to visit that place and bring the situation under control. A vast confluence (Mela) takes place in Kurukshetra in Haryana. All of you know that more than 10 lakh people participate in that confluence. Our Government makes all arrangements in advance. There are control rooms, dispensaries, telephone booths and close circuit Television. I agree that in the case route is very wrong—i.e. about 250 kilometer but India has a vast communication system. Telephone booths should have been set up there, team of doctors should have been deployed at various points. Hon'ble Prime Minister says that number of people was more than expected. I want ask one thing. If number of representatives would increase, is it not the duty of the Government to make arrangements for their sitting, working etc. It is the responsibility of the Government. How can Government say that number was more and blankets could not be arranged? The number of blankets was 14½ thousand but (*Interruptions*) number of people was 1.25 lakh. If Government wanted to arrange blankets, they could arrange in three hours. If they could not reach by road, they could use helicopters, aeroplanes, Army and Airforce. It was the responsibility of the Government.

Recently Haryana was in the grip of floods. The area to which I belong, was under water for 7 days but the Government did not provide a single helicopter. It is very sad

that lakhs of people are stranded there and they are penniless. I agree that there was snowfall and heavy rainfall and some people might have died because of natural calamity but then what Government have done. Responsibility should be fixed for the loss of life. Now so many people are in distress stranded in Jammu.

I would like to say one thing to the Minister of Railways also. You are leader of the House. Arrangements should be made to set up more hotels and two Ministers should be deployed there to ensure that edible things are not sold at exorbitant rates. The people from all regions of the country are stranded there. What impression will they gather that what arrangement has been made by the Government. If the Government does not work for welfare of the people we will strongly oppose such Government. I held the Government responsible for the tragedy. The Prime Minister should suspend the officers found guilty of dereliction of duty and after than a Commission of inquiry should be constituted to probe the whole affair.

SHRI SAMIK LAHIRI (Diamond Harbour): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have recently returned for Srinagar. I want to Pahalgam also. I stayed in Srinagar for 2 days. I express my deep sorrow and offer condolences to the pilgrims killed there.

[English]

The main problem there was that there was no coordination, particularly, between civil and army authorities. Two parallel authorities, were running there.

[Translation]

Version of civil and army authorities were quite different. We wanted to go to Pahalgam but we were not allowed by the authorities. They said that the road is closed. But the pilgrims who returned in the night told that the road was open. Had they allowed to go to Pahalgam, the pilgrims could have some satisfaction.

[English]

As my colleague has already told that he had lots of medicines. He could not reach Pahalgam with these medicines. I have seen that also.

[Translation]

We could reach Pahalgam yesterday and we saw

[English]

60 per cent of the passengers have already been evacuated from Pahalgam. But the main problem was lack of coordination.

[Translation]

I talked to the S.P. of that area. He said that all pilgrims would be sent to Jammu by bus free of charge. Even then

tickets were being sold at local State Transport Corporation. I saw those ticket with the many pilgrims. The State Government had requisitioned many private buses but they had not issued any instructions to them not to charge any fare from the passengers. There was so much rush that people would think that the three buses which reached Pahalgam were the last ones and they may not reach Jammu. Therefore

[English]

they were really rushing towards, the bus.

[Translation]

I observed that condition of the road was also very bad. Moreover passengers were sitting on roof of the buses also.

[English]

They were coming in a very dangerous manner

[Translation]

such was the condition. We contacted the S.P. and officers of traffic Police also and requested them to deploy more buses otherwise

[English]

they are really panic stricken

[Translation]

because it was announced by the administration for the first time that

[English]

after 28th, we will not be responsible for taking the security charges

[Translation]

but after our discussion with the S.P. we were told that

[English]

till the last Yatri leaves Pahalgam, I will be here. He assured us and I saw thereafter that many trucks and buses were proceeding towards Pahalgam. One thing I want to tell here that

[English]

there was a lack of Communication.

[Translation]

There were 70,000 people in Pahalgam from 23rd and 24th August, they were unable to communicate with their native place and therefor there was lot of anxiety among the people. It was not very difficulty for the administration to install a radio station there. Temporary telephone booths could have been installed there but there was no such arrangement.

[English]

even in Srinagar, there was no communication with Delhi. That was the main problem there.

[Translation]

Therefore I want to say that whenever and wherever such event takes place and where local as well as army administration—both are functioning, there must be coordination among them. The Central Government has to discharge their responsibility to build up coordination otherwise there will be chances like the present one.

I want to say one thing to the Minister of Railways also. He has made certain arrangements in Jammu. There are camps in Jammu but I have come to know that the main problem is that

[English]

really the Yatris are penniless.

[Translation]

Therefore they should be allowed to travel free of charge

[English]

so that they can return at least to their State Capital.

[Translation]

Some trains should run from Jammu for this purpose. I have seen condition of the 'Yatris' there. I had observed that if proper arrangements are made with regard to trucks and buses, Jammu will be free of 'Yatris' upto tomorrow.

[English]

Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

18.00 hrs.

[Translation]

SHRI HARIN PATHAK: Please let us know about tickets in the train.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Shri Paswan has already told

SHRI HARIN PATHAK: Coaches are attached. Actually you start a train for Delhi but 20 thousand people have gone from Gujarat and Maharashtra also.

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN: We are facing this problem that passengers are not available for even regular trains.

SHRI HARIN PATHAK: The people have not reached on yet, they will start reaching from tomorrow.

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN: One train carrying 1400 passengers has already started. We have arranged nine special trains in addition to 11 regular trains. When regular trains will be filled then special train will run.

SHRI HARIN PATHAK: There should be no ticket because they do not have any money. Private vehicles could go from Pahalgam to Chandanvadi. Thereafter one has to go for Sheshnag to Panchtarini and then people keep their luggage at Chandanvadi before proceeding for Amarnath. They keep with them only some amount and rest leave at Chandanvadi. Therefore they do not have money and should be allowed to travel free.

SHRIMATI JAYAWANTI NAVINCHANDRA MEHTA: An announcement to this effect should be made before allowing people to sit in the train. Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir it is about 6 O'clock. Upto what time proceedings will continue?

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: It will continue upto 9-10 O'clock. Arrangement for the dinner has also been made.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA: Will it continue upto 10 O'clock?

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Discussion on this issue will be over now. But proceeding of the House can continue even beyond 10 O'clock.

[English]

SHRI PRAMOTES MUKHERJEE (Berhampore) (WB): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, thank you for the opportunity given to me to express my views regarding this tragic incident. (Interruptions)

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE: For this item extension was taken for one hour. After that the discussion on the Budget has to start. That was the decision of the Business Advisory Committee.

DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY (Visakhapatnam): The speeches may be limited to ten minutes for each Member.

[Translation]

MR. DEPUTY-SEPAKER: Let it be extended by one hour. (Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: The hon'ble Members who have visited this spot have been given more time. Remaining Members will conclude within five minutes each.

[English]

SHRI PRAMOTHES MUKHERJEE: I will finish in two minutes.

18.04 hrs.

(SHRI P.M. SAYEED in the Chair)

We are on a very important discussion regarding a tragic incident on the way towards Amarnath. Our hon. friends Shri Harin Pathak and our hon. friend Shri Samil Lahiri and hon. friend Mohammad Saleem from Rajya Sabha, all of them visited different places that have been affected and they have given a very painful description of the situation prevailing in that area as a result of this tragic incident. We share their agony and their emotions as expressed by them in this House.

They have also submitted a report to the Hon. Home Minister and to the Government. I would appeal to the Government to examine this report immediately.

Loss of human life can never be compensated with money or with any soft words chosen from the dictionary.

It is a matter of great tragedy in the contemporary history of India. We all feel for those who lost their lives on their way to the Amarnath Cave. We express our deep sorrow and our feelings and sympathy for the members of the bereaved families who have lost their dear ones in this great tragedy. I also offer my thanks and gratitude to the Kashmiri porters and villagers and the local people who gave shelter to the pilgrims, who gave hospitality to the pilgrims and who saved many valuable lives of the pilgrims by their experiences at their level. At the same time I would appeal to the hon. Home Minister and to the Government to utilise the natural calamity fund for the recovery of this loss and also give incentive to the measures for the development of tourism in Jammu and Kashmir area.

The sincere attempts made by the hon. Home Minister and by the Central Government in this respect may be justified by some obvious reasons. But the failure of the State bureaucracy of Jammu and Kashmir can never be forgiven. They could avoid the situation had they been alert earlier. They could play their role to adopt the preventive measures for combating the harsh weather and other situations leading to such a disaster. But they could not do so. It is very unfortunate. I have gone through the report submitted by the hon. Home Minister. He is our beloved Home Minister. I have the highest regard for him. ...*(Interruptions)* He is always beloved.

I am sorry to find out that the report has been drafted by the bureaucracy to cover up the failures and lapses. It cannot be accepted that they could not foresee, they could not collect the weather forecast beforehand. It cannot be believable to ourselves. We are living in an age of highly sophisticated science and technology. The sophisticated technology is there

which can give us the necessary information, which can give us the forecast of weather to take adequate measures for combating any kind of harsh weather and harsh natural calamity. But they could not do so. This is an administrative report only. This is a simple administrative report drafted by the persons concerned with administration and this administrative report deals only with natural calamities, harsh weather, landslides, torrential rains, snowfall etc. We know all these things. We did not expect such things. We expected something more from our hon. Home Minister and still we expect that adequate attention should be given by the hon. Home Minister and by the Central Government to this problem so that we can recover the loss and we can expedite and double up and gear up the relief and rescue measures immediately for those persons who are affected and for the relatives who have lost their lives and for those persons who are detained there. We are not in a position to bring back the lives. But we should give proper relief and attention to those who are affected there.

SHRI HARIN PATHAK : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I have a special request to make to you. The hon. Leader of the Opposition, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayeeji has gone to Srinagar today in the afternoon. He might be returning today late evening or tomorrow morning. He has gone there to personally visit the place and see the whole affected area and to meet the people. My humble request is that when he comes back from the visit, we may hear him and, therefore, my request is that the hon. Home Minister can reply tomorrow and till then this discussion may be stopped here. ...*(Interruptions)* Let him give his own submission.

MR. CHAIRMAN : In the B.A.C. It was decided that.

(Interruptions)

SHRI MADHUKAR SARPOTDKAR (Mumbai-North-West) : Sir, we also support that point. Let us have a complete version of the picture. The Home Minister has seen the place and he has submitted his point in the House. ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. CHAIRMAN : He will be giving his own details of the visit.

...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI HARIN PATHAK : My humble request is that the Home Minister should reply tomorrow. *(Interruptions)*. At least, he is the Leader of the Opposition. The sky will not fall. ...*(Interruptions)* Let him have his say. ...*(Interruptions)* He has gone today to Srinagar only for this purpose. *(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

Let the discussion be completed today and Government can give their reply tomorrow and if the House agrees, I would request that Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee will return by tomorrow noon and after allowing him for a couple of minutes you can give your reply.

[English]

The sky will not fall. ...(*Interruptions*)

[Translation]

MR. CHAIRMAN : The Business Advisory Committee has decided that discussion on the Budget would start after reply has been given the present discussion.

[English]

SHRI HARIN PATHAK : The situation is different. Atalji was to go yesterday. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI JASWANT SINGH (Chittorgarh) : With your permission Shri Panigrahi, I would submit that—we have no right—this is not a right that we are exercising. We are only making a request. The Leader of the Opposition after all has gone himself; he has not gone there for holidays. All that we are requesting is that the House benefits from the reply of the Hon. Home Minister after whatever few observations the Leader of the Opposition makes. All that we are requesting is let this debate be concluded, let the Home Minister and all of us benefit from what the Leader of Opposition is saying tomorrow and let the hon. Home Minister reply come tomorrow. That is all we are asking. Immediately after everyone has finished, the discussion on the Budget (General) can commence and the Budget can conclude today. The reply of the Home Minister can come tomorrow like the reply of the Finance Minister will come tomorrow. This is a request. Certainly, we cannot demand it. This is a discussion under Rule 193. Very often the discussions under Rule 193. Very often the discussions under Rule 193 spread over to another day. I appeal both to the hon. Home Minister and to Shri Paswan and of course, you also, to please consider it. We cannot dictate this. We can only request. This is not an unreasonable request. The House will benefit and we all will also benefit. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI P.R. DASMUNSI : Sir, this is not an unreasonable request. The leader of the Opposition himself cooperated with the House because he was insisting on the Adjournment Motion and he accepted discussion under Rule 193. Since they are making this request, what is wrong if Vajpayeeji makes some observations tomorrow?

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : At what time?

SHRI HARIN PATHAK : Tomorrow. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : Sir, it is being decided that the Finance Minister will reply the General Budget discussions tomorrow. Tomorrow is the day for private Members business also. I have no objection. You fix up the time when he will speak. I have requested our hon. Speaker—though originally it was decided that tomorrow nobody will speak and only the reply of the Finance Minister will be there—that our Leader has decided to participate in the Budget. So, he will speak at one o'clock. You do not know that

Mr. Speaker has agreed to it. So, any time before 1 o'clock can be give to Vajpayeeji. We have no objection since he has gone there. But at the same time, we have to give time for its reply also. Kindly fix up time. There should not be Zero Hour tomorrow and then all parties should agree. Let Mr. Vajpayee speak before one o'clock and let the Minister reply. The whole purpose will be served ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. CHAIRMAN : Let me find out from the Leader of the House.

SHRI JASWANT SINGH : Mr. Chairman, Sir, because he is asking about time ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. CHAIRMAN : We can decide it later. Let us have the views of the Leader of the House.

SHRI JASWANT SINGH : If the budget is to be finished before one o'clock, it is fine. The Union Home Minister may take it up after the private Members business is over, after six o'clock. We do not mind. The budget is a priority.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : Let them do the adjustment.

[Translation]

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : We have no objection. The Prime Minister had to go to Lucknow to lay a foundation stone at 3 o'clock today but that programme has been shifted to 11 o'clock because of this discussion. We had learnt that discussion will commence after Question Hour and over by 4.00 p.m. Therefore we reached here before 4.00 p.m. and the Prime Minister cancelled all his other engagements. He is in his office. Earlier it was told that the Home Minister will give reply at 5.45 p.m. We informed the Prime Minister accordingly. Sometime during the discussion on delicate issues, demand is made that the Prime Minister should be present in the House, where is he? We have no objection. The leader of the opposition has gone to visit Jammu and Kashmir today. We accord due importance to him. On return he will give us some more information, but let me check up the programme of the Prime Minister for tomorrow and if there is any programme, then his name will not be enlisted ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA : Will discussion on the Budget not take place?

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : That is for today.

SHRI JASWANT SINGH : Let the discussion be completed by 1 o'clock.

SHRI SRIKANTA JENA : How can it be completed by 1 o'clock tomorrow?

SHRI JASWANT SINGH : Let the hon'ble Members speak today and the Finance Minister may give his reply tomorrow.

[English]

SHRI NIRMALKANTI CHATTERJEE (Dumdum) : You are desiring your Leader to be present to speak on that. They have expressed their desire that their Leader will speak tomorrow on Budget. So, that also has to be accommodated. What our normal practice is, we should move a resolution that the Question Hour be suspended. Otherwise, you cannot accommodate because tomorrow there is Friday.

MR. CHAIRMAN : This decision has already been taken by the Business Advisory Committee.

[Translation]

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : But you have to keep in mind that tomorrow is Friday and when we meet after lunch on Friday there are some interruptions and disturbances also....(Interruptions)

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN : So, let us continue, Mr. Panigrahi. They will ascertain the position within five minutes and tell us.

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I want to say one thing only. You can arrange the timing as you like. But little while ago—unless I was mistaken—one of the suggestions I heard from that side was that my reply, if necessary, could be even after a Private Members Business. I am afraid, I am not in a position to meet this request because I have some other engagement. So, I cannot wait till the Private Members Business is over.

MR. CHAIRMAN : After the Question Hour we have only one hour. If at all we dispense with the Zero Hour, one hour would be there.

SHRI NIRMAL KANTI CHATTERJEE : Sir, the real problem is though you have one hour between 12 o'clock and 1 o'clock, you cannot get away without lunch break tomorrow due to Friday. Then two ex-Prime Ministers will be speaking. Then the reply will be given. So, it is impossible to finish all this within one hour.

SHRI JASWANT SINGH : If you do not have a Zero Hour, then between 12 o'clock and 1 o'clock, we have one hour. I do not think that he will take much time. He is not going to make any major intervention. He will perhaps speak, at the most, for five or ten minutes. Thereafter, between 12 and 1 o'clock, he can speak and the hon. Home Minister's reply can come. Then at 2 o'clock, you take the Budget. You have one and a half hours.

SHRI NIRMAL KANTI CHATTERJEE : He will take one hour.

SHRI JASWANT SINGH : He will take not more than five or ten minutes.

MR. CHAIRMAN : They are ascertaining within five minutes. They will let us know. Shri Sriballav Panigrahi, you may continue and conclude within five minutes.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES AND PENSIONS AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRI S.R. BALASUBRAMONIYAN) : Tomorrow when the Budget is discussed, will everybody get time?

MR. CHAIRMAN : No. Today we have the discussion on the Budget and tomorrow the Finance Minister will reply. The discussion will conclude tonight. Only three more speakers are there. After that, there are two other speakers and then we will decide whether Home Minister's reply would be tomorrow or today. We are ascertaining within five or ten minutes.

18.22 hours

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI : Mr. Chairman, I shall be brief as directed by you as all aspects of this Amarnath yatra tragedy have been adequately covered by now.

I had the impression that after the visit of the hon. Home Minister to the spot and thereafter the Prime Minister's statement and some announcement also made by the hon. Railway Minister, normalcy would be restored very fast. But rather, with a heavy heart, I would observe, after we heard hon. Members of the House who visited the spot yesterday and today—they went up to Pahalgam and on return they had narrated their experiences—now it is for the whole House, for you and for all those who have heard, to decide what type of normalcy has been restored by now. This is a matter of concern.

These *yatras*, *melas* and festivals are part of our tradition. We are, as you know, a secular country. We have different religions practised in India and people of different religious faiths observe and participate in different festivals and this Amarnath yatra is one such very famous yatra.

What has happened should be a eye-opener for the Government of India, particularly for the State Government of Jammu and Kashmir for the future.

Recently, two or three months before, some tragedy also took place at Haridwar *Chota Kumbha Mela* or something like that. Again, at Ujjain also, some *mela* was there and some people died there also.

Before that also, on one occasion, at the time of *Navakalivar* in Puri temple, some deaths took place. But this time, 1.5 million pilgrims congregated there and that passed

off very peacefully. What I mean to say is that, again in the face of threats from terrorists, there was an impression that this *yatra* was losing attraction. But that was not so. In the face of such threat also, about 75,000 people had gone for the *yatra* and participated last year and naturally the Prime Minister that day said that it was beyond any expectation that the participation in this year's *yatra* had more than 1,20,000 pilgrims. It is a good sign for the country and for the society. On the one hand, the misdeeds, crimes and corruption are on the increase and on the other hand, religious festivals, *yatras* and *melas* are taking place where large crowds congregate. This is a welcome feature. The State Government authorities concerned should make all sorts of preparations to meet the situation. When people came to know that Parliamentary elections could take place peacefully in Jammu and Kashmir and the elections to the State Assembly are due one month after, naturally, thinking that the situation is much better, a large number of pilgrims came there. The point is that nobody should politicise the human tragedy. But, at the same time, this human tragedy should not also be undermined, should not be pushed under the carpet. As I said earlier, we should analyse this and draw lessons for the future.

Sir, I would say that one thing is very very disturbing, rather shocking us. The Home Minister by now might have changed his impression. I do not know about it. I am telling you about the human tragedy. If you stick to your point, if you are, still for it, I have nothing to say. You please go ahead with out impression. I would say that he has stated that the natural calamity together with the human failure is responsible for this type of a tragedy. There was such a high loss of lives etc. It was stated that the toll was about 200. I think it would go much beyond the number of 200 or 300. Many people are still missing now. They are untraceable. According to Government rules, unless the dead bodies are recovered or located or identified, the Government do not recognise, do not take cognisance that they are dead. There are the Revenue Department rules like the famine code etc. how to declare somebody dead on account of famine and other things. Even if people are missing for years, even if there is no hope of their coming back and even if different agencies say that those people are dead, the Government do not take cognisance of them. So, similarly, due to these missing people and all those things, this death toll will go further high. At the same time, I would say that nobody has control over weather etc. Of course, in this modern society when technological developments and advancements are very much there, we can be careful about such things. We have the weather officers. We get warnings etc. Probably, it was not properly transmitted to the stations located at higher altitudes well in time. It is certain that had the authorities of the Jammu and Kashmir Government taken proper steps, this could have been averted to some extent. We do not blame Shri Indrajit Gupta personally. We do not blame Shri Deve Gowda, the hon. Prime Minister personally nor the Central Government. It is mainly the concern of the State Government. But since the State Government is under President's Rule, that is why we are

discussing this in detail here. Naturally they should not take it that way. But what is more painful is that after the Home Minister's visit such lapses are there. We have to believe him. Harin Pathakji, at the same time, can we disbelieve the other friend who also came from there? Naturally, the face of these things, to give a clean chit to the State Administration is very painful. I take objection to this. At the same time, I would like to bring to the notice of this august House one thing. Mr. Home Minister, I draw your attention to yesterday's 9.30 and ten o'clock of the television news. At 9.30 it was the news given by *Aaj tak* and at ten o'clock, it was news given by 'Tonight' ... (*Interruptions*) Let him check up the news. There is one thing. It had been stated that 35,000 people were still there at Pahalgam yesterday and not a loudspeaker was working there to announce the information. If it is incorrect, I will be very happy. But it was the last night television news. If I am wrong, please correct me.

I have not gone there. One thing is, there is absolutely no toilet facility available at Pahalgam because it is a small place. What is the capacity it can handle and for how many days? No arrangement has been made when people have been there for so many days. Immediately after the departure of the hon. Home Minister from Pahalgam, his senior officers also left for Srinagar. Not a single officer was available there to give a proper guidance, to monitor the arrangement and to look to all these things. I have heard myself about these things yesterday in the electronic media. And those who have come back from there, have also confirmed this.

The hon. Prime Minister said that there would be an enquiry; and the nature and level of that enquiry would be decided later on by the Government. I think, this was also the assurance given here by Shri Indrajit Gupta. That day, I insisted on judicial inquiry. I again say that there is absolutely no politics in this human tragedy. But the question is, who will enquire? There are instances of such tragedies and everywhere there has been some sort of an enquiry whether it was at Kumbh Mela at Hardwar, Jagannath Temple at Puri or elsewhere. At some place, there was a judicial inquiry and in some other, it was an administrative inquiry. Here, the roles of the Governor and the Chief Secretary have come under fire or criticism. I need not repeat it because you have already asked me to conclude my speech. But since the Governor is involved and the Chief Secretary is involved, I would like you to tell me what sort of an enquiry will be appropriate or what sort of an enquiry will suffice. Can a District Magistrate or a Commissioner enquire into the conduct of a Governor or a Chief Secretary? In view of all this, what is appropriate is a judicial inquiry. I still insist on that. I do not find fault with the Ministers here. Naturally the senior officers of the State Government are at fault. They have taken it very leisurely and casually. Shockingly, the lack of imagination on their part has led to such a tragedy. Otherwise, it could have been contained, it could have been minimised. Of course, snow-fall and heavy rainfall could not have been averted. But the tragedy part, loss of life part could have been reduced. I say that let it be an eye-opener. Let us draw a lesson from this. A

large number of people congregate in all these religious festivals. We have to rise to the occasion. We cannot be callous like this. That is why, I emphatically demand that nothing short of a judicial inquiry will meet the requirement. The Government is sincere. Therefore, anything less than a judicial inquiry will not meet the requirement.

With these words, I thank you again and take my seat.

SHRI BRIJ BHUSHAN TIWARI (Dumariaganj) : The tragedy occurred during Amar Nath Yatra was really serious one. The House has already expressed condolences and I myself express my condolences for the same.

Many hon'ble Members have given their suggestions. I know that Amarnath Yatra is most arduous and hazardous one. There are difficult terrains, height and the vagaries of weather. It is therefore not possible to overcome all the problems completely.

SHRIMATI JAYAWANTI NAVINCHANDRA MEHTA : Now-a-days every thing is possible.

SHRI BRIJ BHUSHAN TIWARI : I do not want to challenge hon'ble body Member in this regard. But accidents of aeroplanes of fully developed countries like America also take place. Most tragic accidents took place in Francisco, Japan, accidents do take place everywhere. Sometime natural calamity is such that it is beyond the control of man or Government. It is true that we should be cautious and make proper arrangements. But as stated by the Home Minister and Prime Minister and all the Members have been convinced that whether from 20th or 22nd August—say between 22nd and 24th August all of a sudden weather become unfavourable. It was so bad that even helicopters and aeroplanes could not be used and all the arrangements went to the winds and most of those people died who were trapped on the way. In fact information could not reach certain camps also. No doubt, Government should have paid special attention on two aspects. When the Government admits that they were expecting about one lakh pilgrims, they should have arranged tents, medical facilities etc. accordingly. They should have used electronic media to tell the people that they must carry such and such articles. The Government should have made foolproof arrangements to meet all eventualities. There should have been some monitoring system to see whether number of pilgrims is increasing or decreasing. If the number was increasing, the Government should have stopped them. The army and the local people given all help to the pilgrims in distress. But the facts stated by our hon'ble Members, who visited the spot, are really painful and disgraceful. It is not during this tragedy of Amarnath Yatra but whenever some big tragedy occurs, some people indulge in nefarious activities. They try to take advantage of the situation and resort to inhuman behaviour. Local administration cannot be absolved of their responsibilities in such a situation. If bus operators or drivers were charging fare from Rs. 300 to Rs. 500 per passenger or pilgrims were made to pay exorbitant rates for a

cup of tea etc., stringent action should have been taken against such people. I agree with this view that people came in large number to our holy places, religious functions and other such events and we should be very cautious and careful in making elaborate arrangements. If we are successful in making such arrangements, it is appreciated and a correct message goes to the people that this government is capable of discharging its responsibility. But it is a matter of satisfaction that the Home Minister of Central Government visited the spot in very adverse circumstances and made enquiries about various activities. But he himself has admitted in his statement that these were certain inadequacies but no one should doubt intention of the Government. In case some responsible officers or other officials of the local administration have not discharged their duty, our Government is prepared to hold an inquiry. We shall learn something from the outcome of the inquiry and will remain more vigilant on similar occasions.

[English]

DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY (Visakhapatnam) : Mr. Chairman, I speak only for three minutes. Otherwise we keep on repeating and hammering the same points.

I must say that it is a big tragedy in the annals of the history that has hit the entire nation. People who had gone to have the *darshan* of Lord Shiva happened to meet with the natural calamity and died.

Yesterday the hon. Home Minister gave a clear cut report about the events and circumstances under which the tragedy took place. Similarly our friends—Shri Pathak and others—who have visited the place personally and come back today have given us a totally different picture. So, there is a lack of communication and there is a misunderstanding about the events. Therefore there is a confusion in the minds of the people as to where actually the suffering has taken place. But this is not the time to blame each other. This is the time when we have to find a solution for the future also. Nevertheless we have to know whether anybody is at fault intentionally or accidentally; due to circumstances beyond their control or by mischief or negligence.

18.41 hrs.

(MR. SPEAKER in the Chair)

Secondly, in future if suddenly the climate changes like this, how should the Government take precaution? We have been hearing that there are no facilities there, there is no proper road etc. The Government of India must spend more money because when people go to see such a great temple to have *darshan* of Lord Shiva, they must go on a *pucca* road. They must also have some more facilities on the way.

Some friends are asking for a judicial enquiry while some others are asking for an administrative enquiry. But let us have an impartial enquiry which will be able to get at the facts.

After the facts come out, the Government should be determined to take action irrespective of any other consideration. Let us not politicalise such situations. The entire House and the entire nation have been feeling sad about this. But I find that there is some political tone in what the Members are speaking. On the one hand they keep on trying to hammer the Government. But on the other hand they say there is not much fault. There is a difference in the tones of different people. That means there is a political feeling. But my submission is, let us not politicalise the situation. Let us be united. Let us see that such tragedies do not take place. In future the Government should see that perfect arrangements are made. If anybody has played any mischief, if anybody is negligent in performing his duty, he should be immediately punished after the enquiry report comes. Till such time, let us not have any apprehension or misgiving in our mind.

Lastly, I fully believe our hon. Home Minister who has got a good image. What I have been hearing about him is that he has always been a selfless personality. He had gone there and got some information. Of course, our other friends have also got some information. But there cannot be such a vast difference between the two. Therefore, the Home Minister must ponder over this to see where is the difference, why there is such a big communication gap in understanding the situation between the two parties. Then only will the truth come out.

I request the Home Minister to bear in mind all the points raised by every member and give a reply.

[Translation]

SHRI JAI PRAKASH AGARWAL (Chandni Chowk - Delhi): Mr. Speaker, Sir, a great tragedy has occurred during the Amarnath Yatra. Thousands of people had gone from Delhi to participate in this yatra. Those people, who have returned, say that they went to see the temple of Amarnath but they saw the scene of death. The people of all the families were upset because of fatal cases. We have religious bent of mind. Amarnath Yatra takes place every year. The Government should make a note of the inadequacies found in the arrangements during the course of journey. For example lack of telephone facility, no arrangement to stay, exorbitant rates of fare charged from the pilgrims and harassment to them. They found a lot of difficulty for coming to Pahalgam from Sheshnag. Government had not made any arrangement. Ours is a religious country. People have religious bent of mind and they have faith in their religion. I hope that the Government will provide all facilities in future so that pilgrims may not face any difficulty during their journey.

Another good thing has come to light and it has been published in the press also that local Muslim families helped a lot. They provided food, tea and shelter to stay. I wish similar sentiments will continue to exist in this country and people will cooperate with one another. There may be yatra of any

community but if we continue to cooperate with one another, there will be no difficulty. The Government may hold inquiry or not but I would like to point out something that many religious institutions have sent appeal to the Government to allot land to them to enable them to construct Yatra Dham or some buildings where from some facilities could be provided to pilgrims. As a result of this, pilgrims undertaking yatra would not find any difficulty in staying or keeping luggage there and complete their yatra without any difficulty.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : Well, on the request of the hon. Member, Shri Jaswant Singh to postpone the reply of the Minister of Home Affairs on this issue till tomorrow, with the Congress having no objection, there was a discussion with the Leader of the House and the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs. They have agreed that this matter could be taken up tomorrow immediately after the Question Hour. There would be no Zero Hour tomorrow.

Shri Vajpayee, the Leader of the Opposition has gone to Jammu and Kashmir. If he returns, he would speak for fifteen minutes, after which the Minister of Home Affairs would reply. If, for any reason, Shri Vajpayee is not able to return, then, the Minister of Home Affairs would straightaway reply to the debate at twelve o'clock tomorrow. This is the consensus that has been reached.

On the debate on the General Budget, well, we thought that it could be concluded today. But I think that there is a request from the Congress side that one more Member might be allowed to speak before the reply of the Minister of Finance. My request to the rest of the Members is that if we could conclude it today by taking very little time, it would be very good. However, I would leave it to the House to decide by what time it should be concluded. Tentatively, the idea is that it should be concluded. Tentatively, the idea is that it should be concluded by ten o'clock tonight.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : As long as you are in the Chair. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : I am told that dinner is also available. So, we shall now resume the General Discussion on the General Budget.

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE : How many Members are still there to speak?

MR. SPEAKER : They are quite large in number, but I think that if the parties can restrict the list to a lesser number, it would be very good.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : Just like the last time, if the time is restricted to five to ten minutes for each Member,

all of them can be accommodated. We can sit up to ten o'clock. It is not that everybody should speak ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI E. AHAMED (Manjeri) : It is more applicable to the major parties.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : Sir, I have got a request to make. I request that Shrimati Krishna Bose may be called to speak first because her husband is not well and she has to catch a flight ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER : That is all the more valid reason for her to speak as briefly as possible.

18.49 hrs.

THE GENERAL BUDGET, 1996-97

[*English*]

SHRIMATI KRISHNA BOSE (Jadavpur) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been in mihd tuned with the issue relating to the unfortunate pilgrims of Amarnath for the last four hours that I find it very difficult to come back to the cold statistics and economics, but I shall try my best. I also know about the constraint of time. So, I shall be very brief also.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have listened to the Budget speech made by our Minister of Finance, Shri Chidambaram with great interest

18.50 hrs.

[SHRI P.M. SAYEED *in the Chair*]

While listening to his speech and to the variety of poetry in multiple languages that he delivered in his Budget speech. I was reminded of the rather sober lines of our Bengali poet. Shukanto:

"Kabita tomaya Dilum Ajke Chhuti,
Khudha Rajye Prithvi Godaya moy
Purnima Chand Jeno Jhalsano Reeti."

When translated it would be like this : 'Poetry, today I give you leave to go. The rule of hunger has turned the world into prose where the full Moon appears to be a warm piece of bread'. Well, indeed, when we turn to the cold prose of the Finance Minister's speech, shorn of all its poetic flourishes what do we find?

I confess that I am somewhat disappointed. I find that the Government has fallen short of what it might have achieved. Many people are happy and some people are not so happy that this year's Government's Budget has kept to the road to the economic reforms which was started by the last Congress Government

Now, with the pragmatic record of our Prime Minister in Karnataka and the record of Shri Chidambaram as a very progressive Minister in the previous Ministry, did we really export anything else? It is true that the reversal of that policy would have meant that India could not have taken its place into the front rank of the growing economies in the foreseeable future. However, we are not surprised that they have kept to the road that was shown by the previous Congress Government. To be brief, I shall not go into the details of the budget and I shall not take up itemwise as some hon. Members did.

I shall keep myself to the two major planks of the Budget. As we all know, the two major planks of the Budget are Revenue side and the Expenditure side. Now, the Finance Minister spoke in ringing tones about more reforms, more compassion, more revenue and more courage. I do not remember the many other 'more' that he spoke. Now, it does take a lot of political courage to take more revenue from the rich and to give more compassion to the poor and to the under privileged. Well, as we all know, our tax base itself is very narrow which means that very few people are in the category of tax payers. Now, if we want to raise the revenue, we cannot go on burdening the same people again and again. So, we must find a way to widen our tax base. How can we do that? Now, to my mind, our tax principles should be very fair and simple. Anybody who earns anything over the exemption line should be made to contribute to the national coffer, notwithstanding from where his income came. I find that there is one sphere which this Government and also the previous Government never touched.

I wonder why we do not tax or we do exempt from taxing the rural rich. I have wondered about it very much. Now, it is true that agriculture is the backbone of our country. It is also true that our present Prime Minister prides himself as a farmer Prime Minister. For the first time, we have a farmer as the Prime Minister.

But even so, I see no reason why the rural rich should not be taxed. That is a sphere where we could have tapped for more revenue.

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND MINISTER OF COMPANY AFFAIRS (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM) : Madam, it is very obvious. Tax on agricultural income is Entry 46 in List 2. The Central Government or the Parliament does not have the power to tax agricultural income.

SHRIMATI KRISHNA BOSE: Is it so? Do you not have the power at all to tax?

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM: No, No of the agricultural income.

SHRIMATI KRISHNA BOSE: Anyway, then at least one thing you can do — stop perhaps the given subsidies. I find that all the benefits of expenditure go to them, and so, they are all a very happy people. All the subsidies on fertiliser.