

is less, 34 lack acres under the Krishna Delta area will dry up and not a drop will come if the dam height is raised...*(Interruptions)* Let me complete...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI V. DHANANJAYA KUMAR : Sir, it is only to enable the hydel power project. We do not want to impound more water...*(Interruptions)* Sir, wrong information should not be given to the House ...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI P. UPENDRA : Let me complete, first...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI V. DHANANJAYA KUMAR : The height of the dam is being raised only to enable the hydel power project to go on. We do not want to impound more water...*(Interruptions)* Correct facts should be placed before the House.

SHRI P. UPENDRA : Sir, now several attempts have been made to sort out this issue amicably. A number of Members of Parliament met the hon. Prime Minister and requested him to take the initiative to solve the problem because he knows the background of the whole case. But unfortunately he could not take the initiative and the matter was treated as an internal affair of the United Front

They appointed four Chief Ministers to look into the matter. I do not know under what authority they were appointed. The four Chief Minister again appointed an official team, including the officials of the Planning Commission and CWC, which they were not supposed to do. Then the Prime Minister withdraw these two Members from there and it became completely an unofficial team. They then went to Bangalore. They were turned down by the Karnataka Government without visiting the dam. All this *tamasha* has taken place and matters are going from bad to worse.

We do not want to politicise this issue. We want an early settlement of this issue. The apprehensions of the people of Andhra Pradesh are genuine because we are a lower riparian State. We do not want to deny the legitimate share of the Karnataka Government or the Karnataka people. They should have their own share. But they should remove these apprehensions of the Andhra people. Why are they increasing the height of the dam which is not necessary at all? Why have they increased the power potential to 1100 M.W. by which again they have to maintain water at a particular level? All these are very ticklish issues and only technical experts have to go into this.

The hon. Prime Minister should take the initiative and should send a team of CWC, monitor the whole thing and find out what is really happening ...*(Interruptions)* The Karnataka Government says that they are not raising it. MLAs from Andhra Pradesh have gone there visited the site and found that height of the dam has been raised. Therefore, these have to be settled at an expert level. I only wish that the Prime Minister should take the initiative and not treat it as a party

affairs. They should treat it as an affair of the Government of India. A tripartite agreement should be made between the Government of India, Government of Karnataka and Government of Andhra Pradesh and settle it amicably before the matter gets worse.

We do not want to strain the relations between the two neighbourly States. We want that the interests of both the States be protected and particularly the apprehensions of Andhra Pradesh people be removed. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER : The House stands adjourned to meet again at 2.10 p.m.

13.08 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned for Lunch till Ten Minutes past Fourteen of the Clock.

14.16 hrs.

The Lok Sabha re-assembled after Lunch at Sixteen Minutes past Fourteen of the Clock

(Mr. Speaker in the Chair)

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : Mr. Home Minister.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Amarnath Yatra

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, and hon. Members, I wish to express my regret that due to some unavoidable delay in arriving back from Srinagar last evening, it was not possible for me to make this statement yesterday as I had planned to do. I am sorry for this.

Hon. Prime Minister has already apprised the House yesterday of the background of this year's Amarnath Yatra and the salient features of the logistic arrangements which made to cater to an unprecedented number of prospective *yatris*, as also the relief and rescue operations carried out by the State authorities, with the assistance of the Army and the para-military Forces, in the wake of the tragic calamity that befell the *yatra*. The untimely snowfall - I should say - at higher reaches along the *yatra* route had exposed the *yatra* to extreme cold, which, combined with the exhaustion of high altitude trekking and shortage of oxygen, caused serious health hazards among the aged and the not so healthy *yatra*. Torrential and incessant rains in the State resulted in unprecedented land slides at several places between Jammu and Banihal on the National Highway and the *yatra* route from Anantnag to Pahalgam at two places. I regret to say that this had resulted in completed snapping of the only road communication link between Jammu and Pahalgam.

Sir, I was there myself on the 22nd and when the weather suddenly took turn for the worst, I was witness to that sharp drop in the temperature, heavy rain accompanied by fighting winds and blizzards. This continuous inclement weather between 22nd and 24th August had prevented any air borne rescue operations for providing succour to the stranded pilgrims or for casualty evacuation from any of the stations along the yatra route. However, the army and security forces helped in a big way on the 24th itself in bringing down a very large number of pilgrims from the camps at higher altitudes to Pahalgam. Lt. Gen. Saklani who, Sir, is the Adviser (Home) of the Governor, rushed to Pahalgam on the 24th. Air rescue operations could commence only on the 25th, by which time the heavy death toll of 121 yatra had already occurred. On opening of the weather, those who were found ailing and sick were evacuated to Srinagar with the utmost urgency.

About 150 sick yatis were provided medical treatment in the Army Base Hospital at Srinagar. Eighty-eight of them were admitted to the Hospital for intensive care.

Yesterday, I visited Kashmir to have a first hand account of the relief and rescue operations being carried out by the authorities. I also reviewed the over-all arrangements made for the yatis at important locations along the yatra route. During this trip, I visited Panjtarni, the highest camp which is close to the Cave Shrine, Pahalgam and Khanabal. At the time of my visit, there were only 100 yatis at Panjtarni, about 500 at Sheshnag, 6700 at Chandanwari, 70,000 at Pahalgam and about 6000 at Anantnag. I talked to a large number of yatis stranded at Panjtarni and Khanabal. Arrangements made for the yatis at Pahalgam, Chandanwari and Khanabal were especially reviewed as these three places together catered to over 80,000 yatis. I also visited the Army Base Hospital to see the evacuated yatis who were hospitalised for treatment.

The yatis were generally very appreciative of the cooperation which was extended by the yatra authorities and security forces. They had very few complaints about the adequacy of relief and the timeliness of rescue operations which they thought were done to the best of their ability. Arrangements made for food items - food items may give wrong idea, they were all lungers, giving cooked food at all the way - at different sites came for special appreciation. No one complained for shortage of food anywhere along the yatra route. Yatis at Panjtarni, however, complained to me that blankets remain in short supply. The administration did provide for tents and blankets at a rate which was four times as many as last year; the arrangements for blankets made by the Administration were only supplemental in nature, and would have sufficed, had the pilgrims carried their own blankets as advised. However, as things turned out, these supplemental arrangements also proved to be inadequate due to the unusually harsh weather conditions, and the freezing temperatures due to unexpected snowfall.

At Pahalgam, one yatri complained of attempts by private shopkeepers to over-charge for food items in restaurants and tuck shops. The hon. Members will appreciate that whenever there is a situation of excessive demand there is a tendency on the part of suppliers to over-charge and to make profit. Although the State authorities were seized of the matter, the local administration at Pahalgam was instructed to strictly enforce regulation of rates for food items. At Pahalgam while there is adequate quantity of rice, wheat and atta, local officials mentioned that they are running short of edible oil and pulses (dal). Instructions were issued on the spot to rush these items from Anantnag the communication link between which and Pahalgam had already be re-established.

When I visited Panjtarni there were about 100 yatis still stranded there. Over a dozen yatis had been identified for evacuation as they were not in a position to walk the distance from Panjtarni and Pahalgam. By the time I returned to Delhi, I was informed that these persons had already been evacuated by helicopters. There were about 2,000 yatis who were rescued from the Cave and taken to Baital. All these yatis have safely reached Srinagar where a camp has been established for lodging. There were six sick persons at Pahalgam needing hospitalisation. They have been evacuated to Srinagar and hospitalised. The Indian Airlines is arranging a shuttle flight today from Srinagar to Jammu, and another flight from Srinagar to Delhi, to clear the pilgrims at Srinagar.

The road link between Pahalgam and Anantnag has already been re-established. Between Anantnag and Udhampur, the National Highway was blocked at half a dozen places. I was informed that the road up to Samrohli, 80 kilometres from Jammu, had been rendered traffic-worthy by the 26th August. The communication link between link between Samrohli and Jammu was expected to be thrown open for traffic by noon today. In view of this, 6000 yatis were allowed to move from Anantnag to Ramban and Samrohli. A similar number of yatis were allowed to move from Pahalgam to Anantnag where arrangements for their over-night stay have been made at a safe place. After the national highway is thrown open for traffic today, the batchwise movement of yatis to Jammu will commence from Pahalgam and Chandanwadi as per the travel plans already worked out by the yatra authorities.

The Holy Mace of Lord Shiva, the *Chhari Mubarak* and I am surprised to find that nobody mentioned yesterday, was airlifted to Panjtarni yesterday. In the normal course the *Chhari Mubarak* would have been taken by road from Srinagar to Pahalgam via Anantnag and Mattan. However, the Srinagar-Anantnag road is still inundated necessitating airlifting of the *Chhari Mubarak* to Panjtarni so that it reaches the Cave early in the morning of 28th August. 28th August is tomorrow. I am informed that that is the last day on which this pooja can be performed at the Cave and this *Chhari*

Mubarak must be there by that time. So there was no alternative except to take it up by air.

Out of the 70,000 yatris camping at Pahalgam, I was told that about 15,000 had not been able to move up to the Cave for Darshan. However, in view of the fact that they would not be able to get to the Cave by 28th August, they have reportedly expressed their willingness to return. Instructions have, however, been issued to make arrangement for their movement to the Cave should any of them desire to reach the Cave by the 28th, after taking care to see that they are exposed to the minimal risks.

I also discussed the plan of the State authorities to deal with the mortal remains of the deceased. The number of dead has now gone upto 127 but the authorities had by then been able to identify only 77. In 19 cases, where the relatives gave their consent, cremation had already been done. The local authorities were preparing wooden coffins for those in whose cases the relatives have expressed desire to take the human remains back. As for the unidentified bodies, photographs have been taken by the authorities. If no relatives turn up for identification in a day or two, there will be no option left but to perform the last rites in Pahalgam or Chandanwari itself.

I may say that some of the bodies have already begun decomposing because the weather has changed again. Weather is very changeable there. Yesterday when I was there, it was quite hot. It was a bright sun shine and the temperature was quite hot. Some of the doctors and people told me that these bodies would not remain intact very long, they will start to decompose.

Some hon. Members had asked yesterday why advance warning was not given when there were signs of deteriorating weather. I had also asked the State authorities what precautions had been taken in view of the inclement weather. I was told by the Adviser to the Governor that on 22nd August itself, when the weather suddenly turned hostile, instructions were issued to the Yatra Officers not to allow yatris to proceed beyond the established camps without clearance. While this instruction was enforced at various camps but by then, thousands of yatris had already left the respective camps and were in between two camps, and many of them who were at the higher altitudes had already suffered severe exposure. Although, in retrospect, one would wish that more advance meteorological information should have been sought and acted upon, the State authorities seem to have done their best in minimizing the damage under the given circumstance.

Although some minor lacunae in the arrangements can be seen here and there in the context of the large number of yatris this year, the arrangements made for yatra were by and large satisfactory and would have been adequate had the weather not been unusually harsh. The State authorities with excellent cooperation from the Army and Para-Military Forces have left no

stone unturned in reaching succour and minimizing casualties in handling the tragic event.

Subsequently, Sir, I have got one or two pieces of information which I would like to share with the House.

Edible oil and pulses have been sent to Pahalgam from Anantnag this morning. The National Highway between Anantnag and Jammu is being thrown open for traffic from 3.00 P.M. today. About 2,000 yatris will come to Jammu by today evening. There are no yatris left now at Panjtari or Seshnag. All have been evacuated and come down to Pahalgam. The Director of Tourism, Jammu and Kashmir, Shri P.K. Tripathi — who is an IAS officer — has been put in charge of the Pahalgam Camp to oversee the arrangements which are being made there.

14.33 hrs.

RE: MOTION FOR ADJOURNMENT

Amarnath Yatra

[English]

SHRI JASWANT SINGH (Chittorgarh) : Sir, I want to make my submission.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV (Silchar) : Sir, are we having a discussion on it or you are just asking some question.

MR. SPEAKER : No, question. I have to give my ruling on the admission of the Adjournment Motion.

Would you like to say before that?

SHRI JASWANT SINGH : Would you, before giving ruling, permit us to say something?

MR. SPEAKER : Yes.

(Interruptions)

SHRI JASWANT SINGH : He has to give a Ruling. All that I am saying is before his Ruling. The Hon. Speaker would permit me to make my submission.

Sir, it is not our intention to raise contention in the face of as grim a tragedy as has so obviously taken place. But if we do not give voice to our concern in this assembly, I do not know, where else we are to do so. If the question, that I have raised to the hon. Home Minister sounds pointed, it is only because our concerns are also pointed. The whole House was awaiting with anxiety. Indeed, the hon. the Prime Minister said, 'let us wait, until the Home Minister comes'. And, we were rather expecting that the hon. Home Minister would come back with facts which are the consequence of his visit, and not simply a post facto narration of what has been taking place, and repeat that in this House on behalf of the Government or other agencies since yesterday. If it is being repetitive, I do not know, what new...