

12.03 hrs.

## STATEMENT BY MINISTER

### CRASH OF HELICOPTER ENGAGED BY ONGC IN MUMBAI HIGH OFFSHORE

Title: Statement regarding crash of helicopter engaged by ONGC in Mumbai High offshore – Laid.

\* THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI RAM NAIK): Sir, I am indeed sorry to inform hon. Members that in an extremely unfortunate accident, a MI-172 helicopter by ONGC chartered from MESCO Airlines crashed on 11<sup>th</sup> August morning. The helicopter had taken off from ONGC Helibase at Juhu, Mumbai at 11.37 hrs. The helicopter landed on ONGC Rig-Sagar Kiran and took off from there at 12.15 hrs. to move to another ONGC Rig-Sagar Jyoti. Immediately on take-off from Sagar Kiran, the helicopter crashed into the sea with 25 passengers including 14 officers and 8 Workmen of ONGC, 3 Contract employees and four crewmembers.

Rescue operations were immediately initiated by launching rescue boat from Sagar Kiran as well as mobilizing ONGC vessels in the vicinity. Other helicopters on charter were also pressed into service for search and rescue. Coast Guard and Navy also joined search and rescue operations within one hour. While two persons were rescued, bodies of three persons, who died in the incident, were recovered. The multi-purpose supply vessels deployed by ONGC have located the debris of the ill-fated helicopter on 12<sup>th</sup> August early morning at a depth of around 80 meters. In the early hours today the helicopter was retrieved from the sea bottom and 22 bodies were found therein and identified. Search continues for remaining two bodies.

As per information available from ONGC, the helicopter was reported to be airworthy and no snag was reported at the time of the take off on 11<sup>th</sup> August, 2003. Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas had requested Ministry of Civil Aviation the same day to institute an enquiry to look into the circumstances of the incident. Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has accordingly ordered a statutory investigation by Shri V.K.Chandna, Deputy Director General.

\* Laid on the Table of the House.

In addition to the above, it has been decided to hold an independent enquiry by a three member Committee which, *inter-alia*, would look into the safety and security of life in offshore operations, especially air logistics, the maintenance, repairs and renovation of offshore structures and pipelines hiring of helicopters and matters ancillary thereto. The Committee would report within three months.

CMD, ONGC has been asked to draw up an emergency plan to further strengthen safety measures for air transportation in the offshore so as to make them fully comparable with the best global standards, in consultation with DGCA, within a fortnight.

As per ONGC's policy, the families of the deceased employees are entitled to financial compensation ranging from Rs. 14.3 lakh to 23.5 lakh, besides standard benefits like Contributory Provident Fund, Gratuity, Leave Encashment and Pension under Self-Financing Scheme etc. The contract employees are entitled to compensation under the Workmen Compensation Act. I have announced an additional *ex-gratia* benefit of Rs. 5 lakh per employees.

I rushed to Mumbai by the first available flight after hearing the sad news of the incident and went to Juhu Helibase of ONGC. In Mumbai, I met representatives of Officers and Employees Associations and discussed follow up measures with CMD, ONGC and Directors of ONGC.

The Collectives from Mumbai Region have written to me on the 11<sup>th</sup> August 2003 regarding a number of their demands pending settlement of which the offshore operations may be affected from 0600 hours of 13<sup>th</sup> August, 2003. This charter was received late at night on that day. I have urged the Collectives not to take any action which may adversely affect the oil and gas production from Mumbai Offshore and thereby the national economy at this critical juncture. I do hope that they would listen to my appeal and maintain normal production. Meanwhile, ONGC management had approached Mumbai High Court which has directed the employees not to disrupt production.

...(Interruptions)

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