

" That the Bill further to amend the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952 be taken into consideration".

*The motion was adopted*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : The House will not take up clause by clause consideration of the Bill.

The question is :

" That clauses 2 to 4 stand part of the Bill"

*The motion was adopted*

*Clause 2 to 4 were added to the Bill*

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER : The question is :

" The clause 1, the Enacting Formula and the Long Title stand part of the Bill.

*The motion was adopted*

*Clause 1, the Enacting Formula and the Long Title were added to the Bill*

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM : I beg to move:

" That the Bill be passed"

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : The question is :

" That the Bill be passed"

*The motion was adopted*

15.00 hrs.

**NATIONAL HIGHWAYS AUTHORITY OF  
INDIA BILL**

[English]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : We will now take up the next item, National Highways Authority of India Bill.

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI RAJESH PILOT) I beg to move:

" That the Bill to provide for the constitution of an Authority for the development, maintenance and management of national highways and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto; be taken into consideration."

The development and maintenance of National Highways is fully finance by the Central Government as this function is included under "Entry 23" of the Union List of the 7th Schedule of the Constitution read with article 246 thereof. The National Highways System covering a length of about 32,138 km is the main artery of road transport in the country. Though constituting only about 2 per cent of the total road length, it bears more than one third of the total freight transport by road in the country. Under Section 5 of the National Highway Act 1956, the Government of India is empowered to entrust the function of development and maintenance of any National Highways to any authority under the Central or State Government. In pursuance thereof field activities such as survey, investigation and preparation of projects, award and supervision of works have been entrusted to State Governments. The Central Government have been looking after to the other aspects like planning, approval of design and estimate, standardisation, monitoring etc. This system is commonly known as 'Agency system' since the State Government are

[Sh. Rajesh pilot] paid 'Agency Charges' presently amounting to 9 per cent of the expenditure incurred by them on works executed on National Highways System.

The Agency System of executive of National Highways has not worked satisfactorily. There are large scale disparities in the condition and level of maintenance of National Highways passing through different States on account of varying system of working and levels of competence and diligence in different States on account of poor project preparation, lack of adequate attention to quality control non-development of contracting industry because of the system of splitting of works into small components, large scale cost overruns excessive expenditure booked on works without sanction of revised estimates, non-development of expert cadre for highway sector because of combined cadres working on buildings, roads and other civil engineering activities and frequent transfers, changes and posting of personnel, inadequate maintenance of highways, large scale ribbon development, excessive loading of vehicles due to lack of control/enforcement and lack of financial discipline. The management of funds allotted to the State has not generally been carried out in an optimum manner resulting either in spurt of expenditure in the last months of the financial year or last minutes surrenders.

The Centre has direct administrative control over the executive agency. There have been instances when the centre had to remain helpless in case the executing agents overlooked acts of commission or omission the part of its staff engaged in the construction and maintenance of National Highways. There have been anomalous situations when Central Government being constitutionally responsible, had to defend as *fait accompli* certain accounts of the agents in various forums such as Parliament, PAC etc., even when not actually convinced about the explanations given by the executing agencies. Similarly, the Centre generally has no input in develop-

ment of suitable staff, fixation and operation of even major contracts, arbitration cases, payment of compensation to contractors over and above the original contract amounts and other items resulting in direct financial commitment of Central Funds.

A number of measures have been suggested from time to time for improving the working of the Agency System without any substantial result. In this background it was considered essential to set up an Authority so that all the activities of the development and maintenance could come under a unified agency. It is proposed that this Authority should take over the function presently being carried out by the State Public Works Department in a phased manner.

The salient features of the proposed National Highways Authority are that it will be a functional body consisting of a Chairman, 5 full-time Members and 4 part time members. The Central Government shall vest in the Authority all properties and other assets vested in it Under Section 4 of the National Highway Act, 1956 in respect of the National Highways the management of which is transferred to the Authority. The Authority shall have powers to acquire land under the provisions of Land Acquisition Act, 1985 or of any corresponding law for the time being in force. The Authority will have powers to enter into, and perform any contract upto a value prescribed by the Government of India. The Central Government will provide capital and also advance grants to the Authority for efficient discharge of its functions.

The main functions of the Authority shall be to develop, maintain and manage the National Highways, and any other highways which may be vested in it by the Government. The Authority will also develop and provide consultancy and construction services in India and abroad and carry out research activities in this field. The Authority may also collect fees on behalf of the Central Government for services rendered in relation to the use of ferries/tunnels and bridges etc. Another major problem facing the road

sector is the lack of adequate resources. In order to augment the budgetary resources, recourse can be had to non-conventional sources of funding like floating of Bonds and the resources so raised could be invested in selected viable toll-based facilities.

It is hoped by setting up the National Highway Authority of India, it will be possible to develop, maintain and manage the national highways in a more efficient manner in the best interests of the country.

With these words, I commend the Bill to the House.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Motion moved:

" That the Bill to provide for the constitution of an Authority for the development, maintenance and management of national highways and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be taken into consideration."

Now Shri Madhav Reddi.

SHRI C. MADHAV REDDI : ( Adilabad ) : I welcome the creation of an Authority for the construction and maintenance of national highways; but the justification given by the Minister just now for creating such an Authority, saying that the existing agency system has failed, and that because of this dual administration, dual control of the national highways, the national highways are not being properly maintained— I do not agree with it. The saying goes that you give the dog a bad name and hang it. You are taking over the control of your own highways. After all, it is the Central Government's property, and the Central Government was not in a position for the last thirty-five years to take up the highways and directly maintain them, for various reasons explained by the Minister; and you had to depend upon, as you said, the "agency system" under which the agencies, the State Governments were being paid 9% commission. But the malady lies somewhere else. The fact remains that

today, our national highways are in such a bad condition that according to one estimate, we require about Rs 6,000 crores to bring them up to a standard. The roads were being maintained with meagre funds. The State Governments or the agencies were never allocated sufficient funds. To say that the funds were not being utilized or that the funds lapsed, is not correct because funds lapse because of the late allocation of funds, and because of various other reasons. As a matter of fact, funds were not adequately allocated to the State Governments, and because of various factors including heavy traffic and also because of certain heavy-weight vehicles plying on the roads, because of floods etc., the roads were damaged to such an extent that it was impossible for the State Governments to maintain them properly without sufficient funds being made available to them. The States will have no dispute if you tell them today that they will not longer be the agents for maintaining these roads. I am sure to that extent their burden will be lessened, but the point is how you are going to maintain them.

15.08 hrs

[SHRIMATI BASAVARAJESWARI *in the Chair*]

How are you going to bring them upto a particular standard? How are you going to widen them and maintain them properly? Where are the funds?

I see in the Bill that only the capital which is being allotted to the Authority is the expenditure already incurred on the capital side, that is, roads which you have constructed, the bridges, etc; and all the expenditure incurred on that will be treated as the capital of the Authority. Now, with this capital plus the budgetary allocations for this year which are very meagre, in the budget we have allotted Rs 374.5 crores for the construction of roads, for widening of roads and Rs 117.5 crores for the maintenance. Out of this, substantial amount has already been spent. Now what remains to be allotted to this

[Sh. C. Madhav Reddi]

Authority? The only income of the Authority seems to be, as was pointed out, 9 per cent commission which the States are getting; with that, they will have to maintain the staff. It will be extremely difficult for; the proposed Authority to function. It is a half-hearted measure. I am not very happy because it looks to me that the Finance Ministry has not extended the full support to the Ministry of Surface Transport and no corpus fund has been created for this. When we create a statutory agency, an institution or a corporation, it must have a corpus fund. Now, what is this fund? You have a central road fund. How much is there in the central road fund? Out of the central road fund, two-third goes to the States for maintenance of State Highways; only one-third remains with the Centre. I do not know how much is there in the central road fund at the disposal of the Central Government; that fund comes out of the cess which we collect on the sale of petrol and on the sale of diesel; and that is a very meagre amount and that fund will also not be available. I think it is included in the; same Rs. 374 crores which we have allocated; the central road fund, I think, is included in this; it is not a separate fund. In any case, the National Highways Authority of India fund which has been named here, there is no existence of that fund; it is in the vacuum; it is to be created in future, but, today, there is no fund. The hon. Minister says that this Authority will be in a position to go to the market and borrow loans; that is the only redeeming feature; that is the main object for which the Authority must be supported.

Today, we do not have enough fund; the budgetary constraints, are there and it is necessary that these agencies should go to the market and borrow loan and float debentures; and that is exactly the justification for creating such an Authority, not because that the present system of agency is not working. Don't find fault with the present system, but try to improve the system and say that it is necessary unless you have this Authority you cannot borrow the required capital, you cannot increase the resources for the development of the roads.

The hon. Minister has said that the total mileage of the National Highways today is 32,000 kms. As I said, the 32,000 km. of roads which are in existence today require another Rs. 6000 crores to bring them up to a particular standard, and there is a demand for each and every State that more and more roads should be included in the National Highways. Speaking for our own State of Andhra Pradesh, we have been telling that since the formation of Andhra Pradesh, not a single km. of National Highway was declared. I am very happy that; the hon. Minister has taken note of this. We understand that the road from Jagdalpur to Nizamabad, has been declared as a National Highway, if I am correct, I do not know, if it has not been already declared, I would request the hon. Minister to tell us the position and to declare it in future so that we may take it up. That road which links Visakhapatnam with Bombay, from East Coast to the West Coast is an important road, which is a lifeline of the economy connecting the East Coast to the West Coast.

The Vohra Committee commented some time ago, I think in 1983, that the dual system must go. As a matter of fact, the dual system never existed. The Government of India never exercised the authority over their own roads. Because, it was the State Governments which were maintaining the roads, it was the State Governments which were widening the roads, it was the State Governments which were looking after the roads. The only thing which the Government of India was doing was giving the funds. Every year funds were being allocated for maintenance. In my view if at all that was a dual system, then, on the same analogy in future you will say that it will be dual system even after the Authority comes into being; the funds will be given by the Government of India and the Highway Authority has spend them to maintain roads. The Highway Authority should be allotted sufficient funds so that they may not have to look to the Central Government for budgetary allocations year after year. It is only once in four years, once in a period, that you allocate certain funds towards the corpus fund. But there should be

enough corpus fund to begin with. Unless this is done, I think it is difficult for the National Highway Authority to function and to fulfil its responsibilities.

Now, the hon. Minister said that the National Highways will not be entrusted to the Authority all at once, that the roads will be allotted to it in a phased manner and there is also a lot of delegated authority. The Authority will have no funds to begin with and we have to look to the rules. What type of rules are going to be framed? We do not know what would be the powers of the Authority.

When we have a Bill before us we should know to what extent the Authority can function and what is the contract which they can award. But that has to be prescribed in the rules. We do not know how the rules are going to be framed. These are all vital matters which are to be incorporated in the Bill itself when the Bill is passed, rather than leaving it for delegated legislation. The World Bank has observed that the Indian highways are the worst in the whole world.

We need not have to disbelieve this because we know that our roads are in such a bad condition. In my own constituency after the floods of this year the road from Nirmal to Adilabad has become so bad that for negotiating a distance of 70 to 80 kilometres, I took about ten hours. It is easy for us to go cross-country rather than travel on the roads. These things have to be looked into and I do not know whether this Authority will have enough funds and enough staff to take up such roads. And though it is only a small beginning—of course a good beginning—it is likely to miss the whole objective. Because, the whole object is to raise funds by going into market. You cannot go into the market because the Authority has no corpus fund. It has no function at all. It has a limited function. Only a small portion of the highways has been entrusted to them and not all the highways. I do not think there is anything wrong in entrusting the entire highways of 32000 kms to National Highways Authority of India. Why should we not do it? After all, the Government of India is giving funds for

the maintenance of these roads. Overnight you can entrust the entire highways to the National Highways Authority of India. What is the difficulty, I am not able to understand. Of course you may feel that adequate staff have to be recruited and a lot of planning is necessary. But all that can be done because you have officers in the Central pool and you can take people on deputation from the State Governments, who are already working in the National Highway Department. They can be taken on deputation and you can start the work straightaway instead of doing it in a phased manner.

Madam Chairman, with these words, I support the concept of establishment of this Authority. I feel that it should not be a toothless tiger and it should be made more effective.

SHRIMATI KISHORI SINHA (Vaishali): Madam Chairman, I rise to support this Bill to establish a National Highway Authority will be responsible for developing, managing and maintaining the National Highways. We have presently 16000 kms of highways which pass through different States and the conditions of these roads differ from State to State because different States do not have the same level of efficiency in maintenance.

If you travel on the Grand Trunk Road, for example, you will find that the condition of the road in Bihar is not satisfactory and not at all well maintained. One will take a few hours to cover a distance of about 40 kms. from Patna to Bihata. The traffic is so heavy and maintenance is so poor that the roads have developed not only pot holes but even depression and hollows at many places impeding smooth and speedy traffic.

As at present there is a system of dual control, the States, acting as the agents of the Centre, construct and maintain the networks with specific grants from the Centre. Several enquiry panels have gone into the working of this system. The Vora Committee in 1983 pointed out that this system was permitting a complete lack of financial accountability on the part of States.

[Smt. Kishori Sinha]

The proposed Authority will end this system. But this by itself would not solve all problems. The Authority will have to face the intrinsic problem of inadequate funds. According to the Additional Director General of Roads, about Rs. 6000 crores need to be spent to bring the existing roads to acceptable standard.

Road cess has been increased from 0.4 per cent to 5 per cent on the basic price of motor spirit including diesel. But the total amount is estimated to be about Rs. 329 crores out of which 66 per cent would be made available to States. So, it is clear that the funds available are inadequate.

The World Bank has agreed to give a loan of US dollar 200 million.

I understand private sector is also interested in taking up construction, maintenance and management of some sectors of the highways. Perhaps the Asian Development Bank has also agreed to extend assistance to private sector agencies in India. I would request the Minister to clarify the position. He should in particular clarify the Government stand on the offer of the private sector.

The proposed Authority will also have to tackle the problems of outmoded techniques of making roads. An Executive Engineer claims that the modernised methods of construction would extend the life of roads to about ten years with lower maintenance costs. The proposed Authority would have to update the technology for which it should have its Research and Developing Wing. I do hope the Government will provide adequate funds to the Authority to perform its functions. The provision enabling the Authority to borrow funds is a welcome measure.

Roads play an important role in the development of the country. Roads, more than rail tracks, have become the harbinger of modernity in many advanced countries. The auto banks of Europe, for instance, are

a standing example of what well-maintained road networks could achieve. As many of us are aware and may have observed while in Europe or America, these roads with multilanes and no crossings, enable high speed traffic to roll on at all times and in all weathers. It is an accepted fact that the higher the speed, the greater the number of trucks and cars that can use the roads. If these roads are well maintained, the damage to vehicles is less and their fuel efficiency goes up.

How all this leads to more efficient and low cost of production can be easily seen if we take the example of Japan. There, I am told, the factories do not keep inventories of more than two to three days, whereas in India, factories have to pile up inventories of one month or fifteen days to prevent breakdown of production. Power houses have to keep minimum fifteen days' stock of coal. As a result, overall costs go up, power charges go up, the cost of production goes up and we have a high-cost-low-productivity economy. If we have an efficient and dependable railway and road system, we need not keep such huge inventories.

We have a terrible imbalance regarding roads and vehicles. Whereas the increase in vehicles is forty times, the increase in road length during the same period is only four times. All this will have to be attended to urgently.

Since the Authority will take over full charge of the highways, the States will be faced with surplus PWD staff. The Government may instruct the Authority to take over a part of the staff.

Another problem before the Authority would be to manage the road network spread all over the country from a single place. The Authority should therefore have regional or zonal bodies to manage the roads and pay better attention to regional problems. There is a provision in the Bill to form companies under the Authority. What would be the function of these companies, I would like to know from the Minister.

The Centre should also associate State Governments with the Authority. Representatives of State Governments could be included as part time members of the Authority and also of the Advisory Bodies at State level to provide for interaction with State Governments. I would urge the Minister to take a decision on this and incorporate it in the Bill.

There has to be coordination with the Railways and hence a high level railway official should be nominated to be a part time member of the Authority. The Bill does not say anything about the full time members and their qualifications. It would be better if these qualifications are incorporated in the Bill itself. Experts and specialists in transportation and country planning should be associated with the Authority. For instance, one of the members of the Authority could be representative of the Automobile Association of India.

I commend the provision for the Authority to run motels and restaurants along the highways. These should be functional and at low cost. The Authority should also look into communication and provide public telephones along with highways. There should be cranes to remove damaged vehicles and also first aid centres along the highways.

With these words, Madam Chairman, I welcome and support this Bill.

[*Translation*]

SHRI VIRDHI CHANDER JAIN (Barmer): Madam Chairman, I support the National Highway Authority of India Bill, 1988, which has been introduced in the House.

I agree with some of the views expressed by hon. Shri C. Madhav Reddi. State Governments were given responsibility for the National Highways under the Agency System. As the Agency System failed it was considered essential to set up an Authority. The State Governments are being held guilty for this. I feel that this is not the right approach. If States are at fault, then

State Governments run by both the Congress (I) and the Opposition are at fault. Engineers, be they of the Central or State Governments, do not perform their duties honestly. Corruption is rampant among engineers. It should be rooted out. If we can rectify this system we can say that we have achieved a lot. Otherwise the Centre and the State Governments will keep hurling accusations at each other. I do not think that this is proper.

When the Centre is setting up this Authority it should take full responsibility also. Why should the State Governments be held responsible? The Centre can complete this work using all the resources at its disposal. The State Governments are not in a position to execute this work satisfactorily. Everyone accepts this fact. The Rajasthan Government is certainly not in a position to execute this task.

When we travel from Rajasthan to Gujarat, we find that roads in the latter State are in an excellent condition. If the work is in the hands of the Central Government, the same expertise will be applied everywhere and roads will be uniformly good throughout the country. All roads in the country particularly the main highways should be taken over by the Central Government and subjected to complete overhauling.

Funds allocated for roads are very small. Both the Central and the State Governments give the lowest priority to development of roads. We feel that development of roads is an important factor in the country's progress. State Governments do not have adequate resources at their disposal to undertake construction of roads in the largest number. Provision of roads is a must for the speedy progress in the backward areas of our States. If we are to take our States into the 21st Century all villages with a population of 1000 should be linked with the roads.

Along with National Highways I also want to talk about other roads. Accidents are also caused by the bad condition of roads.

[Sh. Viridhi Chander Jain]

The hon. Minister is requested to find out the particular points or crossings on National Highways at which most accidents take place. On the road between Jaipur and Ajmer there are numerous crossings where accidents take place frequently. Immediate action should be taken at such crossings to prevent further loss of life. Land in the area should be acquired however powerful the land-owner may be straight roads without any crossings should be made to prevent accidents. There is definitely a need to be careful in this respect.

Madam Chairman, according to the plan all National Highways have to be broadened and bubled by the year 2000. I thank the hon. Minister for visiting my constituency to see how the National Highway from Pathankot to Kandla could be broadened. In view of famine and the need for security the Highway is being broadened from Pokhran to Jaisalmer, Barmer and the Gujarat border. Its breadth is being increased by 1.5 times. If the breadth is doubled and it is made into a double road it utility will increase. I urge the hon. Minister to take an immediate decision because if this work is taken up later its cost will increase. I thank the hon. Minister for the work presently being done.

The Rajasthan Government has been asked to take a decision to upgrade certain roads to the Status of National Highways. These include Ajmer, Bhiwara, Chittaurgarh, Ratlam, Indore, Gurgaon, Alwar, Sariska, Sawai, Madhopur and Gwalior. In this way these roads can be developed for the benefit of the masses. Through petrol and diesel the Central Government has received Rs. 320 crores in the Central Road Fund. Funds should also be collected through the toll system. Toll tax should be imposed wherever bridges are constructed. It has also been seen that bridges are damaged during floods and monsoon. While constructing bridges it should be ensured that they are strong enough to withstand the vagaries of nature. Repair and maintenance of bridges should be done on a regular basis.

Another important issue relates to railway crossings. There should be railway crossings on National Highways. In their absence the public has to make a long detour and waste hours trying to get across. On an important road in Jaipur people have to often wait for an hour to get to Civil Lines in the absence of a railway crossing. Therefore all work related to the construction of railway crossings needs to be given priority. Along with this we should also strengthen our financial position by floating bonds to borrow loans. Efforts should be made to allocate more funds for the development of National Highways in the Eighth Five Year Plan. If the roads are in good condition expenditure on fuel is less, rate of accidents is low and there is no damage to vehicles. So in the modern age it is necessary to make a roads which are not prone to accidents and which are easier for pedestrians to walk on. With these words I support the Bill and conclude my speech.

[English]

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA (Bankura): I rise to oppose the National Highway Authority Bill, 1988 because the reasons put forward for constituting the Authority for National Highways seem to me not sound. The State Governments are blamed for the poor maintenance of national highways and because of this reason, separate National Highway Authority is sought to be constituted to look after the maintenance and development of national highways. For the last three decades, the maintenance, repair and development of national highways are being looked after by the State Government as an agent of Central Government and they get 9% as agency charge. Now you want to take over all these national highways and you want to form an Authority. State Governments are to maintain separate staff and office and infrastructure. Teddy get 9% as agency charge. But, when the office staff and the infrastructure of the National Highways are taken over by the Authority, how will they be utilised? I think that this will be a burden for the State Government. A suggestion has been made by Shri C. Madhav

Reddi that the staff can be taken on deputation basis because of their experience.

So, it is not a fact that the conditions of National Highways are bad and the roads are not properly maintained because of the lack of interest or inefficiency of the State Governments. The main reason is shortage of funds and because of late release of funds. Complaint are made by the State Governments that funds are not released in proper time. The funds are released just before the monsoon when they do not find any time to complete the work on released, in the month of February and when these works are not completed, the amount sometimes lapses. So, the reason for the poor maintenance and bad conditions of National Highways, as stated by the various Committees like the National Transport Policy Committee, is because of constraint of funds and non-availability of funds. I think the National Highways constitute only less than 3 per cent of the total road length — may be 2.5 per cent or even 2 per cent and six KM of the surface length. For the maintenance and development, modernisation of National Highways, the State Governments are not getting the funds which are required.

For the Seventh Five Year Plan, the minimum requirement in this regard was Rs. 4200 crores. But only Rs. 900 crores were sanctioned for the maintenance and development of National Highways. If it is so, then why should the State Governments be blamed for poor maintenance and for bad conditions of National Highways? Even in the Mid-term Appraisal of the Seventh Plan also, it has been stated and I quote:

**"The prime weakness in the road sector is the prolonged neglect of the maintenance revealed by a recent study of the Planning Commission. This is the result of a continuing gap between requirement and allotment of funds for the maintenance of roads. If this gap is not bridged very soon, a significant proportion of the road network is likely to break down beyond redemption. At least one Km. out of every three of our National**

**Highways is in need of attention due to cumulative neglect of the past two decades....."**

This observation has been made in the Mid-term Appraisal of the Seventh Five Year Plan.

I think, the purpose for bringing in this Bill to constitute the Authority is only to issue bonds to collect money because money is required and the Planning Commission is not allocating sufficient funds. The Railways have formed a Corporation of their own. Likewise, the Ministry of Surface Transport can also form a Corporation. The Railways have got their Railway Finance Corporation and similarly the Ministry of Surface Transport may also have their Transport Finance Corporation. The Government can form a Corporation like this and issue bonds to collect money. IN some States, the maintenance is very much up to the standard. There may be two or three States where these roads may not be properly maintained. There may be some reason or the other. Now, there are 33,000 kilometres of length of our national highway. The target is to double it by the turn of the century. But the annual progress is only 1.47 per cent. With this progress, it will take at least forty years to achieve this target of doubling the existing length of national highways, that is, 33,000 kilometres of road and the road plan outlay is also gradually declining. Outlay for the whole transport sector is declining. Similarly outlay for roads sector is also gradually declining from 7.5 per cent to just 2.9 per cent in the Seventh Five Year Plan. And this road transport is very vital for the industrialisation. It is an important infrastructure. The National Transport Policy Committee also recommended it and they also identified 33 roads to be taken over as national highways. If the present criteria are strictly maintained for declaring a road a district road, or state highway or national highway, then vast areas of our country, the hilly area, the jungle area, the forest area, many parts of Madhya Pradesh, some parts of Orissa, some parts of Assam where there are no railway lines, cannot have national highway.

[Sh. Basudeb Acharia]

Now, there are three categories: (a) runs through the length and breadth of the country; (b) connects foreign highways, state capitals and major parts of industrial and tourist centres; and (c) meets the security requirement of the country. If these criteria are followed strictly, then these areas, the hilly areas, the backward areas, backward regions, forest areas, will not have any national highway. Where there are no railway lines, we cannot have new railway lines and we cannot have national highways. Roads which are a very important infrastructure, if the infrastructure is not developed, there cannot be any industrialisation. So, the roads are very much vital. It is connected with the economic growth of the area. If these criteria are strictly maintained, then these areas, the backward areas will remain backward for ever unless this is liberalised.

After 41 years of Independence, still 67 per cent of our villages are without having any fair-weather roads or all-weather roads. In the Seventh Five Year Plan, the weakness of our roads has been summed up:

"As much as 65 per cent of villages in the country are without an all-weather roads. Only 47 per cent of the road length in the country is provided with a proper surface besides pavement width of most of the road length is only single lane."

Even in respect of national highways, 30% of length has a single lane road pavement. The grid as a whole suffers of serious deficiencies and there is a growing mismatch between traffic needs and the available infrastructure; thus resulting in severe capacity constraints, delay, congestion, fuel wastage and higher vehicle operation cost.

Our vehicular traffic has been increased by 10%; whereas the road surface, the road length has been increased only 5.5%. Thus, there is congestion. Because of the poor condition of the roads, accidents are also taking place. Thirty thousand lives are lost every year. That means one person is killed in every four minutes due to road accidents.

We are spending Rs. 500 crores more for fuel consumption. If the condition of the roads is developed, then the consumption of fuel can also be reduced. We can save Rs. 500 crores. Also the operational cost of the vehicles can be reduced. The road accidents can also be reduced.

Coming to the capacity of the road, our roads are planned for 7.5 tonne axle load. This is the standard capacity. But our lorries carry more than 22 tonnes and even 40 tonnes. Because of this heavier traffic — carrying more than the capacity of the road — the roads are damaged and the condition becomes bad. Unless the capacity of the road is increased, the standard capacity increased, the roads cannot be maintained properly.

Another important factor is that funds are not released in proper time for maintenance of the road, for construction or for the repairs. There are some stages of work like pitching of boulders etc. For that some time gap is also required. As the fund is not released in proper time, the time gap is reduced. For that reason the roads which are repaired, the next year again they require repair. It becomes damaged and require immediate repair.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Are you concluding now?

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA: Tomorrow I will conclude, Madam.

---

16.00 hrs.

DISCUSSION UNDER RULE 193

[English]

**Rice in Price of Essential Commodities—Contd.**

MR CHAIRMAN: The House will now take up further discussion on the rise in prices of essential commodities, raised by