

12.03 hrs.

CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER
OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

REPORTED DISAPPEARANCE OF S. S.
Mahajagamitra

SHRI NATH PAI (Rajapur): I call the attention of the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Shipping and Transport to the following matter of urgent public importance and request that he may make a statement thereon:

The reported disappearance of S. S. *Mahajagamitra*, a cargo vessel, in the Pakistani waters and steps taken to recover the same.

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT (SHRI IQBAL SINGH): The vessel m. v. "Mahajagamitra" owned by the Great Eastern Shipping Company and chartered by the South East Asia Shipping Company proceeded with cargo from Calcutta for Kuwait and left Sandheads at about 10.00 hours on the 11th November, 1970.

The vessel had 49 persons on board and was proceeding with cargo of 5700 Tonnes—comprising jute, tea and other general cargo and steel. The vessel was presumably caught in the cyclonic storm which hit East Pakistan recently and is missing since the afternoon of the 12th instant after sending out an S.O.S. message. The estimated position of the vessel at the time of sending the S. O. S was 20° 30' north and 89° 00' east.

Immediately on receipt of S. O. S. message, intensive and extensive search for and rescue of the vessel was organised. All the ships in the vicinity were asked to respond to the vessel's S. O. S. call. The Indian Navy, Air Force and the Calcutta Port Commissioners were alerted and asked to assist and carry out aerial and surface search and rescue. Indian ships "DESHLOK" and "VISHWAMAHIMA" and a foreign ship "TEESTA" have carried out surface searches in and around the area. Indian Air Force have carried out aerial searches extensively but unfortunately no in-

formation is available about the vessel. The searches are still continuing. All organisations concerned, viz. the Directorate General of Shipping, the All-India Radio, Calcutta, the Indian Navy and Air Force, Civil Aviation authorities and Calcutta Port Commissioners are acting fully in concert and doing everything possible for search and rescue of the vessel and survivors. Ships in the vicinity have also been asked to continue to keep sharp look-out for the vessel. The neighbouring Maritime countries of Pakistan and Burma have also been requested to intimate to us if the vessel is found on or near their coasts or if any further information reaches them. Government have also requested our High Commission in Islamabad and Ambassador in Burma to inform us if they are able to get any information to locate the vessel in the territorial waters of Pakistan and Burma. Aircrafts of the Indian Air Force have also made a thorough aerial search of the missing vessel and her crew in Pakistani and Burmese territories, after securing their permission to fly over their territory.

2. Mr. Bragg, a Director of the South East Asia Shipping Company, left for East Pakistan on the 17th November, 1970, to seek, if available, information about the vessel and her crew. Our Deputy High Commissioner in Dacca has been requested to render all possible assistance to Mr. Bragg. In spite of all possible efforts, I regret to inform the House, we have not yet been able to get any information about the vessel and her crew.

SHRI NATH PAI: It is more than a week since the ship was last heard of. I think the Government has now reached the unhappy conclusion that the ship is perhaps lost. In that case, the usual practice is to express sympathies for the members of the crew and to indicate to the House what kind of relief is given to their families. If, however, the Government is still hopeful, and I hope they perhaps are, that the ship may be traced, they should tell us that.

May I know when the knowledge was first available to the Government about the onset of the cyclone? Is it a fact that as early as 9th November the Government was made

aware that the cyclone was developing? If so, why was the ship allowed to put to sea on the 11th? What kind of co-operation has Government received from the neighbouring countries, their navies and their merchant navies?

Finally, is the Government satisfied with the present arrangements on our coast with regard to anticipation of cyclones and storms and rescue measures? Is it not a fact that four years ago on the western coast of India, when a cyclone took place, ships were lost without any trace, the reason being that the storm warning system had proved very inadequate and the rescue system even more lamentably inadequate? In the light of this may I know why the ship was allowed to be put to sea?

SHRI IQBAL SINGH: We are in touch with the family members of the crew and informing them about the position. But we have not informed them so far that the ship is lost, because we are still continuing the search with the aid and assistance of neighbouring countries.

Regarding the second point, it is true that on the 9th we received this warning of the cyclone, and the Calcutta Port Commissioners were asked to hoist the stormwarning signal. But at that time, the cyclone was about 50 degrees to 70 degrees, and it was just east of the course of the ship. Even on the 11th, when the ship left Sandheads, the pilot of the Calcutta port had also taken the information we have given, but it was entirely always the judgement of the Master of the ship, whether he has to Sail or not to sail. But we cannot anticipate; at that time, the cyclone was east of the course, and presumably he would have tried to avoid that course, because a second ship which left Sandheads after seven hours was not caught in. That was the *Viswamahima* to which we had sent SOS; it was not caught in the cyclone. That is the whole position.

Regarding stormwarning signal, we will still see whether these things are effective. But as far as the present position is

concerned, we feel that information was available to him, Even on the last signal he was trying to avoid the cyclone. That is the whole position.

Regarding the signal system, we will review the position, and if any further improvement is required, we will do it.

SHRI NATH PAI: If you do not agree that the ship is lost, are you sure that it has been impounded by Pakistan? You did not say what was the co-operation you received from the neighbouring countries. Whose co-operation you had sought?

SHRI IQBAL SINGH: Regarding co-operation from neighbouring countries, we have requested them that our Indian Air Force planes should fly over their territorial waters and through their territory, and they have given full permission, Our Indian Air Force planes flew over their territory and their territorial waters. That is the maximum which we have asked for, and considering the whole position in East Pakistan, we have done the best, and whatever assistance we have asked from them, so far they have readily given it.

SHRI NATH PAI: May I point out a discrepancy? In the other House, your senior colleague has said that he has ordered an enquiry as to why the ship was allowed to be put to sea when the stormwarning signal was hoisted. Which of the two things is correct? You said that the Master of the ship was to judge whether to sail or not to sail.

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT (SHRI RAGHU RAMAIAH): I did answer that question, because I myself was wondering why the ship was allowed to go and I gave the answer that the Director-General of Shipping is enquiring into it. It is a fact that he has enquired into it. At the same time, what my colleague said is also true. Not only this ship but three other ships left about the same time.

I would like to add one thing, though how far credibility can be given to it and another thing; that is, there is an unconfirmed report that some ship has been aground in an island off

[Shri Raghu Ramaiah]

East Pakistan. We have asked for more specific information. It may not be this ship, but we are trying to get the information through every possible source.

SHRI BEDABRATA BARUA (Kaliabor): I would like to know if the value of the storm-warning was really of that nature that it turned out to be. Cyclone warnings do appear off and on, but this type of cyclone comes in a decade or so. I want to know whether that type of anticipation was there in the warning.

Secondly, did the warning indicate the exact location of the storm or did it mislead the captain also in regard to the location of the storm when the warning was given.

Thirdly, I would like to know about the provision for compensation, I think the chartered companies have insured, the ship as well as the cargo. I do not know what type of insurance the employees had. May I know whether the ship and the cargo were insured, and whether the employees also would be compensated, and whether any negotiation has been carried on.

Fourthly, I would like to know whether the search continues or it has been abandoned. There has been a newspaper report that it has been abandoned and hopes are lost. I want the Government to clarify the position whether so far as the search is concerned, it has been abandoned or it continues.

SHRI RAGHU RAMAIAH: It is insured and they will get the benefits under the Workmen's Compensation Act. Regarding the warning, the cyclone was declared on the evening of 9-11-70 and it was broadcast six times a day. On 11-11-70, at 10 AM when the ship left the sandheads, the cyclone was located at 16 degrees N and 87 degrees E. Presumably like the other three ships which also left at that time, the master of this ship thought he would also escape the storm.

The others escaped, but he did not.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BASU (Diamond Harbour): If the Minister wanted to give a little more details, he could have done it. Day before yesterday evening, in Calcutta, one

paper published very elaborate details that the Pakistan Flying Club which is making a lot of intensive searches has located two steamers near Bhola. But so far the Government of India have not opened their mouth in this regard. If the Minister will read the *Anand Bazaar Patrika* of 19th November, it gives in the front page full scale details of what has been happening and what the Pakistan authorities are feeling about it. The Government of India must know that the Pakistan Government is doing its best to trace the steamer and help in rescue work. Secondly, the master of a vessel is not free with the steamer between the Calcutta Port and the sea. It is entirely in the hands of the pilot who is controlled by the Calcutta Port Commissioners. In view of the fact that gale warnings are given days in advance and repeated through different media, even though the master wanted to take some risk for the sake of making some money for the owners, why did the Calcutta port Commissioners allow the pilot to take the steamer beyond the point where they had received the gale warning? May I know whether Government has received any communication from the Pakistan Government, specially its airborne organisations about their searches and endeavours and the details of their findings? The steamer had a crew of 49 including officers. Has Government already given any compensation to their next of kin?

SHRI RAGHU RAMAIAH: About the opening of the mouth, I cannot open my mouth as wide as he can, because the Government must necessarily go by definite, specific and authentic information and not by rumours. My hon. friend knows that we are as anxious as anybody else to secure the safety of the ships. But when there are certain readings about the gale in a certain direction, it does not mean that all shipping is prohibited. But in the special circumstances of this case, I have said that I am already looking into the question whether the Director General of Shipping could do something more. So far as the pilot is concerned, he himself has reported that the master was fully aware of the cyclone, but he thought he would escape it.

SHRI JYOTIRMOY BASU: But what did the pilot feel? He is the master of the ship upto the sea.

SHRI RAGHU RAMAIAH : The pilot's duty is to pilot and he piloted. (*Interruptions*).

SHRI BAL RAJ MADHOK (South Delhi): While natural calamities cannot be ruled out, may I know whether the fact that there is a strike in the Calcutta Port and some kind of emergency exists there was also a hindrance to proper investigations being made about the ship in time? Secondly, the minister said that 3 ships sailed at the same time; two were safe and this ship was untraceable. What was the tonnage of the two other ships? Is it a fact that this ship had a low tonnage—only about 5000 tonnes—and it was obsolete? Many of the ships in the Indian Merchant Shipping are of low tonnage and obsolete and they cannot stand such storms. Otherwise, bigger and more modern ships can stand such storms.

Therefore, may I know whether anything is being done to see that the ships that we send to the high seas are of a higher tonnage and are of improved conditions so that they are not easily liable to be affected by such natural calamities on the seas?

SHRI RAGHU RAMAIAH : The tonnage of this ship is about 5,700 tonnes. We are not in a position just now to give the tonnage of the other two vessels.

As to why this ship was allowed to go, as I said, I personally wanted to know why some restriction should not be placed. I am asking the Director-General to look into it.

SHRI BAL RAJ MADHOK : That was not my question. My question was: Is it a fact that the strike in Calcutta Port was any hindrance in the way of tracing the ship?

SHRI RAGHU RAMAIAH : The strike in the Calcutta Port has become a very frequent feature. That has nothing to do with these regular sailings.

RE: MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT
SERVANTS' STRIKE

12.22 hrs.

श्री मधु लिमये (मुंगेर) : अध्यक्ष महोदय मैं आपको कई बार लिख चुका हूँ, आज आप

मेरी बात सुन लीजिए। इस सदन में हम लोगों को कई नियमों के अनुसार चलना चाहिए। पश्चिम बंगाल के बारे में, जब वहाँ पर जनप्रिय सरकार मौजूद थी—मैं 1967 की बात कर रहा हूँ—चटर्जी साहब के ऊपर हमला हुआ, नक्सलाइट वायलेन्स हुआ, कई दफा हम लोगों को चर्चा करने का मौका मिला। उस समय इन लोगों के द्वारा आक्षेप उठाया गया था तो मैंने कहा था कि लोकसभा सार्वभौम है, इसको हर सार्वजनिक महत्व के प्रश्न पर चर्चा करने का अधिकार होना चाहिए। इसका मतलब यह नहीं है कि राज्यों के मामले में हम हस्तक्षेप कर रहे हैं। अब महाराष्ट्र में राज्य कर्मचारियों की हड़ताल चल रही है जिसके चलते विधान सभा की बैठक को मुलतवी रखा गया। बीस साल में इस तरह की कोई घटना नहीं हुई है। अगर आप एडजर्नमेंट मोशन नहीं करना चाहते तो बात मेरी समझ में आती है लेकिन नियम 193 के अन्तर्गत या कालिग अटेन्शन में इस मामले को उठाने का मौका दिया जाना चाहिए। क्या विधान सभा की बैठक इस तरह स्थगित किया जाना कोई मामूली बात है मैं मेरिट्स में नहीं जा रहा हूँ लेकिन मैं आपसे इसके बारे में निर्णय चाहता हूँ कि किसी न किसी शकल में, या तो व्यानाकर्षण या नियम 193, किसी न किसी शकल में इसके ऊपर विचार करने का मौका दिया जाए ताकि हम प्रधान मंत्री और वित्त मन्त्री से कहें कि इस मामले की गम्भीरता को मद्दे नज़र रखते हुए वे हस्तक्षेप करें और अपने गुड आफिसेज का इस्तेमाल करें।

SHRI NATH PAI (Rajapur) : I have also written to you about this matter. May I point out to you, to help you take an early decision in the matter, that the authority of this House is attached under the provisions of the Constitution? Under article 355 it is the duty of the Centre to ensure that the administration of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. The impli-