

lations continue to grow, it will be necessary either to step up movement or cut down production, as pithead stocks cannot be allowed to go on accumulating beyond a point.

(b) Government have appointed a high level Committee to go into the question of transport for moving coal and the Committee at present is engaged in the task of initiating action for improvement of transport facilities.

12 hrs.

CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

DESTRUCTION BY FIRE OF TIMBER AT THE
RAILWAY TIMBER DEPOT, DHILWAN

Shri P. C. Borooah (Sibsagar): Sir, under Rule 197, I beg to call the attention of the Minister of Railways to the following matter of urgent public importance and I request that he may make a statement thereon:—

"The destruction by fire of timber worth crores of rupees at the Railway Timber Depot, Dhilwan."

The Deputy Minister of Railways (Shri S. V. Ramaswamy): On the 23rd March, 1961 a fire broke out at about 5 p.m. in the Railway Sleeper Treatment Plant at Dhilwan which is situated on the East bank of river Beas. The fire alarm was immediately sounded and a call for help sent out to the Military, Civil and police authorities at Beas, Amritsar, Batala, Jullundur, Ludhiana, Kapurthala etc. About three hundred Railway Staff who were at the plant at the time made all possible efforts to bring the fire under control with water and sand from the hydrants and sand bins situated at a number of points in between the stacks of sleepers. The fire which had started simultaneously at 6 or 7 spots in a series of stacks at the southern end of the Depot, however spread quickly fanned by high wind. Help arrived very soon from the military Fire Brigades at Beas and Jullundur and also from the Police and Civil authorities at Amritsar, Batala, Jullundur, Ludhiana and Kapurthala etc. The first fire brigade

from Beas was at work by 5.30 p.m. and it was joined by 8 other fire brigades before midnight. Water was drawn from the open well inside the Depot and also from the river Beas. In spite of strenuous work by the fire brigades and the army and civil personnel who joined in the operations the fire could not be brought under control immediately on account of the high wind which kept changing direction frequently. All that could be done was to save the stacks of sleepers at the eastern end of the Depot by creating a gap from the burning stacks and by soaking them with water. More than 1½ lakhs of sleepers of the value of about 30 lakhs were thus saved. The fire was eventually brought under control by about 6.30 hrs. the next morning.

2. One Driver's quarter in the middle of the Depot was damaged in the fire. Other staff quarters at the fringe of Sleeper Depot were slightly damaged but fortunately there has been no loss or injury to any of the staff and their families and there has been no loss of their property also.

3. All-out efforts were made to save the Sleeper Treatment Plant and machinery from the devastating fire. As a result of these efforts the damage was minimised and was confined to the charging cylinder and creosote tank under it. Some minor damage was caused to the other machinery but it is hoped to put back the plant into commission within about 3 months' time. The storage tanks containing creosote oil were also saved.

4. The total loss in the fire in estimated to be about 127 lakhs consisting of the following:—

(i) About 5,75,000 Sleepers burnt in the fire.	Rs. 115 lakhs.
(ii) Damage to Railway sidings inside the Depot.	Rs. 6 lakhs
(iii) Damage to wagons	Rs. 2 lakhs
(iv) Damage to Plant and Machinery	Rs. 2 lakhs
(v) Damage to Buildings Electrical and Telephone Installations	Rs. 2 lakhs
Total loss	127 lakhs

5. A high level committee consisting of 3 Heads of departments is holding an enquiry into the incident. They have not concluded the enquiry and their finding regarding the cause of the fire is not yet available.

Shri Thirumala Rao (Kakinada): Sir, there was another accident at the Government depot in Gaya. Has the hon. Minister got any information on that?

Mr. Speaker: When is the hon. Minister expecting to get the report?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: The report on this fire?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: On this Dhilwan fire, the committee is sitting.

Mr. Speaker: When is he expecting to get the report?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: It may take a week to ten days.

Several Hon. Members rose—

Shri D. C. Sharma (Gurdaspur): Is the Government going to enquire into the aspect of sabotage?

The Minister of Railways (**Shri Jagjivan Ram**): The committee will look into every aspect of the matter, when they look into the question.

Shri Braj Raj Singh (Firozabad): It is not known whether the stocks were checked or not. In order to get over the shortage in stock people might have got rid of it by setting fire.

Shri Jagjivan Ram: When I learnt the news of this fire, my mind also reacted exactly in the same way as the hon. Member and I made it sure. I found that two months back the stock was verified.

Shri Tyagi (Dehra Dun): Now when the stock was already taken, the Minister can give us an idea, a rough idea, of the amount of loss that the State has sustained.

Mr. Speaker: He has given it as Rs. 127 lakhs.

Shri Raghunath Singh (Varanasi): May I know whether the services of the fire brigade were requisitioned or not; and if requisitioned, whether the fire brigade has submitted any report?

Shri S. V. Ramaswamy: I have read the entire thing. The fire brigades came into operation almost immediately.

Mr. Speaker: The fire brigades do not submit reports.

Shri S. M. Banerjee (Kanpur): Is it not a fact that before 31st March, every year the stocks are checked and verified? May I know whether the verification of the stocks had started; if so, whether it has been completed? My suspicion is this. I am not imputing motives to anybody...

Mr. Speaker: That they have sold away the stocks and set fire to it.

Shri S. M. Banerjee: Sir, this was a regular feature in the Defence Ministry's depots some time ago—there used to be a fire and that just covered everything. I want to know whether any outsider is associated.

Shri Jagjivan Ram: The hon. Member has not cared to listen to the reply that I gave. I said that the stocks were verified two months back. Therefore, there is no question of any suspicion on that score.

Shri T. B. Vittal Rao (Khammam): It is stated that a high level committee is being appointed. But I find from the newspaper reports that only 3 Heads of Departments of the Northern Railway where the fire occurred are being appointed. In view of the fact that the loss is about Rs. 127 lakhs, as the Government say, could the Government think of asking any other Railway officers or the Railway Board Members to form the committee to inquire into the whole thing?

Shri Jagjivan Ram: We have full faith in our departmental heads.

Shri T. B. Vittal Rao: They have got full faith in them; and that is why there was the fire. (Interruptions).

Shri Jagjivan Ram: We have got the highest officers of these departments of the Northern Railway on the Committee; and we have full confidence in their integrity.

Mr. Speaker: Hon Members are suggesting whether any Member of Parliament cannot be made the Chairman of the Committee. It is for the hon. Minister to accept or not. I leave it to him. I would personally like that the Chairman of the Estimates Committee or of the Public Accounts Committee may be associated with this. The hon. Minister just now said that he himself had that suspicion.

Shri Jagjivan Ram: I did not say that I have that suspicion. I have no suspicion. I hope to be excused if I have given that impression. I am sorry if my English was defective, and it had that effect on your mind. I have no doubt, no suspicion; no suspicion that in order to cover the fact that the stock was less some employees had themselves set fire. I have no such suspicion.

Mr. Speaker: Anyhow it is for the Government to consider any suggestion from the House. Unless the House passes a resolution, in which case the Government will be bound, these suggestions will be taken notice of by the Government. That is all.

Shri Hem Barua (Gauhati): Before you pass on the next item on the agenda, may I bring to your notice that I tabled a privilege motion?

Shri T. B. Vittal Rao: Has the previous item of business been concluded, Sir? You said that the Chairman of the Estimates Committee or the Public Accounts Committee should be associated with this enquiry. What happened to that?

Mr. Speaker: I do not know. After all, I can only make a suggestion. Let the hon. Minister consider the pros and cons. I do not know the full facts. He says that he has got absolute faith in his own officers. In answer to that hon. Members said something. Just to reinforce the suggestion made by hon.

Members here, I said this. It is not that every Member may be associated; there are two Committees which are responsible in this matter—the Estimates Committee and the Public Accounts Committee—and they may look into it; they may send for details; it is open to them to do so later. At an earlier stage itself, whether they could be associated, it is for the hon. Minister to consider the pros and cons. I do not want to force my opinion on him nor is it a considered opinion. I made merely a suggestion and I leave it at that.

Shri T. B. Vittal Rao: I request you to allow a discussion on the statement made by him.

Mr. Speaker: Very well if hon. Members will sit on a Saturday, I will allow one.... (*Interruptions.*)

Shri Jagjivan Ram: Sir, when any suggestion emanates from the Chair, it becomes very difficult for me to say 'no' to it. But as you have said that you have made the suggestion offhand, I submit to you and request you to apply your mind to this question.... (*Interruptions.*)

Mr. Speaker: I have not said that I applied my mind to this. But this much I must make clear. It is a loss of over a crore and odd rupees. I do not dispute the honesty of any person in any department of this Government. No one here does it. Unless a court goes into an allegation, I do not allow even an allegation to be made on the floor of this House because it may be found to be absolutely false, whereas when once an allegation is made, the mischief is done. It is not that. It is open to the Estimates Committee and the Public Accounts Committee to look into it. They will look into it at some other time. The Public Accounts Committee will do it but it will be *post mortem*, long after the event. Therefore, what they have a right to do at some stage I only suggested to the hon. Minister whether that ought not to be one now, in view of the suggestions that have been made by this House. It is not at

random that I made that suggestion. As a matter of fact, I can ask the Estimates Committee to look into it and see the causes of the loss; what is the extent of the loss and so on after the report is made. Of course it is not at this stage. Therefore, I leave it to the Minister.

The Minister of Mines and Oil (Shri K. D. Malaviya): Only after a report is made?

Mr. Speaker: Of course. When once a report is made, it is open to the Estimates Committee and the Public Accounts Committee to look into it. I only suggested if it can be done at an earlier stage; to remove the suspicion, if one of them cannot be associated. It is entirely for him; it is only a suggestion for him to consider. (*Interruptions*).

Shri Jagjivan Ram: To that suggestion, I say, Sir, that of course after the report is made, it is always open to them to go into it and who can say that I am not going before the Estimates Committee... (*Interruptions*).

Shri Tyagi: There is your suggestion Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members are entitled to table a Resolution and force the Government to do a particular thing; let them muster strength. All that I could do, I have done.

Shri Tyagi: I do not want to insist on it.

PAPERS LAID ON THE TABLE

ANNUAL REPORT AND AUDITED ACCOUNTS OF THE ASHOKA HOTEL, LIMITED

The Minister of Works, Housing and Supply (Shri K. C. Reddy): I beg to lay on the Table a copy each of the following papers:—

- (i) Annual Report of the Ashoka Hotels Limited for the year ended 31st March, 1960 along with the Audited Accounts and the comments of the Comptroller and Auditor

General thereon, under sub-section (1) of Section 639 of the Companies Act, 1956;

- (ii) Review by the Government on the working of the above Company. [*Placed in Library. See No. LT-2780/61.*]

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OIL AND NATURAL GAS COMMISSION AND NOTIFICATION UNDER THE MINES AND MINERALS (REGULATION AND DEVELOPMENTS) ACT

The Minister of Mines and Oil (Shri K. D. Malaviya): I beg to lay on the Table a copy each of the following papers:—

- (i) Annual Report of the Oil and Natural Gas Commission for the year 1959-60, under sub-section (3) of Section 23 of the Oil and Natural Gas Commission Act, 1959. [*Placed in Library. See No. LT-2779/61.*]
- (ii) Notification No. G.S.R. 358 dated the 18th March, 1961, under sub-section (1) of section 28 of the Mines and Minerals (Regulation and Development) Act, 1957. [*Placed in Library. See No. LT-2781/61.*]

INDIAN POLICE SERVICE (UNIFORM) AMENDMENT RULES

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs (Shri Datar): I beg to lay on the Table a copy of the Indian Police Service (Uniform) Amendment Rules, 1961 published in Notification No. G.S.R. 208 dated the 25th February, 1961, under sub-section (2) of Section 3 of the All India Services Act, 1951 [*Placed in Library. See No. LT-2782/61.*].

REPORT OF ASSESMENT COMMITTEE ON VIJNAN MANDIRS

The Minister of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs (Shri Humayun Kabir): I beg to lay on the Table a