

Sir, this fact is not only known to us but to the whole world. But what I was interested to know from the Minister is whether there are any new sites which have been selected for oil exploration either by ONGC or by any other agency and with what progress.

**SHRI RAVINDRA VARMA:** The hon. Member says that it is known to the whole world that oil exploration is going on in Assam but his question begins, 'Whether Government have decided for oil exploration in Assam.' Perhaps the hon. Member's world does not include himself.

**SHRI NIHAR LASKAR:** Some mistake has occurred somewhere.

**SHRI RAVINDRA VARMA:** We are not responsible for that. The question as tabled reads: 'whether government have decided for oil exploration in Assam.' and the answer to the question is as tabled.

**SHRI NIHAR LASKAR:** My question was whether government have decided for further oil exploration.

**SHRI RAVINDRA VARMA:** The hon. Member has asked whether any further drilling is contemplated. He is aware, I am sure, that ONGC has conducted drilling in 21 structures in Assam, including Dasangmukh, Rudrasagar, Lakwa, etc. I do not know whether he would like me to read out all the 21 names where drilling has been conducted. Oil so far has been struck only in 8 structures out of the 21. While development drilling at Rudrasagar and Lakwa is virtually complete, it is going on at a faster place at Galeki structure. Currently exploratory drilling is also being conducted at Lakwa, Charali, Lakhmani and Borholla structures and the ONGC plans to commence drilling at Chargola and Masimpur both in the Cachar district in which the hon. Member is particularly interested and also in Laximajan, Borpathram and Holongpar areas. Rig building and other preparatory works have almost been completed at Chargola and the well is likely to be spudded by the end of this month or early next month.

### Maharashtra Express

\*139. **SHRI VASANT SATHE:** Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the average speed of Maharashtra Express is very slow as compared to other Express trains on main Trunk;

(b) if so, what steps are being taken to speed up Maharashtra Express and provide other amenities like Dining Car therein;

(c) whether there is a proposal to extend Maharashtra Express route beyond Nagpur upto Gondia-Bokaro; and

(d) if so, the decision taken in the matter?

**THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE):** (a) the average speed of 83/84 Maharashtra Express is 39 KMPH as compared to the average speed of BG Mail/Express trains on the Indian Railways during 1975-76 which was 46.4 KMPH.

(b) Withdrawal of the existing stoppages to speed up Maharashtra Express will not be liked by the present users and, therefore, is not desirable. No room is available on the train to attach additional bogies. Catering facilities are available at various stations enroute.

(c) No.

(d) Does not arise.

**SHRI VASANT SATHE:** I am really surprised and pained at the reply my friend has given because, coming from Maharashtra, I thought that at least he would know the plight of passengers who have to travel by this train. Within Maharashtra itself from Pune to Nagpur, if a train were to take more than 24 hours to cover the distance, you can understand how fast this train must be. Why do you call it an Express at all when it goes with the speed of a passenger, stops at every station and takes such a long time to cover the distance from Nag-

pur to Pune? There have been complaints from all commuters. You will not find a single passenger who travels by this train and who does not complain about the speed of the train. What is my friend going to do—I want to know about speeding up this train. You charge Express rate and go by passenger speed. You then call it a passenger and charge passenger fare.

**PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE:** As far as speed is concerned, I admit that it is in between that of the passenger and express train speed. I concede that it is neither a passenger train nor an express train.

There is one contradiction in various suggestions that are made by the hon. members of this House and also the users of the train or the passengers of the train. Passengers want that there should be some trains which may be faster than the passenger trains and others say that they should have a number of stoppages for the train so that they can attend to the interest of the passengers at all stations. If we start introducing all express and fast trains on almost all the lines, in that case we will not be able to serve the needs of those who want the required stoppages.

**SHRI VASANT SATHE:** This matter has been discussed even in the Zonal Committee. There are a number of ways to solve this problem. I do not want to take the time of this House. We can discuss it. There are ways to have the stoppages and also have a fast speed. At night times the speed can be increased and in some areas when the train passes in day time the speed is reduced as we have to have more stoppages. Normally in the mid of the night no person utilizes this train. There is a way of doing it. If you are keen that this Express train should continue it may be called Janata train and do not charge express fare. As long as you charge express fare, for heaven's sake, keep express speed.

**PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE:** We will take the suggestion into account.

I would like to point out one difficulty. The route on which Maharashtra Express is travelling, already there is a saturated line capacity. If we just disturb the present speed and try to make it faster, it will disturb a number of other trains. Therefore, I shall sit with the hon. Member and I shall try to point out the difficulties. I am sure I shall be able to convince him. If he convinces me I shall change the pattern.

**SHRI SONU SINGH PATIL:** Does the hon. Minister know that there is a terrible demand to stop Maharashtra Express at various stations, particularly in my constituency like Bodwad, Masawad and Kajgaon, etc.

**PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE:** You will see that both the Members are sitting at cross purposes. He wants a number of stoppages to be increased. That will further decrease the speed, because the average speed will have to go down. All these problems have to be taken note of.

**SHRI R. K. MHALGI:** What are the difficulties in not attaching a dining car to this Express train?

**PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE:** As far as the arrangement of dining cars is concerned, we have tried to balance between the dining cars to be attached to certain trains, pantry cars to be attached to certain other trains and food being supplied from the base kitchens depending upon the requirements and depending upon the financial resources that are available.

I would like to point out one difficulty to Shri Sathe, if dining car is attached, the capacity of the passengers in the train is decreased. We remove the dining car and introduce pantry car, it is because the passenger capacity is to be stepped up. That is the reason.

**SHRI SHANKARRAO MANE:** I would like to know from the hon. Railway Minister whether he is going

to curtail the journey period of Mahalaxmi Express leaving from Kolapur and going to Bombay, which takes normally 22 hours.

MR. SPEAKER: That is a different train and that is a different question. I think we have finished with the questions. Thanks to the absentee Members! If hon. Members want a second round then we will have to take up the questions for the second round. We have got ten minutes left. I have no objection. Go along. Mr. Sudheeran.

**Survey and Expenditure Involved in laying Ernakulam-Alleppey Railway Line**

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\*125. SHRI V. M. SUDHEERAN:  
SHRI M. RAM GOPAL  
REDDY:

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Kerala Government has urged Central Government to expedite the sanction of line between Ernakulam and Alleppey;

(b) if so, the total expenditure involved on this line; and

(c) action proposed to be taken by Government about this line?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (PROF. MADHU DANDEVATE): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The line from Ernakulam to Alleppey is estimated to cost about Rs. 5 crores.

(c) The question of taking up the construction of the line is under active consideration of the Government in consultation with the Planning Commission.

SHRI V. M. SUDHEERAN: Sir, it is a vital project as far as Kerala is concerned. The State Government has taken a very keen interest in offering government's own land as also wooden sleepers. It has already spent more than Rs. one lakh for the

survey and the people of that area have come forward by offering full manpower to do the unskilled work.

So, may I request the Minister to be pleased to state whether he would give us a definite assurance that the project will be sanctioned and that the work will be started in this year itself?

PROF. MADHU DANDEVATE: Initially when we suggested to the Planning Commission that this particular line should be cleared and we should be permitted to include this in 1977-78 budget, the clearance was not given. Certain developments had since then taken place which had created some work. The original estimated cost was Rs. 5 crores. Because Kerala Government had assured that they would be prepared to give government land free and wooden sleepers also free of charge and in addition, even the earth work might be undertaken to a certain extent, I think the cost would go down from Rs. 5 crores to Rs. 4.55 crores. In the light of these, we are re-examining the proposition. Initially the returns that were indicated appeared to be grossly exaggerated. Again we are trying to go into the feasibility report and are taking up the issue with the Planning Commission. I can assure the hon. Member that if this is cleared, as far as the Ministry is concerned, it is prepared to go ahead with the implementation of the plan for the construction of this line.

SHRI N. SREEKANTAN NAIR: Sir, in view of the fact that the railway line runs along the coast of Kerala which is the poorest part of the country and, in view of the fact that it touches the port town of Alleppey which is now almost in a bad condition, will the ministry move the file to see that this is expedited? These two factors are very important.

PROF. MADHU DANDEVATE: Sir, that is exactly the reason why at the Minister's level, we have already taken a decision that we should proceed