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Extract from the speech of Mr. Raj Bahadur
in Lok Sabha on March 24, 1964

Shri Raj Bahadur: I would like straightaway to turn to the points that have been made, because I must economise on time. To begin with, I must take up the subject which the hon. Member who opened the debate took up, namely, roads and road transport Roads and road transport are closest to his heart...

Shri M.R.Masani: And yours also.

Shri Raj Bahadur: Yes, to mine also. He has made a considerable study and I have always held in great respect the observations that he always makes about them. Sometimes, I may not agree with him, but that is for genuine and honest reasons. He has said that some sort of complacency, which is not justified, seems to be apparent to him from the facts and figures that we have given in our report. He forecast that transport shortage might be six times worse or more serious than it was in 1961. He has said that road allocations that have been made are very meagre as against the recommendation of the Indian Road Congress, which demanded Rs.590 crores and, for the third Plan, we got only Rs.416 crores. In fact, may I correct him that we got only Rs.324 crores to begin with and then it was raised to Rs.416 crores. He says the tempo of the work also is not good. That particular thing was also mentioned by another Member, Mrs. Renu Chakravartty, who said there have been short-falls and we have not been able to utilise the road allocations. That surprised me. May I say how things stand?

So far as utilisation of allocations is concerned, let it be realised that till as late as 1960-61, the annual expenditure on National Highways was only of the order of about Rs.10 crores. In 1962-63, it rose to Rs.17.42 crores. In 1963-64, the revised estimates showed that we spent as much as Rs.34.38 crores over National Highways alone. This particular figure has to be viewed against the background that initially only Rs.48 crores was allotted for National Highways and we have spent Rs.34.38 crores. in one year. It is a record in the history of National Highways. The observation made by my friend, Shri Daji, has to be judged against this particular background. So far as allocations are concerned, of course it was Rs.324 ~~xxx~~ crores to begin with and it rose to Rs.416 crores. Apart from that, we have to taken into account the huge amount of money that is being spent on border roads. I might also say that as need and opportunity arise, we are trying to spare more funds and I will show later on how we are doing that.

The highlight of the year, however, would be the very remarkable performance by our road engineers and road workers and that is the construction of a stretch of 102 miles of road from Barauni to Phulbaria - a missing link on National Highway No. 31, which has been completed to a two-lane standard in a record time of one year, with the strengthening of bridges all through to class 70 standard.

I would like to point out now a few facts about road transport, to which my friend gave a good daal of attention. He said that the automobile production target of 60,000 has been revised to 54,000, whereas in 1960 the figure of production was 27,100 and at least 6400 vehicles should have been added every year. He said, we have performed very badly and we are only lingering at 28,481 in 1963. May I point out the facts? We have to view the automobile production against the background of allocations and foreign exchange made for the industry. Even there, we have to see that whatever is allocated is properly utilised and the best effort that our manufacturers could put up in this direction was to increase the quantum of indigenous parts. That is where I think they have performed very well. The Leylands, for example, have gone from 38.5 percent in 1959-60 to 76 percent. Bedford have gone up from 46 to 60.9 percent; Dodge from 68 to 79.85 and Tata Mercedes-Benz from 64 to 77 percent. It is well-known that if we manufacture the parts ourselves and not merely assemble motor parts, the production of automobiles will not be that much as when we simply assemble them.

Shri Iqbal Singh: What about the price?

Shri Raj Bahadur: That will be beside the point that I am trying to make out. The total population of goods and passenger vehicles - I mean commercial vehicles - in 1950-51 was 116,411. In 1962-63, it rose to 268,000, which is more than twice and by 31st March, 1966, it is expected to go up to 360,000, which means that we would have nearly trebled that particular figure.

What is the performance so far as the various companies are concerned. I will not go into the details, but I will give only the total. In 1964 we hope to manufacture 35,000, in 1965 - 42,250 and in 1966 - 54,500. This is also to be judged against the fact that the licensing capacity has been increased considerably. The licensing capacity as it has been increased comes to 61,800 including two new ones which are: Simpson - 1200 and Beaver - heavy vehicles 2000. So we can appreciate that with this capacity if the target as now being revised can be achieved, it should be considered to be quite an achievement.

The next point that he made was that against the estimate, which he quoted, of 16 million tons to be lifted by road transport, the number of permits that has been given by Inter-State Transport Commission is piteously small. It is only 440, he said, which is too small a number and this cannot be justified on the basis of 3000 vehicles per million tons, which requires 48,000 permits. But I would like to tell him that the Inter-State Transport Commission is not the only authority that gives inter-State permits. In fact, for the first time we have decided that so many permits should be given on certain very very long distance routes connecting Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and other places. I will not go into those details. The total number of inter-State regular permits even today is 16,449. If we add to this the average number of temporary permits as on 1-4-1962, which was 19,092, the total comes to 35,541, against the 48,000 that he said. Let him remember that from 268000, the target that has been fixed for the end of the Plan period for automobile production, there will be an increase of 92,000 vehicles. All these 92,000 vehicles will have to be given permits — all of them may not go for long distance traffic; some may go for long distance traffic and some may go for short distances, but the overall transport capacity that our road transport industry needs will be built up.

Let it be realised that this is being done in the fact of great difficulty in regard to the availability of foreign exchange. Expansion of road transport, my hon. friend will definitely concede and the House will also appreciate, depends on two factors. The first one is, how far and how best we are able to expand, improve and strengthen our road system. The second is, how far and how best we are able to expand our automobile production. These are the two factors on which the entire thing depends. It has to be recognised that with all the shortcomings, with the short allocations about which he has been complaining - to a certain extent I also feel that the allocations have been rather poor, they have been meagre and it is not that I do not have that feeling - the road transport industry has been able to carry on and has been able to meet the country's requirements. For that, the transport operators and all concerned in the field have to be thanked and congratulated.

So far as the question of taxation is concerned - I know that Shri Masani is leaving for some of his party work and therefore I will take his points first — he knows very well that we have tried to limit it and tried to guide the State Governments in this behalf as best as we can. He asked why we were not coming forward with the piece of legislation which he recommended. We were not oblivious to that recommendation. We did take into account that recommendation. We studied it thoroughly, as thoroughly as we could, and we found that we could not fix ceilings. And, mere principles would not carry us any further. Therefore, we have to confine ourselves to persuading the State Governments concerned to agree to some sort of fixed principles about taxation. He knows very well that the fact that we have not had any taxation measures imposing taxes on motor vehicles or motor transport this year, not only by the Centre but also by the State Governments, leads us to the conclusion that this realisation has been made of the urgent need to give some sort of protection to this industry. I think that has been done.

Coming back to roads, may I just state a few facts which are of great importance? Another remarkable thing that has been achieved by the engineers and workers is the construction of five big bridges on what is known as the North Trunk Road in Assam including one big bridge on Torsa. I would say that this particular work, also, has been performed and completed in a very limited time of 10 to 12 months which is almost a record.

It has been stated that the National Highways have not been fairly treated and we have not looked after them well. But let us remember that when the National Highways system was first effected we had as much as 10,000 miles out of a total of 13,800 miles which were really of a very low quality and very low standard. Also, we had a large mileage of missing links. We have practically made up all the missing links excepting 100 miles which we will take in the Fourth Plan. So far as improvement is concerned, we have improved more than 10,000 miles.

So far as bridges are concerned, if we just take into account the bridges costing more than Rs.5 lakhs, we have already completed 100 bridges out of 215, 59 will be completed by the end of the Third Plan, those on which work will be taken up or is going to be taken up in the Third Plan is 42 and only 14 will remain for us to deal with in the Fourth Plan.

In this connection, may I just make a small announcement. Many a time the hon. Members have pointed out the necessity of developing the areas along and near the foot of the Himalayas for economic benefit. I am glad to report that a scheme for constructing a high class road from Bareilly in U.P. to Amingaon in Assam has recently been approved. The road will run through the States of U.P., Bihar, Bengal and Assam parallel to the Himalayan range. The existing roads will be absorbed in the new road as far as possible and new alignments will be adopted where no roads exist. The work involved is very considerable and may cost Rs.100 crores out of which Rs.50 crores are expected to be required for construction of bridges. Being located in terai region which is intercepted by many streams, 23 bridges across big rivers and large number of medium and minor bridges will be required. Every effort will be made to complete this road as soon as possible.

Secondly, with loan assistance from the Central Government to the Rajasthan Government, we propose to consider the construction of a 425-mile long road along side the Rajasthan Canal. This is an important need of that area which will develop very well after the canal is commissioned. Then, for a long time a demand has been made about the east coast road in Madras State extending from Madras to

Cape Comerin. We propose to consider that and we would try to have it included in the Fourth Plan. This would connect South Arcot, Tanjavur, Ramanathapuram, Tinneveli, etc.

Similarly, a very important demand has been made by the Gujarat Government and the people of Gujarat for a coastal road from Gujarat. That also we have got in view and we propose to give our best thought to it.

Only one work more about road and road transport, and that is about the need for mechanisation of road construction. We are concentrating our attention on that and we will do our best to see that so far as it lies in our power we would try to acquire this equipment and also try to encourage and promote the industry for the manufacture of this equipment.

There is one point more which I should not miss, and that is about the Inter-State Transport Commission. It was stated that merely a Joint Secretary is at the head of this department and we should make it more powerful, give it more powers to issue permits. We do not propose to do that, because we think that the present method has worked very well. Through this Inter-State Transport Commission we have achieved two big objects. Firstly, we have been able to persuade the State Governments at least to name the inter-State roads. A complete list in consultation with the State Governments has been formulated.

Secondly, we have also persuaded them in making them solve, or come to some sort of agreement or settlement, about the disputes that are there. We do not want to take the power of issuing directives, so far as this Commssion is concerned.

A reference was made to Dr. Beeching's report by my hon. friend, Shri Masani, who has just gone away. He has said that they have recommended in UK the closing down of half of the railway stations, numbering as many as 4,293, and also cancellation of passenger service. I do not think we can do it in this country, nor would my hon. friend, Shri Masani, like me to recommend that to my colleague, the Railway Minister.