

DISCUSSIONS ON TRANSPORT DEMANDS

SHRI M.R. MASANI PLEADS ONCE AGAIN FOR ROAD TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

Speaking on his cut motion moved in Lok Sabha on the demands for grants of Transport Ministry for the coming year the champion of the cause of Road Transport once again attacked the week-kneed policy of the ministry in dealing with the question of coordination between the railway and road transport. Here is the text of his speech :



I have moved cut motion No. 5, which deals with the failure to take steps to enable roads and road transport to play their part in the country's economic development.

I am speaking on this subject after an interval of three years. At that time, my hon. friend's senior colleague, Dr. P. Subbarayan, was in charge of this portfolio, and my hon. friend opposite was the Minister of State in charge of this particular matter.

During the three years that have passed, one had hoped for a great deal of improvement in regard to the position about the development of roads and road transport in this country. The report of the Ministry, which we have with us, gives a somewhat smug picture full of complacency about what is being done for the development of roads and road transport. I am afraid, with all respect to my hon. friend the Minister, the complacency shown in that report is not justified. The picture that I see, on the other hand, is of dangers facing this country of a bottle-neck before long.

It seems to be a fact that, during the middle of every Five Year Plan, the Railways and the

Planning Commission get together to reassure us that everything is under control. But when that particular plan ends, we face disaster. That happened in the case of the Second Five Year Plan and, although I hate to be a prophet of glooms, I am going to make this prophecy that at the end of the Third Plan we shall be facing an even worse situation.

During the middle of the Second Plan, if you see the Railway Budget speech of 18th February, 1952, you will find that the case of the Railways was that they had more than surplus capacity, and they could take care of all the growth in traffic and indeed, that in order to protect them, restrictions should be placed on road transport. Unfortunately, that view was accepted. That complacency and the acceptance of that view led to disaster in 1961. By 1960-61, the transport demands exceeded the transport capacity by about 12 million tons. This in turn led to the closure of factories, the dismissal of thousands of workers, and the stultification of our economic progress. We all remember the bottle-neck in coal, for instance, which was one example of that breakdown.

Again, in the middle of the Third Plan, the picture as held out by the Railways and the Planning Commission, without, as far as I can see, any contradiction from the Transport Ministry, that everything is again under control. If this complacency is accepted again, I shall forecast a transport shortage in 1966 which will be six times as intense and far-reaching as that which occurred in 1961. Why do I say that we shall be caught napping?

On the basis of the accepted relationship between the growth of national income and the demand for transport, it had been estimated that the total mechanised facilities will have to be geared to 357 million tons of traffic, at the end of the Third Plan in 1966-67. This is an unprecedented increase in demand. The Railways estimate their own carrying capacity at the end of the Third Plan at 245 million tons. Therefore, 130 million tons will need to be carried by other methods; obviously, of these, road transport will be by far the biggest.

How are we gearing ourselves to meet this challenge of 130 million tons of transport which today we have not the means to carry? I

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big challenge for all of us. Whether we are in the public sector or in the private sector, we have to augment the capacity as quickly as possible. For that all necessary assistance is to be provided by way of suitable credit facilities. I know some advantage has been taken by certain organisations in this particular trade. At least sanctions have been quite encouraging. During this year the figure quoted is Rs. 17 crores. During the last year it was about Rs. 20 crores sanction, but I do not know how much was drawn out of it. That is a substantial and sizeable sum and if all this could be used, perhaps a good advance could be made. But I do not know what is the progress?

What we really expect of the Institute is that it should serve as the brain-trust of the road transport industry and it has been doing well in that direction. The Institute should consider the problems and find out the solutions and I am quite sure that as far as that goes we shall do our best to help the institute.

I do not think we can ignore the rickshaw which is the poor man's taxi. The rickshaw drivers are facing competition from the taxis. Something has to be done about that. This is a problem for the smaller man, who has got means only to own a rickshaw and earn his living out of it. I should say that this problem also is a living problem and answer has to be found for it too.

We are seriously considering and so is the Planning Commission the problem of adequate development of the automobile industry and also of the development of our road system has to answer the requirements of the developing economy and I know barring about 2700 miles of National Highways the rest of the system is only single-lane and much has to be done. Initially we had as many as 210 major rivers to be bridged, on our National Highways out of which we bridged 96 in the Second Plan period. Today we have got 66 bridges under construction, work is going to be started on another 34. That will take us to a figure of 100; even at the end of the Third Plan period we will have 14 bridges left to be taken care of in the 4th

Plan. That only shows how much we have to do and that is only one item i.e. the major rivers. We find many inter-State links are suffering from the absence of proper river bridges and culverts and their construction or improvement can provide a very useful help to transport operators to extend their operations. It is now the need of the country that we should take care of the inter-State roads, we should take care of the inter-State highways; and thus meet the challenge of growing traffic. We have to modernise our road as far as we can.

I have given you only a few

facts and I do not want to burden you with more, but I would say all these problems are very urgent and they need our attention. The Government alone cannot tackle them; we require the best of co-operation from all people in the transport industry—all sections whether they are automobile and spare-parts manufacturers or dealers and transport operators, all sections are required to co-operate. We on our part shall try to do the best that is expected of road transport. I thank you very much for giving me this opportunity of meeting you, which is really always a pleasure for me.

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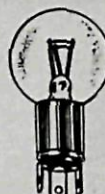
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fear that on every front, our failure to meet this challenge, and, it would seem our lack of the awareness of the bottle-neck that will exist, comes to view.

The state of the roads is deplorable. Quite apart from the miserable quality of our roads, even the quantity is lacking. Per square mile of area, we have in India today 0.36 miles of road as against 2.3 miles in U.K., 3.6 miles in France and 4.1 miles in Japan. Even little Ceylon, backward as it is, has twice our road mileage—0.76 mile per square mile.

The 20-year plan of road development had called for an expenditure of Rs. 590 crores during the current Plan. The actual allocation, it is distressing to note, has been less than Rs. 420 crores. Why this failure to get the balance? I think it is a failure of the Transport Ministry. I know the Transport Ministry has its difficulties. But that is what it is there to meet. It is there to champion the cause of road transport. The Railway Ministry exists only to champion the cause of the railways, but road transport lacks that championship on its own side. I would appeal to the hon. Minister even now. Let him try and get this balance of the unallocated resources which have been earmarked for road transport, but which the Transport Ministry fails to secure in any given current year.

On what basis does this take place? The Railways are yielding less than Rs. 150 crores annually by way of interest and taxes to Government. The funds allocated to them amount to Rs. 1500 crores, that is, more than 10 times the annual yield. The Railways are allocated more than 10 times their annual yield to the community. Road transport yields Rs. 220 crores per year. By the same process of reasoning, by any standard of equity and fairplay, they should have been allocated Rs. 2200 crores. Instead of that, there is a miserable allocation of Rs. 420 crores, just 1/5th of what should have been allocated by any parity of reason. Why does this happen?

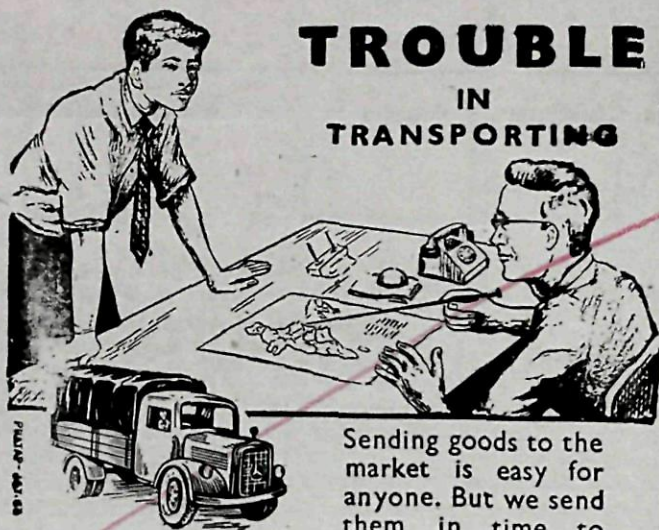
Then we came to automobile manufacture—the manufacture of trucks, buses and other vehicles. There is no sign that we are going

to produce the number of vehicles needed to lift the traffic anticipated at the end of the Third Plan. The production here again is far behind target. The Third Plan had set a target of 60,000 vehicles. The production at the end of 1960 was 27,100. It was, therefore, necessary to increase the production of vehicles by 6,400 vehicles annually to catch up with the target—6,400 more vehicles every year.

Let us see what has happened. In 1961, when the production should have been 33,500, the actual figure was 26,721. Thus, instead of producing 6,400 more, we produced 400 less! In 1962, when the production should have been 40,000, the number dropped further,

to 26,820. In 1963, the latest year for which we have figures, we should have produced 46,000 vehicles, but the actual figure was 28,481! Therefore, the shortfall as against the Plan in the last three years is one of 37,000 vehicles.

Why has this happened? It is not the fault of the manufacturers. It is the fault of Government because, owing to faulty priorities, the foreign exchange that should have been given for the manufacture of these vehicles was denied to the industry. The result will be that even in 1966, we shall be far short of the target. I begin to see in newspapers official spokesmen themselves conceding that the target itself has been lowered from



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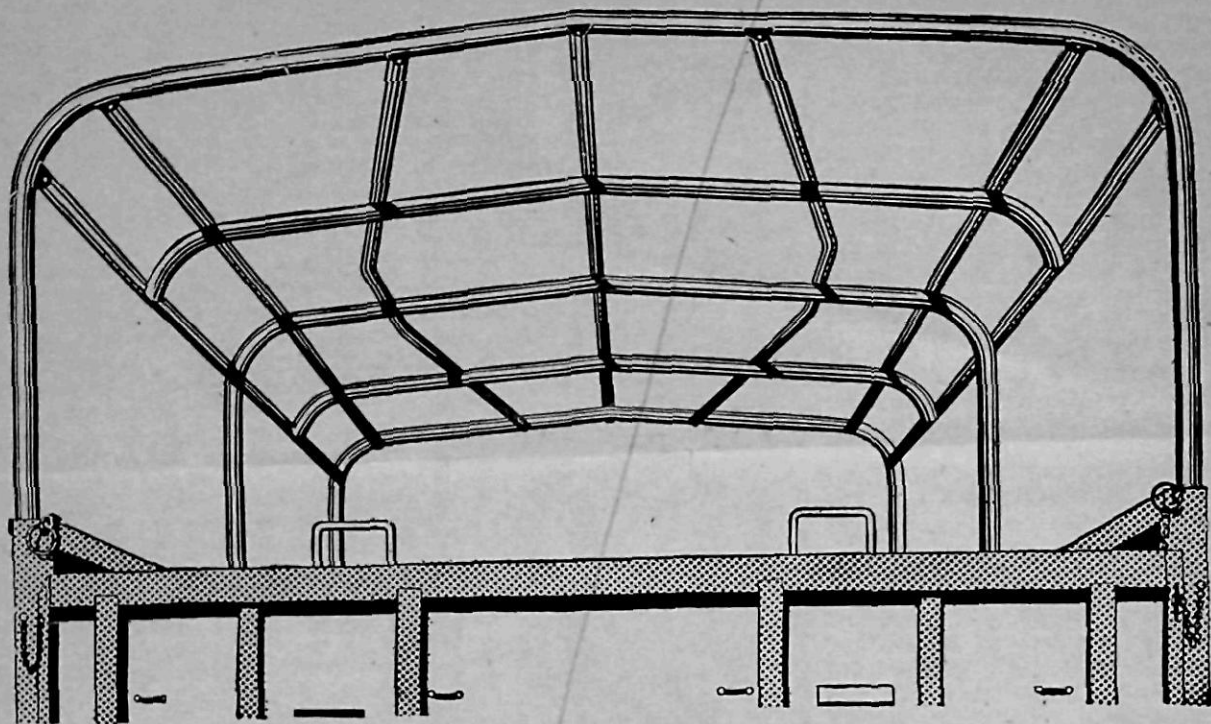
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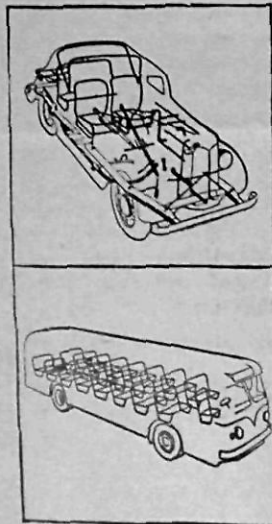
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Speech of Sri M.R. Masani

60,000 to 54,000 at the end of the Third Plan. So, even the pretence of trying to catch up with the obligations laid down at the beginning of the Third Plan is being given up.

Then we came to the restrictions on transport. The hopes raised by the establishment of the Inter-State Transport Commission have been sadly blighted. The Commission had recommended the issue of inter-State permits for trunk routes, but this has not been implemented because the State Governments straddling these routes want to tax the vehicles over and over again.

Five years ago, the Road Transport Reorganisation Committee, of which I was privileged to be Chairman, had recommended that legislation laying down not the quantum but the principles of taxation, and providing for a single-point tax on transport vehicles should be prepared and introduced in Parliament by the Union Government. My hon. friend, Shri S.K. Patil—then the Minister in charge—warmly welcomed this and all the other recommendations made by our Committee, and the House unanimously applauded the recommendations of the Committee. One believed that something would be done. I want to ask the hon. Minister why such a Bill has not been produced before the House although all these years have passed?

The number of permits issued on the recommendation of the Inter-State Transport Commission is a mockery when compared to the country's needs. According to the calculations made by Shri P.C. Mathew, a member of the Indian Civil Service, and Additional Secretary to the Cabinet Secretariat in the Department of Statistics, in February 1962, the additional volume of long-distance traffic earmarked for roads during the

current Plan is 16 million tons. This is the figure worked out by the Cabinet Secretariat. Each million tons may need 3,000 trucks. 48,000 permits will be needed to lift the traffic which roads will have to carry by 1966. Permits so far recommended by the Inter-State Transport Commission are not sufficient to carry even 2 per cent of that traffic!

Why is the Commission so important? Why is it ineffective. Is it because the composition of the Commission makes it subservient to the vested interests of the Railways? Is it because the Chairman is only a Joint Secretary of the Transport Ministry whom neither the Railway Board nor the State Governments seem to take very seriously? Would it not have been better if an eminent non-official carrying weight, with personality and drive, had been made Chairman or President of the Inter-State Transport Commission, a man whom even Chief Ministers could not brush aside so lightly? I am asking these questions. These are questions that arise because the whole purpose of establishing this Commission appears to have failed.

Then, Government, have the right under the Act to give the Commission power to issue permits. But that power is not given to the Commission. They have been given the power only to commend or issue directives to State Governments—which is something a little different. Even now, belated as it is, I suggest that status and importance be given to the Commission by the Transport Ministry—belatedly—giving full power to issue permits in their own way. The Act permits it.

Now vehicle taxation. One can say that 1964 is the very first year in recent history when road transport has not been subjected to

additional taxation. People may say that one should be grateful for small mercies. But that is not so, because relief had been expected from the extortionate taxation on road transport in the past years. Unfortunately, the Transport Minister, who, I think, knows that roads in India are inordinately taxed by any standards, said rather meekly, addressing the All India Conference of State Transport Commissioners' meeting on 6th and 7th February:

"I am afraid the issue is clouded by considerations, the validity and relevance of which are not free from doubt."

If this is so, if Government really want to know whether this is so or not, why not ask the National Council of Applied Economic Research to examine this question and to give the answer whether it is so or not?

The taxation on motor vehicles in this country has now been the highest in the world for many years. Its present incidence is approximately Rs. 3,000 per year per motor vehicle, which is more than twice the levels obtaining in advanced countries of the West, where road transport and motor transport have made tremendous strides. This is a severe deterrent to rapid economic growth. Traffic to and from our 5½ lakh villages, which can be the springboard for agricultural and even industrial expansion, simply cannot stand the burden of these taxes which constitute a serious disincentive to both economic production and agricultural development, about which we talk so much—shed crocodile tears. That needs to be done is to lift the burden on road transport so that the country is opened up to let agriculture and industry thrive. That is not done.

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The question arises : why does all this happen ? I need hardly tell the House that I do not for a moment believe that there is any particular perversity in my hon. friend, the Minister, whom I respect very much, who, I know, is a good student of this subject and about whose understanding and feeling for the cause of road transport there can be no question.

Then how does this happen ? I regret to have to say that this is due to the weakness, over the last decade, of the Transport Ministry in the face of what I have described as the biggest lobby and the biggest vested interest in this country—the Railway Board.

This is an old story. It started with a circular issued by the Ministry of Transport to the State Governments on 9th September, 1958, asking them not to license road traffic for distances of over 302 miles or a radius of 150 miles without the prior approval of the Railways—one competitor being asked to get the permission of the other competitor to enter into competition. The circular went on to recommend that the grant of representation to the Railways on the State Transport Authorities should be ensured. This circular made the Transport Authority the laughing stock of the State Governments in India, because, as it

happens, the Motor Vehicles Act forbids the representation of the railways on State Transport Authorities ! So, this paragraph was hastily withdrawn, but the rest of the circular which lays down this vicious principle that you cannot carry things by road beyond a certain distance without the approval of Their Majesties the Railway Board still remains. This defiance, this continued defiance, of the verdict of Parliament has been going on for five years now.

When the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, 1956, was before Parliament, it was referred to a Joint Committee, and there Clause 50 which laid down that there should be such a distance limit was struck down by the Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament. Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, the then Minister, said in the Lok Sabha on 28th November, 1956 : "The Committee also decided to remove the mileage restrictions for grant of public carrier permits." And Shri O.V. Alagesan said in the Upper House on 12th December, 1956 : "The Committee also amended Clause 50 and decided to remove the mileage restriction for grant of public carrier permits between places connected by railways." If that was so in 1956, how was it that in 1958, behind the back of Parliament, the Transport Ministry restored this mileage restriction by its own dictat ? If it was not in subservience to the Railway Board, how can one justify this ?

In May, 1963, to bring the story a little nearer, Shri Jagjivan Ram, the then Minister, assured the Maharashtra Board of Communications, at a meeting in Nasik, that the circular of the Ministry could be treated as a dead letter. But while he made this statement in a speech, have the State Governments been informed that this circular has been withdrawn ? I would be very glad to know from the hon. Minister that this has now been formally done.

On the contrary, I fear that this weak-kneed policy of appeasing the Railways is still continuing. Answering a question in this House on 25th February this year, the

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Transport Minister said that the Transport Commissioners/Secretaries Conference held in Calcutta on the 6th and 7th February recommended, *inter alia*, as follows :

"That copies of all applications received by the different Transport Authorities for grant of permits for transport vehicles, which were published under Section 57 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1939, might also be sent to the local Railway Administration concerned to ensure that the Administration received sufficient opportunity to make its representation on the adequacy of the services provided by it, if it so desired."

In other words, once again this mischievous principle is brought back that the Railways have a Great Power of veto over the development of road transport in this country. The veto that holds up the Security Council many times, given to certain Great Powers is given to the Railways of this country, which also, as I said, is a Great Power in this country.

In the Ministry's Report on Page 2 you will find that even the Inter-State Transport Commission has been browbeaten now into accepting this position in regard to lorries carrying petrol.

The Finance Minister has said more than once in this House that the objective of planning is to maximise output and the rate of growth. This in turn involves that all national investment is directed to those channels where the pay-off in terms of growth is the greatest. It has been proved more than once on the floor of the House, it is in the report of the Transport Reorganisation Committee and the hon. Minister does not quarrel with it, that every rupee spent in laying down roads and bridges and

producing vehicles brings many times the return that the same rupee would bring in laying down railway track or making a railway wagon.

Other countries are more intelligent and have applied this test, with the result that today most countries in the world which have the gumption are diverting their investment from railways to roads, waterways and airways which are more modern and more advanced from a technological point of view. Not only that. They are physically uprooting railway lines in a large measure, because they are wasteful.

Britain, the country which invented the steam engine and which pioneered the first railway in 1830 in the whole world, now accepts the internal combustion machine of the motor vehicle as a more modern form of transport. Dr. Beeching's report not only admits that railway traffic is now outmoded, but it recommends very drastic surgery. Dr. Beeching's report recommended the closure of over half of the existing 4,293 passenger stations in the United Kingdom, withdrawal of passenger services over 5,000 route miles, and the retiring of 375,000 wagons.

In Britain, France and Germany together, the percentage of freight traffic carried by railways declined from 74 to 52 percent between 1930 and 1954, while that movement by roads increased from 10 to 34 percent.

That is how progressive countries move ahead with the Industrial Revolution from the age of fossil power, of coal, to the age of petroleum, electricity and atomic energy. Our Prime Minister often talks about not living in a bullock cart age, but, unfortunately, his Government, on this point,

thinks in no other terms than the bullock cart mentality.

A very detached and respected correspondent, Shri B.G. Verghese, said in the *Time of India* on 11th April last year :

"The Railways are fully stretched, but the road haulage industry continues to be hamstrung by restrictions and heavy taxation... Railways have a new role to play in a different and changing situation... The entire narrow gauge and most of the metre gauge lines are unremunerative."

And he goes on to say :
"Keeping these lines going means a hidden subsidy. Though the subsidy might be concealed, somebody is paying for it, and the country might be better off...by relieving the hidden taxpayer of his burden and employing other means of transport for opening up backward areas."

Therefore, if we really mean what we profess, to move with the times, to be technological in spirit, to be in keeping with the spirit of the times, it is time that we make up our minds that from now on the railways have to recede and airways and roads and waterways have to take over more and more of the burden of carrying goods in this country. Otherwise, we shall be like Mrs. Parkinson, who tried to sweep the ocean back with a broom, and, of course, failed.

We talk a great deal about 'take off,' but how can this country take off if the surface of the roads is not there? The surface of the roads is one of the grounds from which the take off must take place, along with the air strips of this country. The longer we delay the acceptance of this fact, the more this country is going to pay for following archaic, bullock cart methods and mentality.

(Continued on page 31)

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(Continued from page 29)

Three years ago, I had the misfortune to accuse the then Minister of allowing the Railway Minister to sit on his back, just as the railways were riding on the back of the roads, and I then made an appeal to him. I was placing the facts before the hon. Minister, and I was trying to encourage him to show a little more guts on behalf of the transport services. It was not his job to go on apologising for the Railways. After three years, I must again repeat the same appeal to the present Minister. I know his heart is in the right place, but I think that what is required is a little more guts and backbone to stand up to the Railway Board. Till last year the Minister had an excuse that there were giants of the Congress Party sitting in charge of the Railway portfolio, and junior Ministers might perhaps be forgiven for not being able to assert themselves altogether! But since there has been a happy change, and today those incharge of the railway

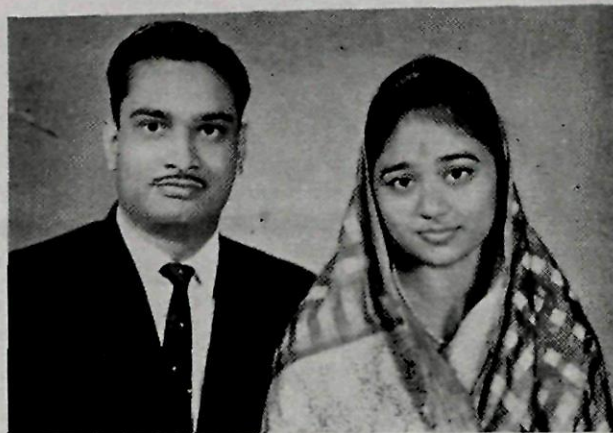
portfolio are relatively junior, I hope he will, in the light of this changed situation, show a fresh approach, be a little more assertive.

This House has never grudged the Transport Ministry any support during the last six or seven years.

It is for the Ministry to mobilise the support that public opinion and Parliament have given them, and to stand up for more modern and advanced methods of transport against the archaic ones which are still dominating the scene.

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Promise held out by Shri Raj Bahadur

Replying to the debate on his Ministry's demands Shri Raj Bahadur said in the Lok Sabha :



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 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 shortfalls and we have not been able to utilise the road allocations. That surprised me. May I say how things stand ?

So far as utilisations 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 crores to begin with and it rose to Rs. 416 crores. Apart from that, we have to take 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 deal 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

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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 per cent. 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.

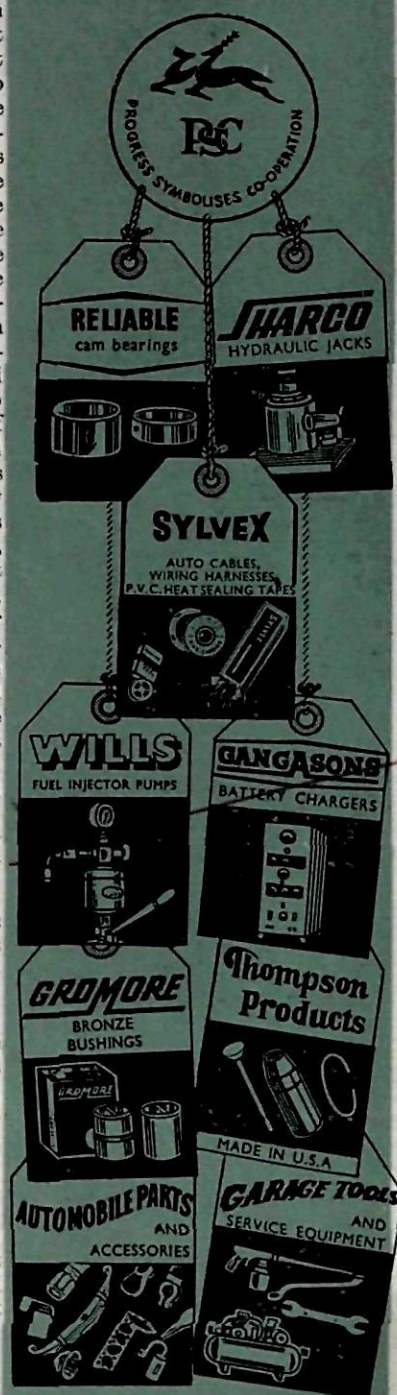
What is the performance so far as the various companies are concerned. I will not go into the details, but I will give only the total. In 1964 we hope to manufacture 35,000, in 1965—42,250 and in 1966—54,500. This is also to be judged against the fact that the licensing capacity has been increased considerably. The licensing capacity as it has been increased comes to 61,800 including two new ones which are: Simpson—1,200 and Beaver—heavy vehicles 2,000. 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 3,000 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 2,68,000, 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 face 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

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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 place 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 been fairly treated and we have not looked after them well. But let us remember that when the National Highway 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 424-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 Comorin. We propose to consider that and we would try to have it included in the

Fourth Plan. This would connect South Arcot, Tanjavur, Ramana-thapuram, 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 Commission 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.

Transport Secretaries and Commissioners' Conference in Calcutta.

Will the Minister of Transport be pleased to state :

(a) whether an All India Conference of State Transport Secretaries and Commissioners was held recently at Calcutta.

(b) if so, the decisions arrived thereat ;

(c) whether high cost of petroleum and its derivatives or the fuels needed for propulsion of automobiles, also came up for discussion ; and

(d) if so, the action proposed in this behalf ?

Answers

The Minister of transport
(Shri Raj Bahadur)

(a) Yes

(b) (1) The guide lines drawn up by the Ministry of Transport for the preparation of long-term plans relating to roads and road transport, with particular reference to the Fourth Plan, were endorsed. These guide lines stressed the need for setting up Planning and Development Wings in the Transport Department of each State for making accurate traffic assessment on all important highways, proper phasing of road transport nationalisation programmes, formation of viable units, including cooperatives, of road transport operators, licens-

ing of goods bookig and forwarding agencies and conducting essential studies relating to motor vehicles taxation and freight rates. (2) It was suggested that a separate Conference of traffic and transport officials, traffic engineers and town planners might be convened by the Ministry of Transport to consider the traffic problems, especially in urban areas.

(3) Four Zonal Committee were set up to examine the problems relating to weight restrictions applicable to transport vehicles on national highways and other inter-State routes and recommend suitable programmes and priorities for strengthening the weak links or providing the missing links ;

(4) It was recommended—

(i) that copies of all applications received by the different Transport Authorities for grant of permits for transport vehicles, which were published under Section 57 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1939, might also be sent to the local Railway Administration concerned to ensure that the Administration received sufficient opportunity to make its representation on the adequacy of the services provided by it, if it so desired ;

(ii) that certificates of fitness in respect of new transport vehicles might be granted for a period of one year in the plains and for six months for operation on hill routes ;

(iii) that particulars of motor vehicles transferred from one State to another might be reported by the State to which the vehicles were transferred to the State in which they were originally registered, on a quarterly basis ;

(iv) that the State Governments should, in consultation with the State Financial Corporations and other interests concerned, devise suitable measures to facilitate the flow of funds to the road transport

industry ;

(v) that a single authority, i.e. the State Transport Authority or the State Transport Commissioner, should be entrusted with the work of countersigning permits for inter-State routes ;

(vi) that the State Road Transport Undertakings should examine the feasibility of maintaining breakdown services at their zonal headquarters for removing disabled motor vehicles from the roads ;

and

(vii) that the question of setting up Road Boards at the Central and State levels should be examined by the Government of India in consultation with the State Governments.

(5) It was recommended further that the Motor Vehicles Act, 1939, might be amended—

(i) to provide for the treatment of a route assigned under the permit as a condition of the permit and for the variation of the route to meet traffic requirements, if necessary ;

(ii) to clarify legislative intention in regard to vehicles with left hand steering control i.e. that vehicle should normally be fitted with right-hand steering control and that where they had left-hand steering control, they should also be equipped with the necessary mechanical or electrical signalling devices ;

(iii) to enable any legal representative of a person who died in a motor vehicle accident to file a claim for compensation, instead of requiring that all the legal representatives should jointly make such an application, as the existing provisions have been interpreted, to require ; and

(iv) to debar persons with defective hearing from driving transport vehicles.

(c) No

(d) Does not arise.

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