RAILWAYS AND THE RAILWAYS MAN
SPEEZH IN THE LOKSABHA
BY:- ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE
Text of the speech delivered by Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, M. P., in the course of the Lok Sabha debate on the Railway Budget 1959-60 presented before the Parliament by Shri Jagjiwan Ram, Minister of Railways:

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir,

The picture of our Railway’s financial state of affairs as emerges from the Railway budget is a dismal one indeed. A slump in the revenues on the one hand and a rise in working expenditure on the other are written very boldly thereon. It is a matter of regret that not much precaution and foresight goes into the preparation of the Railway Budget. Consequently, the estimates prepared do not prove correct. The actual income generally falls short of the estimates and the actual expenditure goes far beyond. On the 24th last, I, along with a number of other members had asked the Hon’ble Minister as to whether it was a fact that working expenses on Railways had risen disproportionately as compared to traffic and railway earnings. To this the Deputy Minister of Railways had replied in the negative and had said (Let me quote his answer) : “Though there have been increases in the number and emoluments of staff and in the cost of materials, particularly of coal, of which the railways consume about a third of the country’s total consumption, there has not been a disproportionate expenses in the working expenses.” I would, in this context, like to draw the Hon’ble Minister’s attention to a directive dated 11-12-58 issued to General Managers by the Railway Board which makes a reference to a letter dated 8-11-58. The portion I refer to reads thus
"The Board considers that it is imperative to arrest immediately any tendency for a rise in the working expenses which are disproportionately high compared to growth of traffic and railway earnings."

To the reply given by the Deputy Minister was appended a statement purporting to furnish statistics in support of his answer. It is extremely difficult to discern from this maze of figures what is the actuality. There is a quip which says untruth is of three grades, Lies, Deliberate lies and Statistics. I do not wish to apply that here. But one thing is clear and that is that the Railway Minister's reply (notwithstanding all these statistics) and the Railway Board's directive are contradictory. We would like to know which of them is true.

As a result of declining revenues, the Railway's Development Fund is showing a minus balance and we are having to borrow from the General Revenues. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, one fails to comprehend as to why the Railway should contribute out of its profits towards the General Revenues to an extent far beyond its capacity and then fall back upon the General Revenues for its Development Fund. I feel that the present measure of contribution which the Railways make towards the General Revenues needs to be reduced. The Railway Minister has favoured extension for one year of the 1954 convention. My submission is that the problem cannot be solved just by extending the period. The Railway contribution requires to be reduced. The net revenues of the Railways this year total 75 crores 60 lakhs, and of these 54 crores 41 lakhs are paid as contribution towards the General Revenues. The estimated balance thus is 21 crores 19 lakhs. I doubt whether the actual balance would be even that much. Last year the actual balance was 13 crores 10 lakhs less than the estimated balance. The shortfall in the Development Fund has resulted in reducing the amount set apart for passenger amenities and labour welfare. The budgeted estimates for this purpose in the year 1958-59 were 36.70 crores where as the revised estimates stand at 30.21 crores.
Passenger amenities have fallen from 3.24 crores (actuals 57-58) to 2.71 crores (revised estimates 58-59) and 2.95 crores (budgeted 59-60). Similarly labour welfare has come down from 8.65 crores to 8.51 crores. It is clear that unless the contribution made to the general revenues is cut down, it will not be possible to extend the facilities we would like to.

RAIL - ROAD RIVALRY

The reason that has been put forth—a sort of bogey has been sought to be raised—to explain falling incomes in Railways is the rail-road competition. Just as in the matter of food stuffs fears have been expressed in regard to the rivalry between sugar cane and foodgrains, so also in the field of transport it has been made to appear that a battle is going to be waged between railways and road transport. I think there need be no apprehensions on this account. There are two reasons why the Railways have failed to compete with road transport. The first is their inefficiency and the second is the high tariff of freight rates, owing to which the law of Diminishing Returns sets into operation. It has been said that in order to make greater allowance for Rail Transport and to increase its income, restrictions would be imposed on Road Traffic. I think any such step would be tantamount to putting a premium on inefficiency. Ours is a vast country. There is ample scope here for rail as well as road transport. Let the Railway Ministry set its own house in order. Only then would we be able to know precisely as to why people prefer to have their goods conveyed by road than by rail, whether it is because the delivery is made straight at their doors, or whether because there is lesser risk of goods being lost or stolen in transit or because of some other facilities. If, not withstanding the fact that for the same distance railway freight charges are lesser than roadways charges, people patronise the roadways, there must be cogent reasons for it. Let these reasons be traced. Imposing restrictions on road transport is no solution. The Hon'ble Minister has expressed the hope that even as our Steel Projects continue to make headway
and as economic conditions improve, the Railways will be required to cater for what they can possibly carry.

In this context I would also like to state that the average speed of goods trains has gone down, and this in spite of the fact that express trains have been started. On broad gauge lines, the average in 1950-51 was 10'8 miles per hour and in 1957-58 it has come down to 9'28. An metre gauge lines, the average in 1949-50 was 9'58 m.p.h. and in 1957-58 it is 8'23. From Agra Cantt. to Tundla the distance is just 19 miles but the time taken to cover this distance is as much as 10 hours and sometimes even 16 hours. If the speed of goods trains is to continue as it is, then whatever be the restrictions you decide to impose on road transport, traders are not going to take to your railways, you may rest assured. If anything, these restrictions will encroach upon the sphere served by bullock-carts. In the transport scheme of our country, bullock-carts too have a place of their own. In fact, all these three modes of goods carriage, the railways, the roadways and the bullock cart, should be complementary to each other and not rivals inter se. Let there be a co-ordinated viewpoint in our plans in this regard.

Rail Accidents

Now I would like to say something in regard to rail accidents. The Hon'ble Minister has admitted in his speech that lately there has been some increase in the number of train collisions and derailments. I have collected some statistics in this regard. During the period January 1, 1958 to December 31, 1958, there have been 18 serious train accidents on our Railways resulting in the death of 80 persons and injuries to 424 others. Some 6 lakhs 90 thousands worth of Railway property has been destroyed in these accidents and Rs. 3,72,199/- have had to be paid as compensation for the dead or injured. I think the picture presented by these figures is extremely alarming and I would like to know from the Hon'ble Minister as to what concrete steps other than
the appointment of Safety Inspectors have been taken to prevent these accidents. We are all aware that accidents are mostly due to failure in the proper observance of rules. Recently some new rules—the Unified General Rules—have been framed. I would like to know whether employees have been duly instructed in this regard. I have received complaints to the effect that officers have been going round to employees and asking them to fill up forms saying that they are aware of these rules and can act in accordance with them. I submit that it is imperative that necessary training must be given to employees in respect of these new rules. If this is not done, and merely written statements are procured from employees that they know those rules when they know them not, the consequences are likely to be very dangerous. There would be no chances of the present alarming trend in accidents being checked.

**Extraordinary Powers of General Managers**

In the name of preventing railway accidents, General Managers have been armed with extraordinary powers. Under Rule 148 of the Railway Establishment Code, railway employees may be dismissed at a one-month's notice. No showcause notice is served, no explanation is asked for, no opportunity of defending himself, of explaining his position is given to him. With just a one-month's notice, the railway authorities can terminate his services. In the Rajya Sabha, the Hon'ble Railway Minister asked a member if he could name any employees who have been thus dismissed. Well, if names are needed, I can mention quite a few. In the Southern Railways alone, Shri Muni Ratnam of Renigunta, Shri Adimurthy of Yeshwantpur, Shri Ramakrishna of Kovvur, and Shri Hanumantha Rao of Machavaram—all Assistant Station Masters—have been dismissed because of their alleged failure to prevent accidents. All are desirous that accidents should be averted. Railway employees too wish that accidents
be avoided. The Railway Minister too has admitted that sometimes the very circumstances are so extraordinary that employees are liable to commit mistakes. If indeed, it is the circumstances which have made the employee err, then it is certainly not equitable that his services should be dispensed with on this account. My submission is that Rule 148, which confers these summary powers of dismissal, should be held in abeyance. In fact what is required is that this Rule be abrogated altogether but if it is not to be so deleted, then please do not make use of it. The Railway Minister has said that the means they have been using, inculcate a sense of security amongst employees. I submit, Sir, that this rule only creates a sense of insecurity amongst railway-men in respect of their services. If the employees commit mistakes, efforts should be made to find out why it has so happened. I can cite instances where employees have been dismissed not because they caused an accident but because they averted an accident.

An Hon'ble Member: Should not he who commits a mistake be punished?

Shri Vajpayee: By all means, punish him who is guilty. But it is not the question of punishment only. It needs to be found out why a particular accident has happened. To what extent is the human element involved therein? A human being is a human being, after all. He is not a machine. In this context, I would also like to stress the necessity of sub-dividing responsibility. Just imagine the multi-farious jobs a station master at a wayside station has to perform. He has to issue tickets, he has to lift the signal, he has to deal with passenger queries and to fill up forms. And then you expect him to act as the pointsman as well. The very rules which require of him to do all this are erroneous and need to be changed. Let responsibility be shared and matters will improve.

Another thing I would like to say in this regard is in relation to the enquiry that is held wherever there is a train accident. The Australian Railway Act provides that in such
enquiries, representatives of Railwaymen Unions are also summoned. If we could secure the confidence of railway employees it would go a long way towards helping in the aversion of train accidents. I would appeal to the Railway Minister to give thought to this aspect of the question.

Attitude Towards Labour

We have had here a lot of discussion on the Railway Ministry’s Labour policy. I can well appreciate the Railway Minister’s difficulties in this regard. The All India Railwaymen’s Federation happens to be associated with the I. N. T. U. C. and the I. N. T. U. C. in turn has attachments with the party in power. His Softness for this Federation therefore is not surprising. Even then, he has been bold in extending some sort of recognition to the National Federation of Railwaymen also. It is somewhat inferior place, however, that has been allotted to this Federation. I hope this discrimination too will be put an end to. As for as the unity of railwaymen goes, I commend the sincerity with which the Railway Minister desires unity amongst Railwaymen. But what need to be realised is that boosting up of tottering federations and unions is no way of bringing about unity. The Northern Railway Mazdoor Union is a branch of the N. I. F. R. The registration of this Union has ended, but its recognition continues. The reason why it is no longer registered is that its accounts are not regular, and that there is a split within the Union itself. But despite this situation you continue to recognise it. Can this be called an impartial policy? What is needed is that free elections be held and the Union which proves to command the confidence of the greater number of railwaymen, be granted recognition. I think it is high time that a decisive step be taken in this regard. Only thus can unity be established amongst railway employees. One thing that I would like to state in this context is that the Railways are so huge a concern that one Association or Federation would not be able to do adequate justice to the task of safeguarding the rights and interests of all railwaymen.
Take the case of Station Masters and Assistant Station Masters, for instance. The mode of promotion which obtained during the British regime continues still. Guards, who were generally Anglo-Indians enjoyed a preference over others. The same channel of promotion is followed still. A knock at the Railway Minister's doors has not given them justice. Now they are seeking justice at the Supreme Court. Then again, it is discriminatory and against the spirit of the Constitution to give preference to Guards over Assistant Station Masters for the purpose of promotions to the high grade of Station Masters.

Security Of Employees

The safety and security of railway employees at wayside stations is another vexing question. The other day, Jindpur station between Shahjahanpur and Pilibhit was attacked by dacoits. They plundered all Railway property, and assaulted the Station Master. Jewellery and such other valuables belonging to railway employees were also taken away. What arrangements have the railway authorities made for these employees of its dwelling in out-of-the-way jungle stations?

Shri Shah Nawaz Khan: Are there no dacoities on roads?

Shri Vajpayee: It is not roadside dacoities we are discussing, Sir. What are you doing in respect of these attacks on your stations, these murderous assaults on your employees, this plundering of railway property—that is the question. How at all can you absolve yourselves of your responsibility by talking of roadside dacoities? If the present state of affairs continues, there can be no sense of security amongst your staff. If Railway employees are deemed essential service staff and they are required to live in their quarters, then should it not be possible that they be allowed to avail of their quarters rent free or they be premitted to live wherever
they choose? Let them go and reside in the villages where their lives and property may be safe. But if your rules make it incumbent upon them to reside at the station, then it is your bounden duty to arrange for their safety. The State Governments maintain that the task of maintaining Law and Order in the area of Railway Stations is not theirs. I submit, Sir, that this problem is a very live one and you cannot just waive it aside. You must find some solution. Some Station Masters of wayside stations have suggested that they be granted Arms Licenses and that some Railway Protection Force should be arranged. I admit that the number of wayside stations being pretty large, the problem is of immense magnitude. But a solution has to be found, none the less.

Departmental Catering

The Hon’ble Minister has stated that Departmental Catering is getting more and more popular. I beg to differ, Sir, this Governmental catering is certainly not growing popular. No wonder, arrangements for Departmental catering at Varanasi, Bhatni and some other stations have had to be closed down. The arrangements are showing a loss. In the year 1957-58, there was a loss of 21.98 lakhs. According to the budgeted estimates there will be a net loss of Rs. 18.38 lakhs in 1959-60. It is estimated that, in all, the Railways have hitherto suffered a loss of some Rs. 35 crores on Departmental Catering.

Deputy-Speaker: 35 crores or 35 lakhs?

Shri Vajpayee: A single year’s loss runs into lakhs, Sir. If you could give me time, I would like to present detailed figures in this regard........

Deputy-Speaker: I would be satisfied even without knowing them all.

Shri Vajapyee: My submission, Sir, is that this sort of experimenting is of no avail. Stop this departmental
catering and tighten your control instead. Passengers, generally, have not been benefitted by it. It is true that care has been taken to procure some commendatory comments from select customers on your Remarks Books, but the ordinary passenger has not profited on that account.

There is another point I would like to touch. The Railway Minister has hinted in his Budget Speech that metre gauge lines would be substituted by broad gauge. I do not agree with this proposal of his. In the present circumstances, this would be extravagant. Money should be spent instead on opening new lines in backward regions like Bundelkhand and Vindhy Pradesh. I have nothing to say in regard to the conversion of narrow gauge to broad gauge. But keeping in view the present circumstances and resources, a programme of converting metre gauge to broad gauge is not desirable.

Railway Workshops

I appreciate the progress made in respect of the manufacture of Rolling Stock and Machine Parts. But there is further scope still in this direction. I have a suggestion to make in this respect. If instead of opening new workshops third shifts be started in the already running workshops, it would not only be economical but would also help to increase production. It is likely that for this purpose working hours may have to be reduced from 8 to 7 hours, but the experiment is worth trying. Steps should also be taken to ascertain as to what extent the delay in workshops is due to shortage of necessary materials in the stores. Strict measures should be adopted to check thefts in Railway Stores. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, you would be surprised to know that there are some three gambling dens in the Railway workshop at Lucknow where gambling to the tune of thousands everyday goes on absolutely unhampered. As far as our Hon'ble Deputy Minister is concerned, he could not even get down from his jeep car when he visited Lucknow sometime back to inspect this workshop. The workshop gate which had been
closed for security reasons was dismantled just in order to make way for his jeep and the Hon'ble Minister inspected the workshop in his jeep.

**Electrification**

In respect of electrification, I submit, Sir, the plan has not been properly prepared. Our workshop at Bhopal hasn’t as yet started manufacturing engines and engine parts and you propose to go ahead with your electrification. Our production at Bhopal, and our programme of electrification ought to be mutually interdependent. You are trying to get along with your electrification whereas the Bhopal workshop is lagging behind. This will mean that engines and engine parts will have to be imported from abroad. This again will involve the question of foreign exchange. It is essential that the manufacturing programme at our Heavy Electrical Plants of Bhopal be co-ordinated with our electrification scheme. Electrification is certainly desirable because while on the one hand there is the question of consuming electricity that is being produced by the major projects, on the other, the serious drain on the country’s coal resources by the railways is to be countered. But this electrification needs engines, engine parts and other material. I have therefore said that this isn’t an example of rational planning.

I feel that the financial state of the Railways needs to be given serious thought to. Let the Railway Ministry, and more specially the new Railway Board adopt a new outlook in this regard and secure the co-operation of both workers and the people—that is my appeal. Thanks.