

'No change in history of Indian Railways'

By Our Special Correspondent

DHARWAD, AUG. 20. The history of Indian Railways remains unchanged, despite information available in a document in the Roorkee Archives unearthed recently, according to S. Settar, and S. Radhakrishnan of the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, and former Chairman of the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR).

Prof. Settar, who was General Editor of the three-volume publication of "Railway Construction in India" brought out by ICHR, was reacting to the statement by the Railway Minister, Nitish Kumar, on the Railways' willingness to consider the new material brought before it.

Prof. Settar, who has written to Mr. Nitish Kumar in this connection, said the Roorkee document brought out by Prem Vrat, Director of IIT, was interesting. However, the

claim that first train ran between Roorkee and Pilar Kaliar on December 22, 1851, more than a year earlier to the one that ran between Mumbai and Thane, was too tall. While information on history was welcome, it should not be sensationalised, Prof. Settar told Mr. Nitish Kumar.

What Roorkee document seemed to inform was not the passenger railway that regularly transported men and material, but a small locomotive, perhaps similar to that of a trolley used for transporting mud and mire at the time of construction of an aqueduct of a canal to draw water from the Solani river. In the absence of further details, particularly photographs, it was difficult to establish its true character, he said.

Prof. Settar said that he was not able to locate either Col. Cautley or the engineer, Thomson, (associated with the Roorkee train) among the prominent names that figured in the railway document of the 19th

Century. Civil engineers and members of the Board of Revenue involved in replacement of roads with rail tracks in the Thirties, and the first experimental railway line of this kind might be the Red Hills and Little Mount track in Chennai, which was completed in December 1837. It was called the "Wind Carriage Railway" as its conveyance carriage was fitted not with loco but a lug-sail.

This was certainly longer and speedier rail transport than the goods carrier of Roorkee. The Roorkee rail of the Fifties is said to have covered two-and-a-half miles in 38 minutes at a speed of four miles per hour, while the speed of the Red Hills Rail Carriage was not less than 12 miles per hour. Carrying some passengers, it covered 25 miles in the first run. "If we have to identify the first passenger service on rail track, it should be the Red Hills Railway of Madras," Prof. Settar said.

Sanitation yet to reach rural people

By T.V.Sivanandan

GULBARGA, AUG. 20. People in rural areas of the State continue to be deprived of sanitation.

Only 6.85 per cent of rural households have access to toilets, and the situation is even worse in backward regions, according to official sources.

A study conducted in this regard said that 15 of the 27 districts were below the State average in terms of having toilets. All five districts in the Gulbarga Division, Gulbarga, Bidar, Raichur, Bellary, and Koppal, had the dubious distinction of having less number of toilets in rural habitations.

Although rural sanitation formed an important component in the development of a particular area or region, the authorities had failed in this regard. The Human Development Indicators pointed out that lack

of sanitation in a particular area was the most visible sign of backwardness, and sanitation was an important aspect in measuring human development, it said.

The High Power Committee for Redressal of Regional Imbalances (HPCRRI), which took note of lack of sanitation in rural areas, has suggested several measures to overcome the problem in its final report submitted to the Government.

Official sources told *The Hindu* today that the committee had urged the Government to adopt a total village sanitation programme with a focus on promoting integrated sanitation in villages. Steps should be taken for safe disposal of human excreta, to provide storm water drains, removal of manure heaps from the vicinity of houses, develop internal roads and streets, and to provide im-

proved "chullas" to enable cooking in a smoke free atmosphere.

The committee recommended to the Government to formulate a programme to provide sanitation facilities by covering 30 per cent of the rural population in five years commencing from the current year at an estimated cost of Rs. 360 crore per year, and 60 per cent of the investment should be made in North Karnataka, sources said.

Sources said taluk and gram panchayats were entrusted with the responsibility of constructing storm water drains and community toilets in villages. However, the initiative failed to take off due to paucity of funds. The Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP) was designed to construct safe latrines based on the "twin-pit pour flush" model. However, the desired result could not be

achieved due to the coverage of families living below the poverty line (BPL) only and poor allocation of funds.

Sources said under the programme, 80 per cent of the expenditure on latrines was provided as subsidy to BPL families. The Government also extended grants to construct community latrines for women. The scheme was successful in places having good water supply. Only 1.19 lakh households in the State were covered under the programme from 1985 to 1995. Sources said the Nirmala Grama Yojana was introduced in the State during 1995-96 to construct latrines. Till 2000, 7.53 lakh latrines were built in rural areas at a cost of Rs. 91.71 crore. Besides, 89,000 latrines were constructed between 1993 and 2000 under the Integrated Rural Water Supply and Environmental Sanitation Project.