

[4 MAY, 2000]

RAJYA SABHA

MR. CHAIRMAN: All right. The House is adjourned till 2-30 p.m. The House then adjourned for lunch at twenty-five minutes past one of the clock.

The House reassembled after lunch at thirty one minutes past two of the clock, **The Vice-Chairman (Shri Suresh Pachouri)** in the Chair.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Situation in Sri Lanka

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): Recent developments in Northern Sri Lanka are a matter of serious concern to India. The Government is closely monitoring the evolving situation. The Government of Sri Lanka has also been in touch with the Government of India. Our High Commissioner to Sri Lanka was, therefore, called to New Delhi earlier this week for consultations on the developing situation.

The Government of India will be guided by its continued commitment to a negotiated peaceful resolution of the conflict, within the framework of Sri Lanka's unity and territorial integrity, a united Sri Lanka where all communities can realize their aspirations. It is India's hope that peace will soon return to Sri Lanka, a country which is a close and friendly neighbour.

The Government of India has received some requests from the Government of Sri Lanka in the context of the present situation. Naturally, all these requests are receiving the urgent consideration of the Government.

The conflict in Northern Sri Lanka continues to cause serious hardship to civilians in the area. As hon. Members are aware, there are nearly 100,000 Sri Lankan refugees in India, including about 30,000 outside the refugee camps. On humanitarian grounds, India continues to look after these refugees. In consonance with this, India will work to mitigate the hardship inflicted upon civilians by the conflict and will render such humanitarian assistance as may become necessary. As and when need arises such assistance will be decided upon only in consultation with Sri Lanka.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE (West Bengal) Sir, the hon. Minister

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE (West Bengal) Sir, the hon. Minister of External Affairs has made a statement and reiterated the policy that we are pursuing in Sri Lanka. We share with anguish our concern about the developments in Sri Lanka. We are involved in a peaceful settlement of the problems where the legitimate interests of various ethnic groups, including the Sri Lankan Tamils are to be protected. At the same time the territorial integrity and unity of Sri Lanka is to be maintained. Any solution to resolve the dispute is to be found within the framework of Sri Lanka's territorial integrity and unity and within the framework of that country's constitution. Naturally, the developments in the close and friendly country just on our border have some impact. As all of us are aware that over decades, a large number of Sri Lankan Tamils have taken refuge in India, and if there will be a further escalation of tension in that island country, there is an apprehension that there may be more influx of refugees. I am sure that the Government is fully aware of this situation and will take all appropriate steps. Perhaps, the Minister did not want to discuss in detail the type of assistance which the Sri Lankan Government had asked from the Government of India. I would also not like to insist on that aspect. I would like to seek information from the hon. Minister on one point. We have read in the newspapers that the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, who was in India in connection with his medical treatment, also called on the Prime Minister, and naturally, the current development was discussed. The entire statement of the Minister has been very carefully and cautiously drafted. The point which is to be kept in view is that our future steps should be also with adequate caution, and at the same time, to ensure that India is not to bear the burden of the fall-out of the developments there. This is not the time to raise passions, and perhaps, because of that reason, the hon. Minister has barely stated the hardcore facts instead of making any comment or analysis of the situation which is developing. One further request I would like to make to the Minister. As this is the preliminary statement which he has made, in course of time, if there be any further development, it is expected that the Government would keep the House informed as the Session is expected to continue till the third week of May. With these words, once again, we hope that peace will come to Sri Lanka. The island country has been undergoing through this unfortunate conflict for a very long time. We hope that a conducive situation will prevail where every ethnic group would be in a position to live in peace and tranquility, where their legitimate rights

will be protected and they will not be the victims of senseless violence. Thank you.

SHRI M. VENKAIAH NAIDU (Karnataka): Sir, I thank you for giving me this opportunity. The statement is well-drafted. The developments in Sri Lanka are really a matter of serious concern to India. We have the past experience also before us. We should not gloss over what had happened and what were its repercussions in India, the burden that had fallen on India and the tragedy that had taken place subsequently also. I do not want to go into those details. But, at the same time, we will be failing in our responsibility if we do not convey the feelings of the people, particularly the people from the southern region about what is happening in Sri Lanka. So, the earlier history has to be kept in mind before the Government takes any decision with regard to this dispute. Sir, with regard to the conflict, it has been stated that India is committed to the resolution of the conflict through negotiation within the framework of the Sri Lanka's unity and territorial integrity.

We are all one on this issue. At the same time, yesterday, there was a news in the electronic media that the Minister made a categorical statement that there was no question of India giving military assistance, as has been sought by Sri Lanka. But, subsequently, it was clarified that no such request was made. I would like to know the factual position in this regard. Whether any request was made and what was the response of the Government in that regard? Will the Government keep in mind what had happened earlier? With regard to giving humanitarian assistance to the Sri Lankan refugees in India - we are known for our hospitality and have been taking up this responsibility - I think, if we want to go beyond this, a wide discussion is needed within the country as to whether India should get herself involved in the affairs or not. This is a very delicate issue. It will also have its repercussions, so far as the population-- particularly in the Southern part of India -- of our country is concerned. So, keeping these sensitive aspects in mind, I only hope that the Government will proceed further very cautiously. We have enough problems on our home-front. And we should not invite any new problem on us. We want Sri Lanka to be united. It is a friendly country. We want a peaceful solution. At the same time, our interests, our sentiments, as also the sentiments of the people, particularly in the Southern part of this country, have to be kept in mind before the Government takes any step in this regard. I also urge upon the

Government that if situation requires, the Government should also involve the opposition parties. In addition, the parties, particularly of Tamil Nadu, should also to be taken into confidence before taking any decision. I have full confidence in the ability of our Prime Minister and the ability of our External Affairs Minister. At the same time, they should also take into account the feelings of the Indian population, of the national level political parties, particularly of Tamil Nadu.

SHRI S. RAMACHANDRAN PILLAI (Kerala): Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir. The present situation in Sri Lanka is a matter of grave concern to India. The military conflicts has now been escalating. All these developments are taking place next door to us. Any attitude we take on this matter will have its implications on the development, taking place in Sri Lanka, as also on the Indian situation. The Government has expressed its consistent stand on this issue. We stand for a negotiated settlement; we stand for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, within the framework of Sri Lanka's unity and territorial integrity. We don't consider that separatism is a solution to the present problem. So, any attitude we take in this matter should be to facilitate the process of finding a peaceful solution to this problem. The Government has not explained the nature of request which came from Sri Lanka and has also not explained the attitude which the Government is going to take on this request. Of course, when the Government takes a decision on these matters, the Government will keep this aspect in mind that all our help, intervention, should be to facilitate the process of a peaceful settlement of this issue. And our help or approach should not be used by other forces to vitiate the atmosphere. Of course, attempts will be made to rouse passions in India. We must be very cautious on this issue because any attitude, any decision, that we take on this will have its repercussions on the Indian situation also. Let us try to help Sri Lanka to find a solution to this issue.

SHRI SWARAJ KAUSHAL (Haryana): Sir, the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka is very important. But we have before us the IPKF experience. As the Governor of Mizoram I had an opportunity to interact with the troops who had returned after the IPKF operation. We lost 1200 men and thousands of our soldiers were wounded and incapacitated. Although we had gone at the invitation of the Sri Lankan Government, when we returned we were unwelcome guests in Sri Lanka and also in Chennai. Then the other aspect is Norway is mediating between the Sri Lankan Government

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and the LTTE. I believe it is the responsibility of the Norwegian Government to intervene at this stage. Their responsibility does not begin after the armed conflict is over. In fact, their responsibility is very much alive even today and they should intervene to stop this bloodshed. While we formulate a strategy for the country, my suggestion to the hon. Leader of the House would be that our case should be that of minimum involvement and we should be very mindful about the precious army lives and we should not repeat the mistake that we made earlier. At the same time, we should safeguard our security interests because what is happening in Sri Lanka will have wide ranging ramifications throughout the country including the North East. Thank you.

SHRI P.N. SIVA (Tamil Nadu): Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for having made a statement on the grave situation. It is an emotive issue. We naturally got agitated over it and we are sorry for what happened this morning. I would like to seek the following clarifications. I would like to quote the Hindu. It says, "Earlier the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Shri Lakshman Kadirgamar, who is convalescing in the Capital called on the Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Talking to a private TV channel, Shri Kadirgamar said Sri Lanka had not made a request for Indian intervention but did not rule out making it later." In the same newspaper, in reply to a question on evacuation, the External Affairs Minister said, "Sri Lanka has not asked for Indian intervention. The situation has not arisen." In this statement the Minister says, "The Government of India has received requests from the Government of Sri Lanka in the context of the present situation. Naturally, all these requests are receiving the urgent consideration of the Government." On the basis of such a request for intervention by India, what will be the reaction of our Government? I think we should all look at the past. We had experienced it by burning our fingers by sending our troops to Sri Lanka in the name of IPKF. It is better to recollect the heavy price we had paid in the form of precious human lives. I do not want to go deep into it. The hon. Minister has mentioned in the statement that India would render such humanitarian assistance as may become necessary in consultation with Sri Lanka. Did they show any humanitarian consideration to our fishermen? Will you get an assurance that at least now they would not hurt the Indian fishermen? You should seriously ponder over it. The Sri Lankan Government is evading a reply. I would like to bring to the notice of the External Affairs Minister that we have lost the

lives of 80 Indians in the last 10 years on the seas within our territory by the Sri Lankan Navy. The womenfolk of the fishermen wait on the shores every day either for the fish that have been brought by the fishermen or for receiving the corpses of those fishermen. This is the sad story that we are having there. The other important point that has been talked about is sending humanitarian assistance. To whom? Is it to the soldiers who are entrapped or to the people? Is it going to be similar to the Operation that was undertaken by the Government of Rajiv Gandhi? Supposing you want to airdrop food packets to the civilians, and your aircraft is attacked in the process, what will happen? Will it be an excuse to send the Army following this or will you take it as an unfriendly approach, and start a war. I recall, during the IPKF's operation in Sri Lanka, the present hon. Defence Minister, Shri George Fernandes, had said: "It is India's Vietnam." He also described some of the incidents there as India's Mylai. Now, you have stated, 'on invitation'. Who should invite you? If there is a pitiable situation there, of the civilians are suffering and starving, help should be sent there through international organisations like the Red Cross. But if you go with arms and ammunitions, it will only reach those whom they want to fight. A bulk of arms they are having were recovered from the Sri Lankan Army. So I hope that the Government will take this as a friendly and fraternal warning from our side. So, what I would like to insist once again to the Minister of External Affairs is that directly or indirectly our Army should not be sent to Sri Lanka. Even if the request is made, the Government should consider it in the same old fashion of 'no intervention'. I would like you to stick to the statement that was given earlier and to the statement which you have made now saying, "requests will be considered on consultation". (*Time bell*) Sir, we, the Tamilians, are more concerned about it. I would like to state that it is not the Tamilians who are suffering, but they are the Indians. Whether the Gujaratis are suffering in Uganda or the Bengalis are suffering in South Africa, we call them Indians; so also the lakhs and lakhs of Tamilians who are suffering there. I would also mention here that the children, who are living there, have not heard the lullabies of their parents, but they have only heard the exploding sounds of firing of guns and cannons. It is a very grave situation. We are directly concerned with it. So, I would like to say, if at all the Government is considering to help the civilians, they should send their help through international organisations like

the Red Cross. I hope that the hon. Minister would enlighten me by giving clarifications on the points that I have raised.

श्री सतीश प्रधान (महाराष्ट्र) : उपसभाध्यक्ष महोदय, सबसे पहले तो मैं आदरणीय मंत्री जी को धन्यवाद देना चाहता हूँ कि उन्होंने बहुत थोड़े समय में लेकिन एक अच्छा स्टेटमेंट सदन में दिया। मेरी इच्छा सिर्फ एक-दो चीजें उनके सामने लाने की है।

महोदय, एक बात हमें भूलनी नहीं चाहिए कि वह हमारा पड़ोसी देश है, हमारे उसके साथ मित्रता के रिलेशन हैं और ये रिलेशन हमारे आगे भी बने रहने चाहिए इसमें कोई दो राय नहीं हो सकती, लेकिन इसके साथ ही साथ हमें यह भी देखना होगा कि हमारे हिन्दू वंश के लोग वहां काफी मात्रा में रहते हैं। करीब 10-15 साल हो गए, जब से वहां आपस में वाद-विवाद चल रहा है, लड़ाई चल रही है और उसके कारण वहां काफी मात्रा में लोग अब तक हताहत हो चुके हैं, हमने उसका बहुत बुरा अनुभव किया है। इसलिए मेरा कहना यह है कि इस समय हम जो भी कदम उठाएं, वह कदम बहुत सोच-विचार कर उठाने की आवश्यकता है ताकि हमारे हिन्दू वंश के जो लोग वहां रहते हैं उनकी सुरक्षा कायम रहे। इसके साथ ही साथ एक बात मैं यह पूछना चाहूंगा, यदि उनको आपत्ति न हो तो आज के 'इंडियन एक्सप्रेस' में न्यूज़ छपी है कि चंडी मंदिर में एक सेशन हो रहा है ब्रह्मास्त्र के बारे में कुछ विचार करने के लिए। हमारे चीफ ऑफ दी आर्मी स्टाफ और चीफ एयर मार्शल वहां गए हैं। यह न्यूज़ मिलने के बाद बाहर यह डिस्कशन शुरू होता है कि क्या वे इसी सिलसिले में बातचीत करने के लिए गए हैं? मंत्री जी, यदि आप इसका कुछ खुलासा कर सकते हैं, तो कर दीजिए। धन्यवाद।

DR. ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR (Andhra Pradesh): Sir, I congratulate the Leader of the House, Jaswant Singhji. He has made this statement within a short span of time. I welcome the decision of the Government of India ruling out any military intervention in Sri Lanka. I feel it is the responsibility of the Sri Lankan Government to evacuate their soldiers. India should not send any aircraft or military or ships for evacuation of their stranded soldiers. I understand that Sri Lanka has not made any such request also. The allies like the DMK, the PMK and the MDMK have strongly opposed any Indian help to Sri Lankan troops. However, our party would abide by the Central Government's policy on Sri Lanka. I also caution that the Government should not repeat the blunder of sending any Indian Peace Keeping Force to Sri Lanka, as was done thirteen years back.

3.00 P.M.

SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN (Kerala): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, we are all very much concerned about the recent developments in Sri Lanka which is a friendly neighbouring country of ours. I am happy to note that the Foreign Minister has already reiterated the general stand or the approach towards the problem that we have taken. He says in paragraph 2, "The Government will be guided by its continued commitment to a negotiated peaceful resolution of the conflict within the framework of Sri Lanka's unity and territorial integrity; a united Sri Lanka where all communities can realise their aspirations". I fully agree with that. It is good that the Minister has reiterated that.

But a concrete application of this line in the evolving developments will be the main problem. Of course, the hon. Minister has already made the declaration that "On humanitarian grounds India continues to look after the refugees", the refugees who are already there in Tamil Nadu and in other parts of India. "In consonance with this, India will work to mitigate the hardships inflicted upon civilians by the conflict and will render such humanitarian assistance as may become necessary". That also is needed. But, at the same time, how will it be done? That is a very serious issue. I think the Government will have to be very cautious in taking steps in relation to that. Of course, steps will have to be taken. But, as several colleagues have pointed out, we should, as far as possible, avoid direct military intervention from the side of the Government of India.

We have already had some experience and we have burnt our fingers once. Therefore, we have to be very, very careful about that. Some proposals have been made with regard to humanitarian assistance, seeking the help of some international agencies. Of course, that can also be thought of. Anyhow, if the Government has to go beyond this limit, I think, the Government will have to seriously consider and take into confidence the various political parties also while taking such a decision. That is the request I had to make. Thank you.

SHRI R.S. GAVAI (Maharashtra): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, it is a matter of great concern to all of us as far as the recent occurrences in Sri Lanka are concerned. I extend my thanks to the Leader of the House as he issued a very short and concise statement mentioning the abundant precautionary measures taken to avoid any controversy. I do feel, keeping in

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view that Sri Lanka is a neighbouring country to us, may it live in unity and integrity. I hope peace and tranquillity would soon return there.

SHRI JASWANT SINGH: Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I must, at the outset, express my gratitude to all hon. Members that have benefited me personally and the Government by their valuable advice, comment and observations. Naturally, Sir, I am heartened by the broad approval that my Statement and the Government's stand in regard to the situation in Northern Sri Lanka have received from almost every Member that has participated. This is reflective of the broad uniformity of viewpoint and consensus in regard to the situation in Sri Lanka. That is a matter of great distress to everyone. After all, Sri Lanka, for about two decades is now in a great tragedy that has been inflicted upon that land and it is everyone's wish that that tragedy comes to an end and peace is restored to that land. It is a friendly neighbouring country. It is our wish that peace is restored, through which all people of Sri Lanka are able to realise their aspirations.

Hon. Pranab Mukherjee had sought an assurance from me. Sir, it is still an evolving situation. He intended quite rightly that should the situation warrants, we come back to the House. I assure you, Sir, that should any event, any development take place which warrants that I come back to the House and inform the House, I will definitely do so. If any situation arises in which we need to sit with the leadership of various political parties to consult with them, that also will be done.

Shri Pranab Mukherjee and Shri Siva asked a question about a meeting which took place between my distinguished counterpart from Sri Lanka, the hon. Lakshman Kadiragamar and the Prime Minister when he made a call on him. He made a call on the Prime Minister yesterday. As you know, he has undergone a major medical treatment in India and has been convalescing and yesterday he was due to leave India. Just before leaving India, he found it necessary to make a courtesy call upon the Prime Minister. Naturally, the evolving situation in Sri Lanka was discussed. He himself was not in Sri Lanka and other than generalities of the situation, nothing much was spoken.

As I have informed the hon. Members, we had summoned our High Commissioner in Colombo, who is in Colombo, who is seized of the situation and was in consultation with the Government of Sri Lanka. He has been the principal agency through which we have been keeping ourselves

informed. Sir, a number of hon. Members, and I think quite appropriately, cautioned the Government against going down the same path as had earlier been followed. I can assure the hon. Members that it is not the Government's intention. Every Government learns from the experiences of the previous Governments. Being responsible for managing the international relations now we are the beneficiaries of the experiences of the previous Governments. On the basis of that, as I mentioned to the Press yesterday, I can inform the House in very clear terms that the option of any kind of military intervention in Northern Sri Lanka is not an option that we are even contemplating of. I think any kind of speculation on that score must be laid to rest. But I appreciate that some hon. Members sounded caution against going down the same route all over again. No, Sir, we will not go down that route. Shri Ramachandran Pillai's and other hon. Members' overtone was of carefully monitoring the situation and cautiously proceeding on the path. I can assure the hon. Members, that is exactly how we are doing it because we are mindful of the fact, as hon. Siva pointed out, the emotional bondage between what happens in the Northern Sri Lanka and parts of India is something that this Government, perhaps more than the earlier Governments, yet again having learnt from the experience, is deeply mindful and we will keep that very much in mind. Before I come to the question of humanitarian assistance, I would like to deal with the point raised by Shri Swaraj Kaushal. He mentioned about Norway, the role Norway is playing or can play in the present circumstances. Yes, Sir, we are aware of the fact that the Sri Lankan Government requested the Norwegian Government to intercede on their behalf to act as a kind of a facilitator for dialogue between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE. Both Sri Lankan Government and the Norwegian Government did us the courtesy, did India the courtesy of consulting us before they undertook that step. We have shared with both, the Government of Sri Lanka and the Government of Norway, what we think about the process that has been adopted. As at the present moment it is my appreciation that the Norwegian initiative of any kind of facilitation perhaps is not a workable solution under the present circumstances. What happens in the future we can only judge when that happens because it is an evolving situation. Hon. Siva also enquired about Lakshman Kadirgamar's meeting with the Prime Minister. It was a courtesy call and I have already informed you about that. About a military intervention, I have stated about it in clear terms. About humanitarian

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assistance as to what will be and how it will be undertaken, what shape it will take, I really cannot speculate because it is truly an evolving situation. At the present moment, there is neither any movement of people, not even the regular movement, but certainly not as refugees. I do not wish to speculate as to what might happen in Jaffna peninsula even one week down the line.

At the present moment, on the basis of information that we have, there is not any sense of panic and there is not any movement of people. I am simply pointing out that, should an occasion arise, it will be necessary because I can foresee a possibility that this very House will come back to the Government and say that there is a human suffering and you should do something about it. And, it is only to cover that kind of a contingency that I mentioned the possibility of humanitarian assistance. माननीय सतीश प्रधान जी ने ब्रह्मास्त्र के बारे में कहा। यह अपने आप में मात्र एक सैन मॉडल एक्सरसाइज है जिसमें वेस्टर्न कमान्ड ने इस एक्सरसाइज को रखा है। आप इस नाम से कोई गूढ़ अर्थ न निकालें तो अच्छा रहेगा।

Dr. Rajkumar, I am grateful to you that you have lent your party's support to the government's stand and you have also cautioned the government. Mr. Virumbi spoke about the policy; and rightly so. This is a valid-enough policy. This is a sound and cautious policy and the real test would be in its application. I accept that. I mean, in any policy, the statement of policy can be sound enough, but the point is, its testing and its application. In that sense, India's statecraft is once again being tested. I have no doubt in my mind that, with the support of all hon. Members that I have received today, we will find answers that subserve our larger purpose, which is of maintaining the integrity of Sri Lanka, in which all the people of Sri Lanka are able to meet their aspirations. Once again, I am grateful to all the hon. Members for their support. Thank you.

SHRI S. VIDUTHALAI VIRUMBI (Tamil Nadu): Sir, Mr. Siva raised a point and that point has not been replied to. He asked about ammunition. He wanted to know whether we are supplying ammunition to Sri Lanka.

SHRI JASWANT SINGH: I might have overlooked the point. We are not supplying any ammunition to Sri Lanka.

SHRI C.P. THIRUNAVUKKARASU (Pondicherry) : Sir, it has appeared in a section of the press that ammunition would be supplied, if asked for. It was reported in one of the national newspapers. We would like to know from the Minister whether there is any such intention before the Government.

DR. ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR : Sir, it was reported by one of the national newspapers.

SHRI JAWANT SINGH: I will answer that. You will appreciate, Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, and I appeal to all hon. Members; there is a possibility that the press does not have all correct reports.

DR. ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR: We are anxious to know about the genuineness of report since we have read that report.

SHRI JASWANT SINGH: To suggest that we supply ammunition would really be stretching the point. Really, there is no such thing.

DISCUSSION ON THE WORKING OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE

SHRI KAPIL SIBAL (Bihar) : Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I consider it a privilege to initiate the discussion on the working of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I do believe that the health of a nation depends on the physical and mental well-being of its citizens. This is a bipartisan issue and I do think that the Government and all the political parties would sit together and first of all analyse the problems facing the country in this regard and the possible solution with respect thereto.

It was the dream of our founding fathers, and that dream was expressed in various articles of the Directive Principles of State Policy - that the State would be obliged to take care of the health and well-being of its citizens. I, particularly, draw the attention of this House to article 41 of the Constitution which talks about public assistance in cases of old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want. I also draw the attention of this House to article 42 which talks about the State making provisions for maternity leave; to article 45 which talks about compulsory education for all children until they attain 14 years of age; to Article 46 which talks about promoting, with special care, the educational