

MR. CHAIRMAN: I am considering it. Now, Mr. Nilotpal Basu.

Matter Raised with Permission - Appointment of Shri Arun Singh as advisor and Consultant in the Ministry of Defence

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU (West Bengal): Sir, the problem here is that even after issues are raised in the House or in the media, the Government does not find an appropriate time to come and take the House into confidence, when the Parliament session is going on. The issue that I am going to raise - It is good that the hon. Leader of the House is also present in the House - is that there has been a very disturbing report published in the Press that Mr. Arun Singh, who was appointed as the Advisor to the Defence Minister, has been taking meetings with senior Defence Service officials. So far as the Press reports are concerned, we are not aware whether he has taken any Oath of Secrecy of Office. He is not, by any chance, accountable to the Parliament. I do not know to whom is he accountable. But, the report is that he is proceeding with the issue of restructuring of the Defence Services.

Sir, we know the record of this Government on the restructuring of the Defence Services. In 1999, after that unseemly controversy regarding Admiral Bhagwat, the then and now erstwhile Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, had announced publicly that within one month they will restructure the Defence Services. That period was over by 31st January, 2000. Now, again we are hearing about the restructuring of the Defence Services. This gentleman, Mr. Arun Singh, as reported in the Press, is taking meetings and is giving verbal orders. The Officers are obviously, as alleged, very upset about the whole thing.

Now, this report has been published last week. This is a serious matter. There is no clarification from the Government. On the earlier issue also, the same thing happened. On the 10th, the issue was raised, the Finance Minister says, ...*(Interruptions)*... Since the issue was raised in the House, it is the property of the House. Each one of us has the right to know about it. On the 10th, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. Gangwar, had promised in this House that he would get back to us. But nothing happened.

If somebody is moving a privilege motion, the Government gets upset. The Minister is, particularly, upset over somebody getting media attention. I do not know why they are sensitive about this. So, we want a clarification on the defence matter in the House. It is too sensitive a matter to be left at that. We want a clarification from the Government.

(21 August, 2001)

RAJYA SABHA

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am utilising this opportunity to make clear what, I think, is a sensitive issue. A number of issues towards the later part of the hon. Member's intervention have been raised. Of course, he reverted when you said, "The matter was closed." On that, I will not make any comment.

Firstly, on the principle of the Executive having an authority to appoint Consultants, let me be very clear. The hon. Member, in the Opposition, who held a very high position of office knows very well that the Executive has the authority, all Government Ministries have the authority to appoint Consultants. The limitation in regard to the Consultants is, Sir, "The number of those retired officials shall not be more than two."

On the specific aspect of a particular gentleman that has been referred to, a number of averments has been made. My first point is on a suggestion made by an hon. Member that the Government must react to every item that appears in the media. I am sure, he himself realises that it is not a practical move. The Government will react, when it thinks it is necessary to react. It will react in time.

I also wish to state here, Sir, I was informed by my hon. colleague, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, that the hon. Member, Pranabbabu and some other distinguished Members in the Opposition wanted a fuller discussion on the report that was prepared by the Group of Ministers on the re-organisation—not simply of the Ministry of Defence—of the entire security structure of the country. That report has been made public. It has been placed in the Parliamentary Library. It has been discussed. I had welcomed that opportunity. I also said, "yes; should the House desire a fuller discussion on the total aspect of the reform of the security apparatus of the country which, after all, the Group of Ministers covered, we would welcome that." It covered internal security, border management, intelligence. It also, of course, covered Defence. We would welcome that and that would provide me an opportunity to address myself to certain averments that the hon. Member had made about restructuring of Defence forces, which had been stated by my distinguished colleague and friend, Mr. Fernandes, that we will do within one month. The timeframe of one month was overtaken by the establishment, appointment of the Group of Ministers, and the restructuring is now in progress, in accordance with the recommendations of the Group of Ministers. And those recommendations are public now. There is one principle involved here which is, referring to such individuals

who are not Members of the House, and referring to them. Yes, Sir, I wish to place it on record, and I want to go back to establish, how, during the Kargil Conflict, Shri Arun Singh, on his own, got in touch with me and said, "The country today faces a challenge. I volunteer myself to work with you in any capacity, in any position, without pay, if necessary, with no rank, no status, nothing, because I believe that I can contribute something to this particular period of trial that the country is facing." I greatly lauded his public spiritedness. You know very well, Sir—I don't wish to go into the background of it—that Shri Arun Singh has withdrawn totally from public life. He has withdrawn totally. I think that was a demonstration of great public spiritedness. I welcomed him. I then sought official permission to have him appointed as a Consultant for a very short period. Soon after the end of Conflict over Kargil, he resigned; he went back.

Thereafter, Sir, followed the K. Subrahmanyam Report which looked into the total management of the Kargil Conflict. Following upon the Subrahmanyam Report, certain recommendations came to the fore, and it was decided, the Prime Minister decided, that a Group of Ministers should go into those recommendations and deal with the whole situation. The Group of Ministers was chaired by my distinguished colleague and senior, Lalji Advani, and he and the rest of us decided that there were four specific areas which we had to deal with—Border Management, Internal Security, Intelligence, and also Defence; therefore, we should have four task forces. Those Task Forces were entrusted to the chairmanship. Intelligence was entrusted to a very distinguished Indian citizen who is currently the Governor of Jammu & Kashmir. Thereafter, Border Management was entrusted to yet another retired, distinguished civil servant—I don't want to take the name because that is all known. Similarly, for Internal Security; and for Defence, it was felt that the experience and the ability, demonstrated ability Mr. Arun Singh has displayed, and commitment to Defence, required that the Task Force on Defence be headed by him. The Government requested him, Mr. Advani requested him; he very kindly agreed to do so.

Thereafter, Sir, came the question of implementation of the recommendations of the Group of Ministers. The Cabinet had met, taken a decision, and, for implementation, I as Defence Minister then again sought permission because it would facilitate implementation of whatever we have to do in the Ministry of Defence if the person who was entrusted with preparing recommendations to the Group of Ministers on Defence was also there because he knew the whole discussion. Sir, this is the broad background.

And about the Official Secrets Act, I want to make it very clear, categorically, that during 1999, when he volunteered mandatorily, he volunteered himself that he would go through an Intelligence scrutiny, plus, he would subscribe to the Official Secrets Act, formally. And the Intelligence scrutiny was carried out, though not required. I do not have to remind the hon. Members that this very Mr. Arun Singh has been a very distinguished Minister of State for Defence previously. I have had occasion to comment which comment, then, drew some ire. I was Mr. Arun Singh's political opponent. I don't remember whether Pranab Babu was a Member of this House or not. I had formally said in this House, "Mr. Arun Singh, today, is possibly the best Minister of State for Defence that the country has ever had". I don't want to go into the rest of that. He then withdrew. For the implementation, before his reappointment as a consultant and Special Adviser on Defence, he again volunteered. He said, "I am again ready to go through the intelligence scrutiny", and he again subscribed to the Official Secrets Act, formally and on paper. I am ready to discuss the totality of the whole question of restructuring, not simply of the Ministry of Defence, but, indeed, of the implementation of the recommendations of the Group of Ministers. It is, of course, for you, Sir, and for my distinguished colleagues in the Opposition, to determine when they wish to do so. I have no difficulty in discussing it. Therefore, I don't want to go into certain other averments that the distinguished hon. Member has raised. The opportunity is there. But so far as he is concerned, he is there as my Special Adviser. He is not there on a permanent basis. He has, indeed, often said, "I have done my job. I want to do it completely and I wish to do it". I do make it quite clear. Indeed, I requested Mr. George Verghese because the public information structure of the Ministry of Defence was not satisfactory. My distinguished predecessor had requested and appointed the former journalist to look into how it can be improved. Let me share with the hon. Members that the Ministry of Defence has 24 Public Information Offices spread all over the country. I am sure that you recognise that those officers are not doing the job, which I say myself, that they ought to do. It is my job, it is my duty, to do whatever I can, on the basis of the recommendations of the Group of Ministers, to attend to restructuring of the Defence Ministry. I am not doing it arbitrarily, and part of restructuring of the Ministry of Defence requires the information system, not merely the management of the information as such, but conveying what the Ministry of Defence is doing in the proper light, to put it across properly, and, then, I did request Shri George Verghese to help me. Again, it is a known fact that Shri George

Verghese has political persuasions which are totally opposed to the political party that I belong to. He made it very clear. He said, "You know, Mr. Jaswant, that your political philosophy and mine do not match". I said, "Yes, I agree. But here we have a task". He was, after all, a Member of the Subrahmanyam Committee which went into the whole Kargil issue. He is a very distinguished journalist. He has not taken up this job because he needs a job. At the age of 60, he withdrew from an editorship. I don't have to remind my distinguished friends from the Opposition benches that he was late Indira Gandhi's Press Adviser when she was the Prime Minister. I chose and I requested Shri George Verghese because I thought that in this national task he would be able to help me and what I do believe is not a question of politics of this variety or that variety. He has done an outstanding work. His report is about to be completed. Indeed, outstanding work has been done by Arun Singh. He was the Minister of State for Defence earlier. When Mr. V.P. Singh was the Prime Minister, he was called back and requested to go into the defence expenditure, and he went into all that. In the case of Kargil, he volunteered to come back. When it came to the Group of Ministers, he was again requested to head the Defence Task Force. I have certainly asked him to help me in the implementation. It is not infinite. It is limited by time. He is not a public figure. He has withdrawn from public life. He has done an outstanding work. He has helped me immensely. He has subscribed impeccably to every requirement of law when it comes to Official Secrets Act or anything else. There is nothing that he does which is not directed by the Defence Minister to help him. I do urge the hon. Members that in your persuasion to find fault with the Government, you always find fault. When you find fault, it is my duty to come forward and respond to you. But there are certain individuals who are really doing these things out of total commitment to public service. They do not seek public office. They do not seek any public limelight. It is my urge that, at least, in this regard please let us have forbearance. So far as the larger question of discussing the restructuring of defence and implementation of the recommendations of the Group of Ministers which covers internal security, border management, Intelligence and Defence, is concerned, whenever you so determine or whenever the Business Advisory Committee and the Opposition so require, I am ready to discuss the totality of that. This matter, I urge you, Sir, may please now be treated as closed.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: We accept the Government's offer to discuss the whole thing. We will be discussing it with you. But all this was

not relevant. Only the fact that he has given a written submission that he is subscribing to the Official Secrets Act was enough...

MR. CHAIRMAN: We will now take up Special Mentions.
Shri Eduardo Faleiro.

SPECIAL MENTIONS

Advertisement by UGC regarding teachers for spoken Sanskrit.

SHRI EDUARDO FALEIRO (Goa): Sir, the University Grants Commission has issued an advertisement in the Employment News dated 11-17 August, 2001 inviting applications for teachers for Spoken Sanskrit Courses. Most of the Indian universities and many affiliated colleges have already Sanskrit Departments and teachers. There appears to be no need to introduce another parallel set of teachers especially in the present situation of resource crunch. What is even more alarming is UGC's attempt, through a process that lacks transparency, to invite applications directly bypassing the university and college authorities that have been functioning as recruitment bodies. This is unprecedented and is beyond the purview of a body that is primarily meant to act as a Grants Commission for universities rather than as a recruiting agency. These actions of the UGC have long-term implications and, therefore, the Government should immediately direct the UGC to withdraw the aforesaid advertisement.

SHRIMATI SARLA MAHESHWARI (West Bengal): Sir, I associate myself with this issue.

SHRIMATI CHANDRA KALA PANDEY (West Bengal): Sir, I associate myself with this issue.

Mental Asylums

SHRI P.G. NARAYANAN (Tamil Nadu): Sir, the recent fire in Erwadi has thrown open the debate on who will care for people with psychiatric disability. There are nearly 25 million people in India who are in need of mental health services. The sad reality is that this may not be true in the case of most of the people with psychiatric disability. It is a contemporary international psychiatric practice that through good rehabilitation services a large number of people who thus suffer can be reintegrated into the mainstream. However, in India there are only 20 centres which provide rehabilitation services. The conditions in majority of