

Title : Statement regarding killing of official of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) in Afghanistan.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

(i) Killing of official of the Border Roads Organisation in Afghanistan

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THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): Sir, with a heavy heart, I rise to speak on the tragic killing of an official of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), Shri Maniappan Raman Kutty, who was working in Afghanistan on the Zaranj-Delaram road project as a driver. The Border Roads Organisation is engaged in building a 218 kilometres road in Afghanistan. This road is vital for its development and for the well being of the Afghan people. It is inconceivable that anybody should be opposed to it and threaten those working on it. The Government is deeply shocked and grieved by the death of Shri M.R. Kutty who was killed in harness in Afghanistan. He was a sincere and dedicated worker of the BRO.

Shri Maniappan Raman Kutty was abducted on 19th November, 2005 along with three Afghan nationals. Upon receiving this news, the Indian Embassy in Kabul immediately established contact with Afghan authorities and sought their help in locating the whereabouts of the hostages and also to seek their safe and secure release. The next day on 20th November 2005, the Taliban claimed responsibility for the abduction and demanded the withdrawal of the BRO from Afghanistan within 48 hours, failing which the Indian hostage would be killed.

This was done in a telephone call to a news agency and no effort was made by the abductors to contact either the Embassy or the BRO. The Afghan Government too was unable to establish contact with them.

I would like to assure this House that the Government of India made every effort possible to seek the safe release of Shri Maniappan Raman Kutty in cooperation with the Afghan authorities. President Karzai himself took charge of

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these efforts by convening a special Cabinet Meeting and setting up a Task Force to deal with the crisis.

In Delhi, hon. Prime Minister personally monitored developments in this regard. Upon his instructions, a group comprising officials from the Ministries of Home, External Affairs, Defence and security agencies was set up under the Cabinet Secretary to monitor developments on a regular basis. The family of Shri Maniappan Raman Kutty was also contacted for extending support and solace to them in their hour of need.

Late in the evening on 22nd November 2005, some news agencies reported that they had received calls from people claiming to represent the Taliban stating that they had killed the Indian hostage. The news was confirmed the next day when Shri Maniappan Raman Kutty's body was found near Delaram. Arrangements to send his mortal remains to his hometown for the last rites have been made by the Government.

The Taliban and its backers bear the responsibility for the consequences of this outrageous act. The perpetrators of this heinous crime must be brought to justice swiftly.

The Government remains firmly committed to extending support and assistance to Afghanistan in its quest for economic development and building a stable and prosperous country. We are in touch with Afghan authorities to ensure the safety of all Indians in Afghanistan. We have also reviewed the security arrangements with concerned Ministries and agencies. A team led by DG BRO has already left for Afghanistan to review security arrangements of our people.

We strongly condemn this inhuman and barbaric act against an innocent person. Shri Maniappan Raman Kutty was working on an India-Afghan Friendship project with utmost devotion. His untimely death is a loss to the Border Roads Organisation and to the country. We value the ultimate sacrifice he has made to the cause of India-Afghan Friendship. Our heartfelt condolences go to the bereaved family members. We assure them that we will ensure their livelihood and security. The family will receive a total of about Rs.9 lakh as compensation and benefits with free education to the secondary level for Shri Maniappan Raman Kutty's two children, and liberalised family pension for Mrs. P.Bindu widow of the deceased in addition.

I wish to assure the House once again that we attach the utmost importance to the safety and security of all our citizens and will not hesitate in taking whatever measures are necessary in order to ensure this.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN (CHIRAYINKIL): Sir, I have given a notice.

MR. SPEAKER: No questions are permitted. But the Leader of the Opposition wants to say something.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : Sir, I have given notice.

MR. SPEAKER: Please. Rules are very strict. Shri Acharia, please control him.

श्री मोहन सिंह (देवरिया) : इस विषय पर चर्चा होनी चाहिए।

अध्यक्ष महोदय : कौन कह रहा है कि चर्चा नहीं होगी। ऐसे बैठे रहने से चर्चा नहीं होती है, इसके लिए नोटिस देना होता है।

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : I have my own feelings.

SHRI L.K. ADVANI (GANDHINAGAR): Mr. Speaker, Sir, I associate myself with the Leader of the House in condemning this inhuman and barbaric act of the Taliban. I have seen a report this morning in the newspapers about a report attributed to the National Security Advisor saying that Pakistan is involved in this dastardly act. It is a very serious matter, if it is so. I have no basis to say this except that particular press report. For a long time we have been trying to improve our relations with Pakistan, ever since they agreed to issue a joint statement with former Prime Minister Vajpayee that they will not allow any kind of terrorism to be operated from Pakistani soil against India. This act against the Border Roads Organisation in Afghanistan is a serious matter. It is against India. Further more it is an attempt to break the friendship between India and Afghanistan. I fully endorse all the other points made in the statement except to say that this House must be taken into confidence as to whether there is any substance in the statement attributed to the National Security Advisor.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, Shri Radhakrishnan! What do you want to do? Do you want to sympathise with the family?

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : I have given notice. The security of the life of persons who are working abroad including Malayalees is now in danger.

MR. SPEAKER: Of all Indians.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : Yes, all Indians including Malayalees.

MR. SPEAKER: Malayalees are also Indians.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : Yes. I would like to draw the attention of the Government in a very specific manner. The Government of India has already dealt with such matters and we all know that. Even in a case where the Supreme Court of Pakistan had sentenced a person to death, the Government was prepared to converse with the Pakistan Government. ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER: This is not a debate. What are you doing, I do not understand!

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : Here also the National Security Advisor had come out with a statement that Pakistan had the knowledge about this thing. If that is the case, the Prime minister ought to have intervened in the matter and asked the Pakistan President in order to save the life of the innocent Malayalee.

MR. SPEAKER: He had done it.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : Not only that. We have previous instances wherein we have even surrendered captors from the jail and produced them before the Taliban.

MR. SPEAKER: Merely your raising of voice does not help.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : It was quite unwise on the part of the Central Government to ask the Afghan Government to intervene and save Shri Kuttu. How can they do that? They are fighting with the Afghan Government.

MR. SPEAKER: I cannot hear anything.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : The course ought to have been to intervene in a very specific manner. We are poor Malayalees. Nobody is hearing our grievances. I have gone to his village accompanying the dead body. I know the feelings of the people assembled there.

MR. SPEAKER: It was very nice of you to have done so. I appreciate your concern.

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : I accompanied the dead body to his home village. I saw thousands of people attending the funeral there. All of them had a feeling that we are citizens of India and the Government should take proper steps ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER: Now, take your seat.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: I am on my legs. Please sit down. This is not a matter of Kerala alone. This is a matter of the country.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : It was very callously dealt with. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Please do not force me to take unpleasant action. These are not empty threats. Please take your seat, Mr. George.

Because of the great importance and seriousness of the matter, on the very first day I had mentioned it from the Chair showing the country's concern. If you do not think that the Chair represents the House, then I do not think you need to have a Chair at all. In that case, do not have a Speaker in the House! If you treat the entire House according to your own sweet will, how will this House run?

I have allowed the matter to be raised again. The Minister has made a statement. The Leader of the Opposition has made some observations. Instead of making an observation, you are going on about your accompanying the dead body and seeing the relatives. Do not misuse the facility given to you.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, I would just like to clarify one point raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I have inquired about this from the National Security Advisor this morning. He is not here, he is in Kerala. What he told me was that he had been misquoted. He did not say that Pakistan was responsible for it. In the course of his conversation with the press somebody asked him and he narrated the past. He said that in the past Pakistan had contact with Taliban and he mentioned that incident. Now, when we tried to have contact with the Pakistani authorities in order to rescue the person concerned to see whether they can help us, they stated that they were sorry. They stated that at some point of time they had contact with the Taliban but they had ceased any contact with Talibans now, and therefore, they would not be able to give any help to us to rescue that person. So, he has not stated that Pakistan is responsible for that.

I thought I should correct the position.

12.30 hrs.