

Title : Reported illegal custody of an Indian by American Forces in Iraq.

SHRI SURESH KURUP : I would like to bring to the notice of the Government the stark plight of Shri Sijo Jose, who is now in the custody of the American forces in Iraq. It is reported that for the last four months, he is in their custody. He was working in a catering firm, which supplies food to the American military bases in Iraq. So, I am informed that he was taken into custody for taking photographs of some prohibited places or such other things. Anyway, in the last four months, his relatives have been trying to contact him, trying to get information about him. I, myself, have written to the Minister of State for External Affairs regarding his plight but I am yet to get the reply. My request is that the Government of India and the Ministry of External Affairs should urgently intervene and take steps to release him from their custody.

SHRI K. FRANCIS GEORGE : I would like to associate myself with the issue raised by the hon. Member.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: All right.

SHRI P.C. THOMAS : My notice is also there on the same issue. I would like to add just one thing. The family members of Shri Sijo Jose are in great distress after hearing about the issue in Afghanistan where a person of BRO has been beheaded. For four months nothing has been heard of this particular person. He had gone there for job. He is from a very poor family. I would like to say that the Ministry of External Affairs has not been able to find out as to what exactly has happened. It is known that this person who has gone through an agent has actually gone to Kuwait but now the family members are thinking as to whether he was in Kuwait. Family members are getting money orders also but he was getting information somewhere in the Gulf. But for the last four months nothing has been heard of. They are in real distress and the family members. The family members have approached us. The Chief Minister of Kerala has approached the Government of India. Nothing has been informed in this regard. I hope the Ministry of External Affairs would go into the matter and find out as to what exactly has happened. Shri Sijo Jose may be in the custody. He cannot say as to what is happening. There is nobody to defend him. He did not know as to what is his offence. Actually, he has committed no offence and this is what we are thinking.

I urge upon the Prime Minister, who is in-charge of the External Affairs portfolio also, in this regard. I had also written to him. But no reply has been received on this aspect. There must be some urgent response from the Government. I would urge upon the hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs to inform this matter to the Minister of External Affairs as well as the hon. Prime Minister as this is a very serious issue and we do not want to hear a bad news which we had heard recently. I hope the hon. Minister is going to respond.

SHRI BIJOY HANDIQUE: Hon. Minister of State for External Affairs is already on the job. I shall again be in touch with him to find out whether there is any information. If there is any information, I will make it available to the House.

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