

12:04 hrs.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER
NEWS ITEM, 'AIR-STRIKE
DELAY COST LIVES : KARGIL REPORT'

Title: Statement regarding news item "Air-strike delay cost lives: Kargil Report"- Laid.

MR. SPEAKER: Now, the House will take up statement to be made by Shri Pranab Mukherjee.

...(Interruptions)

प्रो. विजय कुमार मल्होत्रा (दक्षिण दिल्ली) : अध्यक्ष महोदय, दागी मंत्रियों का जो मामला है, पहले वह तय होना चाहिए। (व्यवधान) जब तक उनको हटाया नहीं जाएगा, तब तक कोई स्टेटमेंट वगैरह नहीं होगा। (व्यवधान)

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): Mr. Speaker, Sir, my attention has been drawn to the article published in the *Hindustan Times* ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Minister, you can lay the statement. The statement will be treated as laid.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, my attention has been drawn to the article published in the *Hindustan Times* which suggests that for lack of decisive action by the then political leadership there was a loss of 474 men to the Indian Army and this also allowed Pakistan to wrest the initial advantage. The facts of the case are detailed below.

On 3rd May, 1999 the first information about an intrusion having taken place in Kargil came to the knowledge of the army Authorities. Between 25th May, 1999 and 26th July, 1999 the CCS was briefed on the various developments that were taking place. On the 26th of July, 1999 the Kargil operations were formally declared as over.

As with every war, so too with Kargil, the Indian Army in September, 2000 prepared a 6 volume classified, report to record the events and analyse the success and failures, shortcomings and strengths of the warlike situation in Kargil. The preparation of an abridged version of this report was taken up in July, 2003 and completed in January, 2004. This report is prepared for the purposes of campaign study in promotion examinations. As these are documents prepared for internal use for training purposes the Ministry of Defence has not been involved in any way with the preparation of these reports.

This 'in-house' report mentions the fact that despite Army asking for the employment of air power from 8th May, 1999 the CCS gave approval for the same on the 25th May, 1999. During this period the Chief of Air Staff was taking the view that air power at those heights could not be properly utilised as helicopters would be extremely vulnerable & there would be danger of escalation of the conflict. His view was that before committing air power political clearance should be obtained which was finally done on 25th May, 1999.

Hon. Members are aware of the circumstances in which the Kargil Review Committee, also popularly known as the Subramaniam Committee, was constituted by the then Government on 29th July 1999. A copy of the Kargil Report is already available with the hon. Members. The then Government had constituted a Group of Ministers to examine the recommendations of the Committee as well as four other task forces that were set up to examine in-depth the recommendations of the Subramaniam Committee. The recommendations of the Group of Ministers were approved by the Cabinet Committee on Security in May 2001 and most of the measures have already been implemented by the previous Government.

One of the questions raised in the *Hindustan Times* article is that the casualties of 474 could have been avoided if air power had been used from the beginning. I wish there had been no casualties at all. However, I have been told that between 8th May, 1999 and 25th May, 1999 the number of casualties were 35. From 26th May, 1999 to the end of the Kargil operation on 26th July, 1999 the number of casualties was 439 (including six Air Force officers). The total casualties are thus 474. It would be seen that the time taken for giving clearance to deploy air power was not the reason for higher casualties. After all, it was a difficult war fought from a position of disadvantage. The members of our Armed Forces demonstrated indomitable courage, fighting abilities, evicted the enemy and won the war.

Regarding the use of air power the Army had on 8th May, 1999 projected the requirement of attack helicopters for use against the enemy and also helicopters for transport of troops. This was considered between 12th May, 1999 and 17th May, 1999 and it was decided not to use this option as it may lead to escalation.

On 25th May, 1999 after a fuller and in-depth appreciation of the emerging situation the CCS took the decision to deploy the Indian Air Force. Finally on 25th May, 1999 the CCS gave the go ahead for use of air power.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. Members, we shall now take up the 'Zero Hour'.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Do you not want 'Zero Hour'?

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: The House stands adjourned till Two o'clock.

12:05 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Fourteen of the Clock.
