

STATEMENT RE : SITUATION IN
SRI LANKA

[English]

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI KHURSHEED ALAM KHAN) : When I last apprised the House on the situation in Sri Lanka I had assured Hon'ble Members that the Government would take the House into confidence as and when there are fresh developments to report. On 25th April, PM in his statement in the House informed the House that the Government was following developments in Sri Lanka and their repercussions on India with concern and that Government have been in continuous touch with the Sri Lankan Government. A Special Advisory Group has since been set up. The Group will expeditiously examine and advise on the serious question of the large scale influx of refugees into India and also the problems of insecurity faced by our fishermen in the Palk Strait.

The situation in Sri Lanka continues to be tense. Violence which had somewhat slackened is again endemic. There have been disturbing reports of large-scale violence in the Eastern province involving Muslims and Tamils. This is a sad and serious development which will further aggravate an already complex situation. The sense of insecurity and uncertainty seems to have further heightened.

As Government have said in the House on several occasions we are deeply affected by the repercussions of the unfortunate ethnic problem in Sri Lanka. We have had to maintain a large and increasing number of refugees from Sri Lanka since July 1983; the exodus is continuing and the figure has now gone up to almost a lakh. While we have done whatever is possible to provide succour to the hapless refugees, the influx imposes heavy social and economic strains on us. The livelihood of our fishermen has been affected, they have been harassed and attacked. We have had to strengthen our surveillance and take other protective measures.

In this complex and grave situation

our primary objective is to ensure that Indian citizens are not under threat and our interests are protected. Simultaneously, we want to see a return to normalcy and stability in Sri Lanka which would permit the refugees to return in safety and dignity. Equally, we hope that a peaceful and negotiated settlement will be found for the problems faced by the Tamils in Sri Lanka without any further delay. We have reiterated that the Sri Lankan Government cannot find a solution to this problem through military means. A negotiated political settlement acceptable to all concerned will have to be found by the Sri Lankan Government.

It is essential that a political dialogue with all concerned is resumed early in Sri Lanka. For this an appropriate atmosphere needs to be created. The present disturbed state in Sri Lanka does not appear conducive to any meaningful efforts for negotiations. We hope that all efforts will be made to defuse the situation and tension. The initiative rests with the Sri Lanka Government and I sincerely hope that they will show the necessary political will and vision in this direction,

We would like to reaffirm our stand that a negotiated [settlement acceptable to all concerned and within the framework of Sri Lanka's sovereignty, integrity and unity can provide the answer to the serious ethnic problem that has engulfed the country. I would like to once again make it clear that we do not believe in separatism. At the same time we do not believe that repressive measures can help in finding a solution to the ethnic issue in Sri Lanka.

We have been in constant touch with the Sri Lanka Government with a view to assisting them in finding a political solution. This has been through both diplomatic channels and visits by special envoys. In our recent exchanges which were free and frank, we have been given to understand that President Jayewardene will take some positive measures towards a political solution. We hope these measures will be implemented without any delay so that a suitable atmosphere for negotiation amongst all concerned can be created.