

Seventeenth Loksabha

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Title: Request for the immediate and unconditional release of Fahad Shah, Sajad Gul and Siddique Kappan in the interest of preserving the freedom of press in our country.

DR. SHASHI THAROOR (THIRUVANANTHAPURAM): Mr. Chairman, I wish to draw the attention of the hon. Minister of Home Affairs towards the recent arrests of Kashmiri journalists, Fahad Shah on charges of sedition and Sajad Gul under the Public Safety Act, who have been accused of promoting terrorism, inciting violence and, as the current dispensation likes to call it, anti nationalism behaviour. The prolonged detention in UP of Siddique Kappan under UAPA already remains to be a blot on our conscience. Several organisations including the Editors Guild of India and Reporters Without Borders have condemned these arrests and identified it as part of a larger pattern of deteriorating press freedom in our country. India has been ranked 142nd in the World Press Freedom Index indicating a worrying trend. Yet another report has named India among the five most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, and among the top 10 countries, accounting for three-quarters of fatalities in the last five years. Statistics also reveal the disturbing killings of 18 journalists since 2014, and detention of seven journalists in custody in connection with their work as of 2021.

Sir, journalists in Kashmir or UP or anywhere in India deserve to be able to do their jobs safely without fear of arrest or harassment. The Supreme Court too has recognised the importance of dissent in a vibrant democracy stating that a free and independent press is a vital pillar of democracy which supports an informed and democratically-engaged

citizenry, and allows those in power to be held accountable more meaningfully.

I, therefore, urge the hon. Minister to facilitate the immediate and unconditional release of Fahad Shah, Sajad Gul, and Siddique Kappan in the interest of preserving the freedom of press in our country. Thank you. ... (*Interruptions*)

HON. CHAIRPERSON: Send a slip to the Table.

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माननीय सभापति : नहीं, मैं आपको बाद में नम्बर देता हूं, मैं आपको बाद में बुलाता हूं । आप पहले बैठिए तो सही ।