

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
DEFENCE
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:3894
ANSWERED ON:17.08.2000
INDIAN PEACE KEEPERS IN SIERRA LEONE
JITENDRA PRASADA

Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the rebel forces in Sierra Leone took about 255 U.N. peace keepers, including 245 Indian soldiers, captive and there was little sympathy from the world community and the Indian Government too was down playing the seriousness of the situation;
- (b) whether the western press has charged that the Indians, Bangladeshis and Nepalese troops were there to make some extra money and implicitly, walked in this adventure; and
- (c) if so, the reaction of the Government thereon?

Answer

MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES)

(a) to (c): A statement is attached.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a) TO (c) OF LOK SABHA UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 3894 FC
17.8.2000

Twenty one personnel including two officers of the Indian battalion who were taken hostage by the Revolutionary United Force (RUF) viz. the rebel forces in Sierra Leone in the first week of May, 2000 were released on 29th June 2000 in Liberia. These personnel have since returned to Freetown (Sierra Leone) and are in good health. The release of the hostages came about in a peaceful manner following diplomatic initiatives by India and the U.N. with the neighbouring African countries.

An Indian Infantry Battalion Group was deployed in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone as part of the UNAMSIL Mission. Two companies of this battalion composed of 221 personnel and 11 Military Observers of different nationalities (including one Indian) were located at Kailahun, approximately 70 kms. away from the Battalion Headquarters at Daru. A situation of stand off between the RUF and the Indian troops had been continuing since 03 May 2000, and from that date the movement of the Indian troops were not being permitted. When all diplomatic efforts made at the highest level, both at the UN and national level to end the impasse at Kailahun failed, the UN Secretary General authorised the exercise of Military option to extricate the besieged UN peacekeepers. As a result of an operation which was successfully launched by UNAMSIL, supported by UK forces, all the UN peacekeepers and Military Observers were extricated from Kailahun on 16th July 2000 and have reached Daru and Freetown.

All throughout the hostage crisis and the stand off at Kailahun, Government had been putting extensive diplomatic pressure on the UN, the USA and key African countries to bear upon the RUF for an early and peaceful settlement of the situation, and there was all round sympathy and cooperation for India on the issue from the world community. Government had also deputed a high level composite team from the Ministries of Defence and External Affairs and the Service Hqrs to Sierra Leone, UK and the USA to negotiate an early settlement of the hostage crisis.

Government is committed to the peace keeping activities of the UN, particularly in Africa, and cannot pay heed to malignant reports in the western press about peace keepers from the Indian sub continent.