

12.06 Hrs.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER HIJACKING OF INDIAN AIRLINES

AIRCRAFT IC-814*

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): Sir, on behalf of Shri Jaswant Singh, I take this opportunity to place before the House all relevant aspects of the hijacking incident of 24 December, 1999.

Indian Airlines Flight IC-814, Kathmandu-Delhi, of December 24th, was hijacked at around 1653 hours Indian Standard Time. ...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA (GUNA): Sir, this is a major issue. Shri Jaswant Singh must have the courtesy of coming here and making the statement himself....*(Interruptions)*

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN): He is the Leader of the other House. He has got urgent business there. ...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : Let him do it tomorrow, Sir! *(Interruptions)*

SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA: Sir, everyday Shri Jaswant Singh has been coming to the House for making the statement...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Jaswant Singh came to the House a number of times to make the statement.

...*(Interruptions)*

*Also placed in Library, See No. LT- 1503/2000)

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : Sir, it is not showing courtesy to the House...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA: Sir, for several days, Shri Jaswant Singh has been coming to the House to make the statement and all the times they have been forcing the House to adjourn....*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Madhavrao Scindia, he is making the statement because it is already listed in the Business.

...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : Please do it tomorrow, Sir...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Rajesh Pilot, only after laying the papers, the Zero Hour can start. Now he is making the statement. It is already listed in the Business.

...*(Interruptions)*

श्री मुलायम सिंह यादव (सम्भल) : अध्यक्ष महोदय, आपने कहा था कि क्वेश्चन ऑवर के बाद आप हमें समय देंगे।...*(व्यवधान)* अब हमें समय नहीं दिया जा रहा है।...*(व्यवधान)* हमारी तरफ देखिए।

MR. SPEAKER: He is making the statement. Please cooperate.

...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER: It is an important statement, Shri Mulayam Singh Yadav. The House wants to know the details.

...*(Interruptions)*

श्री मुलायम सिंह यादव : यह अन्याय हो रहा है।...*(व्यवधान)*

अध्यक्ष महोदय : यह अन्याय नहीं हो रहा है। बिजनेस चल रहा है।

...*(व्यवधान)*

श्री मुलायम सिंह यादव : अध्यक्ष महोदय, आप हमारे जैसे को मजबूर कर रहे हैं।...*(व्यवधान)* हम नहीं चाहते हैं। नहीं, नहीं, यह गलत बात है।...*(व्यवधान)* आप हमारी परवाह नहीं करेंगे तो यह ठीक नहीं है।...*(व्यवधान)* सरकार मनमानी कर रही है लेकिन अगर आप भी मनमानी करेंगे तो ठीक नहीं है।...*(व्यवधान)* हमारा आपसे

अनुरोध है।...(व्यवधान)जब हमें अनुमति दी जाती है और उसके बाद भी हमें बोलने नहीं दिया जाता, यह गलत बात हो रही है।...(व्यवधान)यह क्या बात है ? ...(व्यवधान)

MR.SPEAKER: Nothing should go on record except the Minister's statement.

*(Interruptions)**

1208 बजे

(इस समय श्री रवि प्रकाश वर्मा तथा कुछ अन्य माननीय सदस्य आए और सभा पटल के निकट फर्श पर खड़े हो गए)

MR. SPEAKER: It is Papers laying on the Table. Please understand that.is.

...(Interruptions)

अध्यक्ष महोदय : आप पहले समझ लें कि ज़ीरो ऑवर अभी तक शुरु नहीं हुआ। यह पेपर्स लेड ऑन दि टेबल चल रहा है।

...(व्यवधान)

अध्यक्ष महोदय : आपको प्रोसीजर मालूम नहीं है। वेल में आना आपका काम है। आप पहले प्रोसीजर समझ लें। आप अभी बैठ जाइए। पहले आप प्रोसीजर के बारे में समझ लें।

...(व्यवधान)

अध्यक्ष महोदय : ज़ीरो ऑवर अभी तक शुरु नहीं हुआ है। आप क्या बोल रहे हैं ? यह पेपर्स लेड ऑन द टेबल है। आप क्या बोल रहे हैं ? आप बैठिए।

...(व्यवधान)

MR.SPEAKER: Hon. Members, please go to your seats.

...(Interruptions)

अध्यक्ष महोदय : आप क्या कर रहे हैं ? यह ज़ीरो ऑवर नहीं है। आपको प्रोसीजर मालूम नहीं है।

...(व्यवधान)

अध्यक्ष महोदय : यह प्रोसीजर नहीं है। ज़ीरो ऑवर इसके बाद में होगा। आप बैठ जाइए। आपको मालूम नहीं है। ज़ीरो ऑवर बाद में होगा।

...(व्यवधान)

*Not Recorded.

MR. SPEAKER : Nothing should go on record except the hon. Minister's statement.

*(Interruptions)**

अध्यक्ष महोदय :पहले प्रोसीजर समझ लीजिए, बाद में बात करिए। जीरो आवर अभी तक शुरु नहीं हुआ है।

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : I am appealing to you.

...(Interruptions)

*Not Recorded.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs (Shri Ajit Panja):

I take this opportunity to place before the House all relevant aspects of the hijacking incident of 24 December, 1999.

2. Indian Airlines Flight IC-814, Kathmandu-Delhi, of December 24th, was hijacked at around 1653 hours Indian Standard Time. The air Traffic Control, (ATC), Delhi, received the first information of this hijacking at 1656 hours, when it was also intimated that the hijackers were demanding that the plane to taken to Lahore. Upon refusal of permission to land at Lahore, the plane finally landed at Amritsar at 1900 hours. The hijackers demanded immediate refuelling. The plane was, however, forced [by the hijackers] to take off from Amritsar, without being refuelled, at 1949 hours; this was also without ATC Amritsar's permission. It landed at Lahore at 2007 hours. Permission to land was given only when the pilot informed ATC Lahore that he would be forced to crash-land the aircraft as fuel had got exhausted. The aircraft was refuelled at Lahore. At 2232 hours, it took off for Kabul. Upon being informed, by Kabul, that there were no night landing facilities there, it headed for Dubai, landing at an air force base there at 0132 hrs, on 25 December 1999. Our Ambassador, who had constantly been in touch with UAE authorities, was present alongwith CG, Dubai, though not on the airfield. Following discussions between the UAE authorities and the hijackers, release of 27 passengers, including women and children, was secured here. The dead body of one passenger, Shri Rupin Katyal, who had been stabbed by the hijackers earlier, was also off-loaded here. They were then escorted back to India by the Minister of Civil Aviation in a special flight on 25th December. The aircraft then took off at 0620 hours and landed at Kandahar airport at 0833 hours on 25 December 1999. Thereafter, it stayed at Kandahar until the hijacking was terminated, on the evening of 31 December, 1999. Passengers and crew who had been held hostage for the period reached Delhi that very evening in two special flights. The hijacked aircraft itself was able to return to New Delhi only 1 January 2000, at 1222 hours.
3. On the occurrence of the hijacking institutional mechanisms to deal with the situation were immediately put into action. The Crisis Management Group and the Central Committee met to address the evolving situation. The NSG Task Force was also placed on full alert and readied for employment. The CMG received instructions and directions from the Cabinet and the Cabinet and the Cabinet Committee on Security, which met that very evening, and thereafter regularly till the termination of the hijacking.
4. In handling the situation arising from the hijacking, the Government set for itself clear priorities. These were: (a) the earliest termination of the hijacking; (b) the safe return of the passengers, crew and aircraft; and (c) safeguarding national security. The manner in which the termination of the hijacking was secured met the priorities that the Government had set out.
5. Soon after the aircraft reached Kandahar, an exercise to inform the international community about the incident was launched. Earlier, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan had been contacted for cooperation. Authorities in the UAE, as already informed, had also been asked for assistance in the matter. On 25th December itself, I personally contacted several of my counterparts including those in the neighboring countries, member countries of the UN Security Council and countries with nationals aboard the hijacked aircraft. The Foreign Secretary also spoke to some of his counterparts and heads of diplomatic missions in New Delhi. From all these countries pledges of support and cooperation were received. After the arrival of the hijacked aircraft at Kandahar, upon our suggestion, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Afghanistan and Representatives of countries whose nationals were abroad the aircraft sent special emissaries to Kandahar.
6. International support for India, and condemnation of the hijacking, was thereafter, further elaborated in official statements issued by several foreign Governments. These left no room for doubt that the hijacking of IC-814 represented an unacceptable act of international terrorism and that any action undertaken by the Indian Government would receive full support.
7. As Indian Airlines flight IC-814 had originated in Kathmandu and the plane had landed at Lahore and Dubai before reaching Kandahar, it would be appropriate to make a reference to the approaches of Nepal, Pakistan and the UAE towards this incident. The Government of Nepal, soon after the incident, appointed a committee to investigate the Nepalese end of the hijacking. While the Committee's report has not been made public, action has already been initiated, including a departmental inquiry, against some officials of the Tribhuvan Airport. The Government of Nepal have also conveyed to the Government of India that they are taking all necessary additional measures to enhance security at the Tribhuvan International Airport, on a priority basis.
8. The UAE authorities, after initial reluctance, responded positively to our request about permitting IC-814 to land at an UAE airport. Senior authorities of the UAE were present throughout the period the plane was in the UAE. Their intercession with the hijackers led to the release of 27 passengers and the body of the deceased passenger.
9. The Pakistani authorities allowed the plane to land in Lahore after earlier refusing permission. To my request for assistance, the Honourable Foreign Minister of Pakistan, inter-alia, conveyed that they would act in accordance with law and 'transparently'. To facilitate the rapid move of our High Commissioner from Islamabad to Lahore, upon my request, a helicopter was made available. Before, however, it could take off, the plane was allowed to leave Lahore, at 2232 hrs. At Lahore, upon the suggestion of the Captain, the hijackers offered to offload some women, children and injured persons. ATC Lahore declined. Uptill then, there had occurred no deaths, though who of the passengers had been grievously stabbed. Shri Rupin Katyal succumbed to his injuries en-route Lahore – Dubai.
10. The hijacked Indian Airlines Flight IC-814 reached Kandahar at 0833 hrs. on 25th December. The aircraft thereupon came within the control of the Taliban authorities, whom we do not recognise and with whom we have no official contact. This, however, was not permitted to stand in the way of our dealing with them. Immediate contacts were established on the ATC channel, and between the Indian High Commission in Islamabad and the Taliban Mission in that city.
11. In view of the ideological orientation of the Taliban, their close linkage with Pakistan, their publicly expressed attitude towards Jammu & Kashmir, and their support to fundamentalist organisations, it was essential that an assessment regarding their approach towards the hijacking, the hijackers and the assistance that could be expected of them in its termination be first established. It was important that there be no misjudgment in this regard, at the critical juncture.
12. After assessment, and as a first step, an official from our High Commission in Islamabad was sent to Kandahar on the morning of December 27. Strengthened by his report from the spot, a team of officials, including doctors and a relief crew, reached Kandahar, from Delhi on 27th evening itself. Concerned officials in this group met with Representatives of the countries present in Kandahar, UN officials, as also Taliban authorities, including Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil. Our team update itself, in detail, on the condition of the aircraft, the state of health of the passengers, as also details of what had transpired

between the Taliban and the hijackers uptill then.

13. Direct discussions between the hijackers and our officials took place between the evening of 27 December and the 31st. The hijackers initially demanded the release of Masood Azhar in return for 10 Indians, 5 foreigners and some other passengers of their choice. This piecemeal approach was rejected outright by the Government. Both the Taliban and the hijackers were informed that until there was a formal, full and unambiguous detailing of demands, there could be no talks. It is significant that the Taliban then advised the hijackers to give their full demands. This was done. These were (a) release of 36 terrorists in Indian custody including Masood Azhar; (b) the coffin of Sajad Afghani; and (c) payment of US \$ 200 million. After these demands had been made public by me, the Taliban advised the hijackers that their demands for money and the coffin of Sajad Afghani were un-Islamic. These were, therefore, dropped by the hijackers. Our urging thereafter that a demand for release of terrorists was also un-Islamic was not pressed by the Taliban with the hijackers.
14. Thereupon the hijackers insisted that Masood Azhar be released in exchange for 15 hostages and such other as the hijackers may chose to release. This was again rejected by the Government. Finally, a full package was worked out for the release of all the hostages. Government released three terrorists i.e. Masood Azhar, Mushtaq Zargar and Omar Sheikh.
15. The Taliban had been told by us that as they exercised jurisdiction in Kandahar, the released terrorists would be brought to the Kandahar Airport, whereafter, they would be under Taliban control but not that of the hijackers. It was also explicitly conveyed to the Taliban that we expected that both the hijackers and the released terrorists, would be treated as criminals in conformity with law. The decision taken by the Taliban to allow the hijackers and the released terrorists ten hours to leave Afghanistan was theirs alone.
16. The Taliban authorities while adopting an attitude of correct facilitators, consistently and clearly had their sympathies with the hijackers and their other supporters, and acted accordingly.
17. There are two aspects connected with hijacking that have since been raised in public and I wish to deal with them squarely. The first relates to events in Amritsar, the second, is regarding my travel to Kandahar.
18. Hon'ble Members would appreciate that it was not initially known that the aircraft will land at Amritsar. Information all along had been that the hijackers wanted to go to Lahore. When the aircraft did land at Amritsar, concrete and specific information in respect of the numbers, nationality, weaponry, professionalism and commitment of the hijackers was still scanty and speculative. On the other hand, messages being received from the hijacked aircraft were becoming increasingly tense and demanding. The pilot had by then conveyed that the hijackers had told him that four passengers had already been killed, also that the hijackers had "pistols, grenades, everything." Information was also received that some passengers had been brought forward to the 'J' Class section, their arms tied and that they were to be executed next. While we were conscious that these messages could have been conveyed under duress, at that time, there was no way of definitively establishing relevant facts. Precipitate action, in the absence of even basic information was, therefore, judged as being fraught with unacceptable levels of risk. At this stage no negotiations were possible because the hijackers had, uptill then, communicated no demands except for fuel. Even before the plane had landed at Amritsar the authorities had readied the NSG in Delhi and had instructed local authorities to delay refuelling to the maximum extent possible. A bowser was sent with the objective, among other, to stop the aircraft, but it took off whilst the bowser was still some 300 yards away. It is also noteworthy that except momentarily, the aircraft's engines were running throughout the time that it was at Amritsar and the craft kept changing its position.
19. I decided to go to Kandahar so as to ensure that the termination of the hijacking, the smooth release and safe return of passengers and crew took place without any last minute hitch, also that should a need arise, prompt decisions could be taken on the spot. I believe that my presence in Kandahar, and on board the aircraft on which the hostages returned home, provided solace to the released passengers, who had been held captive for over a week. My travel on the same aircraft as the three terrorists was entirely on account of logistical compulsions, brought about by the limited infrastructural facilities at Kandahar airport, and its incapacity to handle any more aircraft simultaneously.
20. The hijacking incident has once again highlighted the complicity of Pakistan and of organisations patronised and supported by it in terrorist acts against India. Hon'ble Members would note that following upon investigations by Indian authorities, the police have arrested four operatives of the Inter Services Intelligence Agency of Pakistan in Mumbai. All the four, two of whom are Pakistani nationals, belong to the Harkat ul Mujahideen. Their interrogation has established that the hijacking was masterminded by Pakistan's ISI with the assistance of the Harkat. It was further revealed that all the five hijackers were also Pakistanis. The hijackers are now believed to be in Pakistan. The Home Ministry has ordered a CBI enquiry, who have been entrusted with the investigations of the hijacking case.
21. Government have brought to the attention of the international community the role played by Pakistan in the hijacking. Government have raised the matter with the Government of Pakistan, and have provided evidence to them of the involvement of their nationals in the hijacking. Government have reminded the Government of Pakistan that as a signatory to several International Conventions against Terrorism, also the Simla Agreement of 1972, and the Lahore Declaration, it has an international obligation to take the hijackers into custody and to extradite them to India. The Government of Pakistan, in its response, has reiterated its general position that it would undertake to apprehend and prosecute any person or persons found on its territory or the territory of Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir who may be suspected of having committed offences related to hijacking. As they have at the same time rejected our demarche, Pakistan's general commitment has to be assessed accordingly.
22. Government have also raised the matter with the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) with the view to bring to the attention of the member countries the need to adopt appropriate measures to apprehend and extradite the hijackers to India.
23. The hijacking of IC-814 has made stronger our resolve to combat the menace of terrorism. Let no one doubt our firm determination. It has also emphasised the need of strengthening our security, *inter alia*, at airports. Necessary action in this regard has already been initiated.
24. Hon'ble members would permit me to add that the hijacking of IC-814 was an exceptionally professional and complex operation; Kandahar, possibly the most adverse location for us from where to address the situation; and the triangular coordination of the incident by the hijackers, the Taliban, HUM and ISI operatives a most demanding challenge.
25. The termination of the hijacking in the manner that it was achieved, was the best possible solution in a basket of worse alternatives.