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14.51 hrs.

RE: Alleged atrocities on and discrimination against handicapped Dalits of IAS and IRS Services

Title : Regarding the move of the French Government to impose restriction on wearing of turbans by Sikhs.

SARDAR SIMRANJIT SINGH MANN (SANGRUR): Thank you Mr. Deputy-Speaker Sir. I want to raise a very important issue regarding the Sikhs. We are about two-and-a-half crore-population spread out all over the world. We have adopted the sub-continental practice, tradition and custom of wearing the turban and it is a part of our dress code, and we are the only sub-continental people now of the Indian sub-continent that wear the turban as per the tenets of our religion.

There is a legislation being adopted by the French Legislature right now that a lot of people will loose wearing their religious symbols and the Sikh students will not be allowed to attend the public schools and Sikhs who are employed as Government servants will not be able to go to the offices. This is highly discriminatory because the Sikhs have liberated France twice from the clutches of the Germans during the First World War and the Second World War while they wore the turbans. The British Imperial Government told the Sikhs that 'we will not able to give you the pensions if you do not don the helmets'. The Sikh soldiers, who liberated France said, 'we will forego our pensions if we are hit in the head, but we will not wear the helmets and we will die, if providence wishes, with our turbans on.

The second important point that I want to raise, Mr. Deputy-Speaker Sir, is that the Sikhs in the United States and the western world are being made objects of hate crime because they have the turbans and the westerners think that we are either Talibanis, Iraqis or Afghans, who have, to a certain extent, come on the hit list of the Americans and the western world. I myself in Austria was called 'Bin Laden'.

We all want the Government of India to make a representation strongly with the French Government that Sikhs should not be deprived of their right, which is culturally, traditionally and religiously correct for them. I also want the Government of India to publicise in the western media, in the print media and the electronic media, and say that the Sikhs are not Talibanis, Iraqis or Arabs.

They are distinct people of the sub-continent and are completely different kettle of fish so that we do not become targets of hate crime and we are saved from this wave that is going around the Western countries that the Sikhs are either Talibanis or Arabs or Iraqis and we are being deprived of our right to wear the turbans in France. I want a strong rejoinder, diplomatic rejoinder by the Government of India to be given to the French Government and a media campaign launched in the Western Press stating that the Sikhs are not Arabs, Talibanis or Afghans.

Thank you very much Mr. Deputy-Speaker. I have the great honour to thank you on the last day for allowing me to express the pain of almost 2 ½ crore of Sikhs living across the world. Thank you very much.