

Title: Request the Government to take immediate steps to release fishermen of the South District, Kanyakumari from Pakistan jail.

MR. SPEAKER: Please take your seat. You can speak after Shri Vaiko.

SHRI VAIKO (SIVAKASI): Shri Banatwalla, kindly permit me to speak.

SHRI G.M. BANATWALLA : You have always got a chance. You should look to us also.

SHRI VAIKO : I was never given a chance. This is the first opportunity which I have got.

MR. SPEAKER: Juniors should get a chance to speak. Please cooperate with the Chair.

SHRI G.M. BANATWALLA : I have always done so.

MR. SPEAKER: Juniors should get a chance to speak. Shri Vaiko is junior to you.

SHRI VAIKO (SIVAKASI): I am extremely thankful to you and also to other Members for permitting me to raise a serious issue. Through this House, I would like to draw the attention of the Government.

13.00 hrs.

Sir, 19 fisherman from the deep South District of Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu were on contract employment with Saudi Arabian company. But by mistake they entered the Iranian waters and the Naval authorities of Iran arrested them on 16th February 1999. Then the matter was raised with the Iranian Government. The Iranian Government realised the mistake and promised that these fishermen will be sent back to India. But Sir, their misfortune set in and they were taken to Pakistani territory and were released in Pakistan. Subsequently, they were arrested by the Pakistan Police and were lodged in Quetta Jail from 5th June till 5th December, 1999. Then they were shifted to Karachi Jail on 5th December, 1999. Many months have passed. When the Hon. Prime Minister visited the capital town of Kanyakumari, he addressed a mammoth gathering. The Prime Minister was kind enough to give an assurance that the tears of those families will be erased and the Government will take immediate steps to release them from Pakistan Jail. Sir, all the political parties including BJP and the Communist Party (Marxist) in Kanyakumari District have decided to go for a Bandh in the first week of April. It is because the members of those families are getting letters from them that they are being harassed and tortured in the Pakistan Jail. This matter has already been taken up with the Government of India. I have personally represented to the hon. Prime Minister as also the Minister of External Affairs, Shri Jaswant Singh. The External Affairs Minister has taken steps to get them back. They have been communicating with the Pakistan Government. What is happening in Pakistan is that the Government there has become a totalitarian dictatorship and those fishermen are being tortured and their lives are in great peril and danger. Sir, it is the high time that the Government take up the issue very seriously with the Pakistan Government and these fishermen are released. Otherwise, I am afraid their lives will be in jeopardy and danger. This is a very serious issue. All the people of this country are very much concerned about it. A life of an Indian Citizen is a paramount importance. Nineteen lives are in danger there. I seek the protection from the Government to take immediate steps to get their release from Pakistan.

THE HOME MINISTER (SHRI L.K. ADVANI): Sir, I share the concern expressed by the hon. Member, Shri Vaiko. I can only say that I will communicate to the Minister of External Affairs the anguish expressed by the hon. Member and request him to apprise the House of the steps taken till now.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (BOLPUR): We all support this.

MR. SPEAKER: Everybody is supporting each other but you are not supporting the Chair in conducting the House.