

12.12 hrs.

Title: Statement regarding Indian air space violation by U.S. helicopter in Chennai on 26th November, 2001.

MR. SPEAKER: Item No.8(a) – Shri George Fernandes....(*Interruptions*)

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): Sir, as reported by the Airforce, at 0255 hours on 26th November, 2001 the civil radar of Chennai airport manned by Airport Authority of India, picked up an unidentified aircraft at a distance of about 123 km. from Chennai heading North. ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Yesterday you had raised an important issue but today you are not listening....(*Interruptions*)

12.13 hrs

At this stage, Shrimati Sonia Gandhi, Shri Somnath Chatterjee, Shri Mulayam Singh Yadav and some other hon. Members left the House.

SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES : The aircraft was flying over international waters, operating at a speed of about 125 to 140 km. an hour at a height of 5000-6000 feet.

The Naval authorities at Chennai had given clearance to USS ship John Young scheduled to arrive at Chennai at 0800 hours on 26th November, 2001. On receipt of information from the Airport Authority of India at Chennai Airport regarding the detection of an un-identified helicopter on their radar, the Naval authorities immediately contacted USS John Young to confirm, if a helicopter was airborne from that ship. On receipt of confirmation from USS John Young, the ship was advised by the Indian Navy to call back the helicopter to the ship immediately, though this was not in violation of Indian air space. The helicopter eventually landed on board USS John Young when the ship was still about 60 kms. from the Chennai coast.

I would like to inform the hon. Members that the territorial waters and the national air space extend up to 12 nautical miles or 22 kms. from our coast and the waters beyond this limit are international waters wherein ships can operate without restriction.

There has been no report either from the Airforce, the Navy or the Civil authorities or the Airport Authority of India to indicate that there has been any violation of Indian air space by the helicopter off the US Naval ship on 26th November, 2001.

It has been reported in some newspapers that the helicopter overflew Kalpakkam Nuclear Installations for a while. I would like to assure the hon. Members that no such overflight over Kalpakkam Nuclear Installation took place.

I would like to inform the Members that the Government has received specific requests for assistance in connection with 'Operation Enduring Freedom' from certain friendly countries, including the United States. Those requests that conform to our existing policy guidelines for overflights and refuelling of aircraft and port calls by naval ships have been approved. The guidelines rule out India's participation in combat operations, Indian military units operating under a foreign flag other than operation mandated by the United Nations or the provision of bases on Indian soil for any foreign military units.

It is in this context that the USS John Young was given permission to dock at Chennai commercial port.

MR. SPEAKER: The House will now take up `Zero Hour`.

Shri Chandra Vijay Singh....(*Interruptions*)

SHRI SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY (CALCUTTA NORTH WEST): The other day Shri Somnath Chatterjee, Shrimati Sonia Gandhi and Shri Mulayam Singh Yadav had walked out for dinner and they will have lunch today.

...(*Interruptions*)