

Title: Urgent need to make arrangement for taking back Hajis who are stranded at the Jeddah Haj Terminal in Saudi Arabia..

SHRI E. AHAMED (MANJERI): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I may bring to the notice of this House the sad and sorrowful plight of the Indian Hajis who are stranded at the Jeddah Haj Terminal in Saudi Arabia. This time there was a total 1,10,000 Hajis from India out of whom 72,000 Hajis have been sent by the Central Haj Committee.

Every year the Haj Committee, in consultation with Air India arranges flights for the Hajis to go as well as to come back. Last time they had chartered an airline. This time also they have chartered the same airline. The return flight of the Hajis started on the 23rd of March. It has to fly for 33 days, daily six aircraft to bring our Hajis from Jeddah back to India. But quite unfortunately this time when it started on 23rd March, up to 30th of March they should have arranged at least 48 flights from Jeddah to India. But they could not do it because the airlines chartered was not competent or efficient enough to bring the Hajis back to India. As a result of this, there were about fifteen to eighteen flights disrupted and there was a backlog of 5000 Hajis.

When I came to know about this matter, I brought it to the notice of the hon. Prime Minister. The Prime Minister gave instructions then and there and Air India had agreed to operate three additional flights everyday to bring back the Hajis because there was a chaotic situation at the Haj Terminal in Saudi Arabia. But, quite unfortunately the Air India or the Civil Aviation Ministry did not keep their promise. Hajis continued to be stranded at the Haj Terminal and everyday two thousand Hajis were coming from Madina to the Haj Terminal to take their flight. They were also stranded. Hajis who were coming from Mecca were also stranded.

Now the situation is that the Hajis of all other countries have gone back. Only the Indian Hajis are stranded there. It is a shame on our country. It is quite insensitive on the part of the airlines to leave our Hajis like this. Who is responsible for this state of affairs? I am told that this time the very selection of the aircraft or the airline is disputed.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Please conclude.

SHRI E. AHAMED : I am coming to a very important point. It is only our Hajis who are stranded at the Haj Terminal for two-three days without basic necessities being fulfilled.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: What do you want the Government to do?

SHRI E. AHAMED : This matter has been taken in a lackadaisical manner and in a cavalier fashion by the airlines. Who is responsible for this? It is because of the incompetence, inefficiency and irresponsibility on the part of the Civil Aviation Ministry as well as Air India who have arranged the chartered flight. A number of reports have appeared in the newspapers. I do not want to bring them here.

This is the first time in the history of this country that we have become a laughing stock in the eyes of other Islamic communities and Islamic countries in the world. Turkey also has sent a number of Hajis. People from Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh and from other countries have all gone back to their countries. Only our Hajis are stranded there.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: What do you want the Government of India to do?

SHRI E. AHAMED : I am just asking through you the Parliamentary Affairs Minister to take it upon himself. Let him contact the airlines concerned and the Civil Aviation Ministry. Our Hajis are to be brought back because as per the original schedule, the last Haji is to reach here on 26th of this month. But, if it continues like this, it will take one month. Therefore, I humbly request the Minister to take it seriously. This is a very sensitive issue. This is a very serious issue. Hajis of India are left in high and dry in that country.

Our Prime Minister has taken very keen interest in this. I do admit it. But the administration is not moving in that direction. He has been given false information. Therefore, I want the Government to take it as a serious matter. These poor Hajis are left there high and dry and they are spending a horrible time without the basic facilities.(Interruptions)

SHRI G.M. BANATWALLA (PONNANI): Let the Government tell us as to what they are doing to bring back the Hajis. The Government must give us an assurance on this. You cannot leave the Hajis like that over there. The Prime Minister has given direction. But the direction of the Prime Minister is not being followed.

श्री अकबर अली खांदोकर : उपाध्यक्ष जी, दो-तीन रोज़ से हज़्यात्री वहां पड़े हुए हैं, उनको वहां खाना नहीं मिलता है। एक बार खाना खाने के बाद दूसरी बार खाना मिलने में उनको एक दिन लग जाता है। एयर इंडिया की सर्विस वहां बिल्कुल खराब हो गई है। मेरी मांग है कि इसकी जल्दी से जांच करानी चाहिए और वहां जो हज़्यात्री हैं, उनको जल्दी से जल्दी यहां लाना चाहिए।

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: I also know personally as some people have contacted me from Jeddah. Now the hon.

Minister wants to react.

SHRI RASHID ALVI (AMROHA): On behalf of my party, I want to associate with the views expressed by Shri E. Ahamed.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: This is an issue of all parties. So, please do not bring parties into it.

SHRI E. AHAMED: I want the Government to conduct an inquiry as to how it happened, why it happened, and how it will be removed. It is a serious matter. Every year it is going to continue.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Do you not want the hon. Minister to react? Otherwise I will call the next Member.

SHRI P.C. THOMAS : It is the inefficiency on the part of Air India. Some of the Hajis have come back, but their luggage is still lying there. This also has to be looked into.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Now the hon. Minister is reacting.

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: I expect all of us to be unanimous on a few issues which are not partisan. When Air India or the Government takes the responsibility to send Hajis, naturally it is the responsibility of the same carrier to bring them back. I do not want to compare them with other countries for the simple reason that I am not aware whether other countries use their aircraft and sponsor them. I am really not aware of it. So, I do not know what happens in Malaysia.

But in India, this is a long practice that we send Hajis, we arrange for the aircraft, Government gives subsidy and every year, it is increasing. Even the Government of India led by Shri A.B. Vajpayee has also increased the number of Hajis. There is a consensus on this. When you have brought this to my notice, I will definitely talk with the Minister for Civil Aviation and Air India officials and see that our brothers who are there are brought as early as possible. But you must appreciate that the Parliamentary Affairs Minister will not be in a position to give assurances on the Ministries which are not under his control. But I have taken note of your feelings. ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: People have contacted me also.

श्री अकबर अली खांदोकर : वहां जो हाजी लोग हैं, उनके पास पैसा नहीं रहता है, वे लोग वहां भूखे मर रहे हैं। (व्यवधान)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: He has taken note of it and he knows what to do.

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Next time we should see that the leaders would come last. ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: It will be certainly taken note of.

...(*Interruptions*)