

12.05 hrs.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER
RE: INCIDENT OF ATTACK BY TERRORISTS ON
THE ARMY CAMP AT AKHNOOR

...(Interruptions)

Title: Statement regarding incident of attack by terrorists on the army camp at Akhnoor.

MR. SPEAKER: Now, Shri George Fernandes is to make a statement regarding 'incident of attack by terrorists on the army camp at Akhnoor'.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI (RAIGANJ): Sir, we are staging a walk-out because we are boycotting the Defence Minister.

12.05½ hrs.

(Shri Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi and some other hon.Members then left the House)

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. Minister, you can lay the statement on the Table of the House.

...(Interruptions)

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): Sir, I beg to lay on the Table of the House a statement regarding the incident of terrorist attack in Tanda Army Cantonment (Akhnoor) in Jammu and Kashmir.

*Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the House about the unfortunate incident of terrorist attack in Tanda Cantonment at Akhnoor in Jammu and Kashmir on July 22, 2003. I have visited the site in the morning of July 23, 2003.

On July 22, 2003 at about 0550 hours, three terrorists, one in civilian dress and two in combat uniform with khaki caps (one was wearing the epaulettes of Pakistan Army Lieutenant and Janbaz insignia), disembarked from a civil truck

1206. Laid on the Table

front of the EME Battalion Gate of Tanda Cantonment. The sentry at the gate immediately challenged them and opened fire. One terrorist was killed on the spot, and in the ensuing firefight one sentry was killed and one was injured. The other terrorists evaded fire of the sentry and rushed inside the unit lines lobbing grenades and firing indiscriminately. In the process, a total of two Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and four Other Ranks (Ors) were killed and two JCOs and four Ors were wounded. The Quick Reaction Team (QRT) of the unit killed the second terrorist.

By 0630 hours, QRTs from neighbouring units were also moved to the location. A detailed search of the Area was carried out till 1030 hours. After searching the unit lines and the adjoining area under the supervision of senior officers of local formation, it was assessed that the area had been cleared of the terrorists.

At about 1300 hours, Lt. Gen. Hari Prasad, GOC-in-C, Northern Command and Lt. Gen. T.P.S. Brar, GOC, 16 Corps along with their staff officers visited the site to review the situation. As these officers were moving in the area, one terrorist emerged from the bushes in a *nala*, which passes through the unit lines and lobbed two grenades on them. The terrorist later blew himself up. However, seven officers, including GOC-in-C, Northern Command, and the Corps Commander received minor injuries due to the grenade blasts, except Brig. V.K. Govil, Deputy-Director, EME, 16 Corps, who later succumbed to his injuries at 1630 hours.

As a result of the terrorist attack, eight Army personnel (one officer, two JCOs and five Ors) were killed and thirteen (seven officers, two JCOs and four Ors) were wounded. All the three terrorists were killed, and three AK rifles and three pistols were recovered. The driver of the truck in which the terrorists came has been taken into custody and is being interrogated.

A lesser known militant outfit 'Al Shuhda Brigade J&K' has claimed responsibility for the attack stating "the attack on the camp was carried out to protest visiting Pakistani Opposition Leader, Maulana Fazlur Rehman's remarks that the Line of Control should be converted into a permanent border and the Kashmir issue should be resolved within the framework of the Shimla Agreement." The identity of the three terrorists has not yet been established.

I may inform the House that adequate measures have been taken to ensure security of vulnerable areas by way of gathering intelligence inputs, reinforcing the security mechanisms, intensifying patrolling and employing Quick Reaction Teams. In addition to security measures in position, special strategies are being devised to effectively combat terrorist attacks.

I would like to further inform the hon. Members that an investigation into the incident has already been ordered. I would like to assure the House that if the investigation establishes any lapse in the enforcement of security measures by the Army, stringent action will be taken against those found responsible.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: I am not going to take 'Zero Hour' today because it is not possible.

The House stands adjourned to meet again at two o'clock.

1206 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Fourteen of the Clock.

(Placed in Library. See No.L.T.7835A/2003)