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Title: The Minister of External Affairs laid a statement regarding situation in Sri Lanka.

MADAM SPEAKER: Shri S.M. Krishna to make a Statement. you can lay it on the Table.

...(Interruptions)

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S.M. KRISHNA): Hon. Madam Speaker, I rise to inform the House on the situation in Sri Lanka.

MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Minister, you may lay Statement on the Table of the House.

SHRI S.M. KRISHNA: Madam, I lay it on the Table of the House.

There have been a number of requests for Calling Attention Motions and Short Duration Discussions as well as Parliamentary Questions on issues relating to Sri Lanka in both the Houses of Parliament. I, therefore, propose to make a *suo moto* statement which, I hope, will respond to most, if not all, issues of interest and concern to my fellow Parliamentarians.

Madam Speaker,

The relationship between India and Sri Lanka is based upon shared historical, cultural, ethnic and civilizational ties and extensive people-to-people interaction. In recent years, the relationship has become multifaceted and diverse, encompassing all areas of contemporary relevance.

Sri Lanka has borne the brunt of terrorism for nearly three-decades. The end of the long period of armed conflict in Sri Lanka in May 2009, left around 3,00,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living in camps in Northern Sri Lanka and general devastation of infrastructure in the affected areas.

The Government of India has accorded the highest priority to the welfare of IDPs in Sri Lanka. In June 2009, the Prime Minister announced a grant of Rs. 500 crores for relief, rehabilitation and resettlement work in Sri Lanka. Towards this humanitarian effort, India dispatched family relief packs, deployed an emergency field hospital, conducted an artificial limb fitment camp and deployed seven de-mining teams-in Northern Sri Lanka. It also gifted more than 10,400 MT of shelter material, 4 lakh cement bags, 95,000 agricultural starter packs and 500 tractors to revive agricultural activities in Northern Sri Lanka.

India also announced the construction of 50,000 houses, mainly for IDPs in Sri Lanka. During my visit to Sri Lanka in November 2010, I inaugurated the pilot project for construction of 1000 houses at Ariyalai in Jaffna. I am happy to convey that work on ground has already started and houses are beginning to come up in what is being seen as a model project. I also carried out the ground breaking for railway line restoration projects in Northern Sri Lanka under a Government of India Line of Credit of about US \$ 800 million. India is also assisting in the rehabilitation of the Kanakesanthurai (KKS) harbour, restoration of Duraiappa stadium, construction of a Cultural Centre at Jaffna and vocational training centres at Batticaloa and Nuwara Eliya.

Our primary objective in all that we are doing in Sri Lanka is to ensure the welfare and wellbeing of Sri Lankan Tamils, including IDPs, and to assist in the development of Northern Sri Lanka. In a Joint Press Statement issued on the occasion of the visit of the Sri Lankan External Affairs Minister to India on 17 May, 2011, I urged the expeditious implementation of measures by the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure resettlement and genuine reconciliation, including early return of IDPs to their respective homes. I am happy to convey to the House that according to information available to us around 2,90,000 IDPs have already been resettled and only around 10,000 IDPs remain in the camps.

Government has also articulated its position that the end of armed conflict in Sri Lanka created a historic opportunity to address all outstanding issues relating to minority communities in Sri Lanka, including Tamils. The Joint Press Release of May 17, 2011, states that all such outstanding issues had to be settled in a spirit of understanding and mutual accommodation imbued with political vision to work towards genuine national reconciliation. The External Affairs Minister of Sri Lanka affirmed his Government's commitment to ensuring expeditious and concrete progress in the ongoing dialogue between the Government of Sri Lanka and representatives of Tamil parties and that a devolution package, building upon the 13th Amendment, would contribute towards creating the necessary conditions for such reconciliation.

The end of the long conflict in Sri Lanka has also raised questions relating to the conduct of the war. We have, in this context, noted a report issued by a Panel of Experts constituted by the UN Secretary General on Accountability in Sri Lanka. There have also been public reactions to the telecast of the 'Channel 4' documentary entitled "Sri Lanka's Killing Fields". Presently, our focus should be on the welfare and well being of Tamils in Sri Lanka. Their rehabilitation and rebuilding should be of the highest and most immediate priority. A just and fair settlement of the political problem is of utmost importance. I have, nonetheless, stressed to my Sri Lankan counterpart, the need for an early withdrawal of emergency regulations, investigations into allegations of human rights violations, restoration of normalcy in affected areas and redress

of humanitarian concerns of affected families.

Madam Speaker,

On the concerns expressed by some Members on the issue of Indian fishermen in waters between India and Sri Lanka, allow me to reiterate, at the outset, that the welfare, safety and security of our fishermen have always received the highest priority by Government.

There have been reports of incidents of attacks on Indian fishermen, allegedly by the Sri Lankan Navy. Government, through Diplomatic Channels, has consistently and immediately taken up any reported incident involving arrest or violence against Indian fishermen to ensure their safety, security, early release and repatriation. The Government has conveyed to the Sri Lankan Government that the use of force could not be justified under any circumstance and that all fishermen should be treated in a humane manner. The Sri Lankan side, while denying that their Navy was involved, has promised to seriously investigate these incidents.

During the meetings with my Sri Lankan counterpart in February 2011 in Thimpu and in May 2011 in New Delhi, I not only conveyed our deep concern at the violence against our fishermen but also stressed the need to ensure that these incidents do not recur. In the Joint Press Release issued in May 2011, India and Sri Lanka agreed that the use of force could not be justified under any circumstances and that all fishermen should be treated in a humane manner.

Madam Speaker, through you I would like to inform this august House that we have emphasized that there is no justification for the use of force against our fishermen even though almost all instances of arrest and harassment of our fishermen seem to have occurred in Sri Lankan waters. We do need to be conscious of the sensitivities on the Sri Lanka and of the many Sri Lankan fishermen who have, after a long hiatus, started fishing in that area. We are also working with concerned state Government on our side keeping in mind that issues of fishermen affect both sides. In 2010, a total of 137 Indian fishermen were apprehended and released by Sri Lanka. Till 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2011, a total of 164 Indian fishermen were apprehended by Sri Lanka and all were subsequently released. At the same time, in 2010 a total of 352, and in 2011, a total of 131 Sri Lankan fishermen, have been apprehended by our authorities. A total of 104 Sri Lankan fishermen are still in Indian custody whereas all Indian fisher apprehended on charges of fishing related violations in Sri Lanka have been released.

While the Government of India is of the view that the end of conflict in Sri Lanka provides an opportunity to pursue a lasting political settlement in Sri Lanka within the framework of a united Sri Lanka, acceptable to all the communities in Sri Lanka including the Tamils, it has to be kept in mind that this is a long standing issue and Sri Lanka is going through its internal processes, including structured dialogue between the Government and representatives of Tamil parties. The sooner Sri Lanka can come to a political arrangement within which all the communities feel comfortable, and which works for all of them, the better. In this context, the commencement of a structured dialogue on pursuing a political solution for national reconciliation as well as reconstruction and development is a laudable development. We will do whatever we can to support this process.

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