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Title: Made a statement on the situation along the Line of Control in Jammu & Kashmir.

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): Sir, I would like to apprise the House about the developments, which have taken place on the Indo-Pak Line of Control from 27th July 1998 till date.

On 27th and 28th July 1998, Pakistan resorted to unprecedented and unprovoked firing of artillery and mortars on our posts and in the civilian areas of Batalik and Kargil. We were compelled to retaliate appropriately on 30th July 1998. This resulted in casualties to civilians and troops, as well as damage to military and civilian property on both sides. Sporadic exchange of fire has been going on since then. The intensity of firing, however, has come down since yesterday in most of the areas except Keren, Tangdhar, Uri and Rampur sectors. Kargil sector has been quiet for the last two days. The casualties from 27th July to 4th August are 10 Army soldiers, 6 BSF constables and 31 civilians killed, and 77 Army soldiers, 4 BSF constables and 77 civilians wounded. Details of the casualties are appended to this Statement, which is available.

Pakistan has always resorted to firing along the LOC to facilitate infiltration by Pakistani and foreign militants, who are organised, trained, equipped, financed, armed and finally infiltrated with active covering fire and support from Pakistani Army deployed along the LOC. In recent months, especially since May 1998, our security forces have been able to intercept and reduce the level of infiltration, thereby frustrating Pakistan's designs. As if to give vent to its frustration, Pakistan has started targeting not only our Army posts but also civilian inhabited areas, with Batalik, Kargil, Kanzalwan, Tangdhar, Keren and Uri becoming the main targets.

These actions by Pakistan are in consonance with its calculated design to obstruct and stall peaceful bilateral dialogue and to create a sense of alarm by orchestrating incidents on the border which will project Jammu & Kashmir as a 'flashpoint'. Pakistan's desperation is becoming acute in view of the fast declining Kashmiri support in the Valley to militancy, control of which has passed into the hands of Pakistani militant organisations, patronised by Pakistani political figures; and foreign mercenaries directed by the Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence.

I do not have to emphasise that India has never engaged in any provocative action and has always desired that the International Boundary and the Line of Control should be peaceful and tranquil. India has exercised the utmost restraint and will continue to do so. We expect Pakistan to reciprocate. We also expect that the established diplomatic and military channels will be effectively used to prevent such incidents.

I visited Kargil, Kupwara and Baramulla on August 4, 1998. I also visited two posts in the valley along the LOC. The GOC 15 Corps accompanied me. Thereafter, I visited the 92 Base Hospital and the Bone & Joint Hospital in Srinagar to see the injured army and civilian personnel.

Let me assure the House that the security forces guarding our borders in Jammu & Kashmir are in fine mettle and in full preparedness to meet every eventuality that may arise.

SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES: Mr. Chairman, Sir, with your permission, I would like to make a clarification about the matter which was raised in the House earlier in the morning. It related to again Kashmir and a newspaper item which said that our troops did not occupy as the summer months started, the posts they had vacated during the winter months.

Sir, I will read a brief note on the facts. The news item, 'Pak's winter take over, keeps LOC heat on' in The Indian Express by Aasha Khosa, from Srinagar on 3rd August, 1998 mentions the grabbing of two high altitude border posts by Pakistan.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister, the statement given to the Speaker's office did not contain this.

SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES: Sir, I am not making a statement. I am only making a clarification. ...(Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN: If you give the paper name and other things, then the Members would again ask clarifications, questions. That cannot be allowed.

SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES: Sir, this was raised in the House. If you do not permit me, then I will sit down.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The statement is enough.

Now, the House stands adjourned to meet tomorrow, the 6th August 1998 at 11 a.m.

2321 hours

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on

Thursday, August 6, 1998/Shravana 15, 1920 (Saka)