

12.10 hrs.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Escape from the Custody and Subsequent Death of Shri Shanmugam, one of the Accused in Rajiv Gandhi Assassination Case

[English]

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI S. B. CHAVAN): Sir, I rise to apprise this House of the escape from custody and subsequent death of Shri Shanmugam, an accused in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, arrested by the Special Investigation Team (SIT).

In pursuance of the consent given by the Government of Tamil Nadu for C.B.I. to investigate the case of Shri Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, a Special Investigation Team was formed on 24-5-1991. It has made significant progress in the case and 14 accused have been arrested so far.

One of those arrested was Shri N. Shanmugam, S o Nagaraja Pillai of Kodiakkadu of Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu. As per the information received from C.B.I., Shri Shanmugam was a well-known smuggler and was found to have been helping LTTE elements with shelter, concealment of materials like explosives, transmitters, POL, etc. Further, his men reportedly helped to arrange for reception, accommodation and transport on the day of landing of the killer group including Thanu. Shri Shanmugam was arrested by the SIT on 17-7-1991 after he had surrendered himself to the local police. He was produced before the Special Additional Session Judge, Madras on 18-7-1991 and 30 days of police remand obtained.

While in the custody of the SIT, Shri Shanmugam volunteered to disclose the place where transmitters, high explosives and other materials of LTTE were hidden. He was accordingly taken by a small group of CBI

officers to Vedaranyam on 18-7-91 and at his instance buried and concealed material was recovered which included wireless sets of LTTE, huge quantities of explosives, cans of petrol etc. The recovery was a night-long operation at Kodiakadu reserve forest from 5.00 PM on 18-7-91 to 9.00 AM on 19-7-91. Shri Shanmugam was brought to the inspection bungalow, Vedaranyam at 3.00 PM on 19-7-91 and the investigation was continued. At 9.45 PM Shri Shanmugam was given food, after which he went outside to wash his hands. While washing hands he ran and escaped under cover of darkness. At that time, 2 local police Constables were guarding Shanmugam, while 1 Dy. S.P. and 3 Inspectors of the C.B.I. were present in the room from where he went out. The 2 Constables raised an alarm and everyone present there went out at once to chase the accused. The DIG and S.P., CBI, who were present in the adjoining room also joined the chase. The local police and CRPF also took part in the search, but in vain. At 10.45 PM on 19-7-91, a case was registered at Police Station Vedaranyam under Section 224 IPC and investigation was taken up.

The white Dhoti and white Baniyan of Shri Shanmugam were found abandoned in a dry canal a little away from the Inspection Bungalow.

On 20-7-91, the body of Shri Shanmugam was found hanging from the branch of a tree by means of a rope with saliva dripping from the corner of the mouth. There was also fresh stains which looked like semen stains on the underwear and a blue lungi was found around the feet. The body was first seen by Shri Raj Kumar, Village Administrative Officer and was reported to the Inspector of Police, Vedaranyam at 0600 hours on 20-7-1991. On his report, Vedaranyam Police Station registered a case vide No. 451/91 under Section 174 of Cr. P.C. No marks of injury were found on the body during the inquest

held by the Revenue Divisional Officer, Mannargudi. The inquest was conducted in the presence of local Panchayatdars, the Uncle of the deceased and two of his lawyers. The postmortem was conducted by a team of doctors at Government Hospital, Nagapattinam where the body of the deceased was brought from Vedaranyam. The inquest report and the postmortem report are still awaited. The report of the postmortem examination has been reserved, pending Chemical Analysis of Viscera. After postmortem, the body was handed over to the relations. It was cremated on 21-7-1991 at Vedaranyam around 4.07 P.M.

Government views this incident with concern and is determined to get at the root of this incident on the one hand, and on the other to ensure that the main investigation into the assassination of Shri Rajiv Gandhi continues to be pursued vigorously and taken to its logical conclusion. With these ends in view, I personally visited Madras and Sripierumbudur on the 22nd and 23rd July, saw things for myself, held discussions with all concerned in Tamil Nadu.

A Magisterial inquiry has been ordered under Section 176 Cr. P.C. CBI has ordered an inquiry by an Additional Director into the circumstances leading to this escape from custody and to fix responsibility. Action would be taken on receiving the report.

The State administration has been directed to expedite the report of post-mortem and examination of the viscera by the Chemical examiner, which are necessary to determine the cause of death.

I would like to assure this honourable house that all that is possible will be done to reach the final conclusion in investigation as early as possible.

SHRI P. G. NARAYANAN (Gobichettipalayam): I want one clarification from the hon. Minister.

MR. SPEAKER: I had already said that a statement would be made. Please take your seat. You take your seat when I am standing. If you want to have more information on this, we will see as to how it can be done and all of you will have the opportunity. The report is with you. You can see it also and if you want, we will organise your putting the question but not at this point of time.

SHRI S. B CHAVAN : I would like to add one point to my statement. Just now I got the information.

"The Forensic Science Laboratory, Madras has given its finding that the viscera of Shanmughma did not contain any poisonous substance.

This report is being sent to the Thanjavur Medical College where the post-mortem was conducted by a panel of three doctors. These three doctors are to now submit their verdict on the post-mortem."

SHRI CHANDRA JEET YADAV (Azamgarh): At what time will you allow us?

MR. SPEAKER : I will fix the time. The proper method will be followed.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA (Bankura): We should have a discussion on this.

MR. SPEAKER : I will fix the time. I will look into it and fix the time. Now Mr. Joshi.

(Interruptions)

[Translation]

SHRI RAJNATH SONKAR SHASTRI (Saidpur): Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was announced that the hon. Minister would make a statement and we would be given time to speak on this issue. But a new point has come to my mind which I want to place before the House so that it could be covered in the second statement.
(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: If you start speaking like this, the time will skip further. You take your seat. Yes Mr. Joshi.

(*Interruptions*)

[*Translation*]

SHRI RAJNATH SONKAR SHASTRI: Mr. Speaker, Sir,

(*Interruptions*)*

MR. SPEAKER: Please take your seat I have called Shri Joshi's name.

(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: What Shri Joshi is speaking alone will go on record. I have not called your name. Please take your seat.

(*Interruptions*)

SHRI DAU DAYAL JOSHI (Kota): Mr. Speaker, Sir, my submission is that the price of newsprint both indigenous and imported is increasing day by day, as a result of which the price of Indian newspapers and magazines have risen 2½ times. For instance, 'India Today' which was priced Rs. 4 a year back is selling @ Rs. 7-8 per copy. My submission is that the quota of indigenous newsprint for small and medium newspapers should be fixed. Otherwise, the newspapers in India will go out of reach of the common man. In this connection, the President of the All India Newspapers Guild, Shri Vishwabandhu Gupta has submitted a proposal to the Central Government suggesting that quota of indigenous newsprint for the small and medium newspapers should be fixed. This is all I have to say.

[*English*]

SHRI C. K. KUPPUSWAMY (Coimbatore): Sir, I want to raise an important issue. I would like to state that in January, 1991 the price of 360 Kgs—one *Kandi*—of Cotton was costing in between Rs. 8,500.

and Rs. 9,000/- only. But now the cost of the same cotton is about Rs. 16,000/- So, a very dangerous situation is prevailing now. So many textile mills are facing closure resulting in unemployment of innumerable labourers of the textile mills. Therefore, a very serious problem is prevailing in my constituency. Hence I request that this matter has to be discussed elaborately in this House.

[*Translation*]

SHRI MADAN LAL KHURANA (South Delhi): Mr. Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister is present in the House. 8-10 days back, when I raised the question of kidnapping of the Executive Director of Indian Oil Corporation, Shri Doraiswamy who is in the captivity of Kashmir extremists, he had assured that he would keep the House informed about the developments and the House would be taken into confidence in the matter. But the news that came from the Valley suggested that he could be released any moment. Then came the news that the extremists have set fresh conditions. The entire country is worried about it. The people have an apprehension that the Government is hiding facts from the nation. Last time, when the daughter of the then Home Minister was kidnapped, the country's honour was put at stake to secure her release. My submission is that such compromise should not be done again. Through you, sir, I would like to know from the hon. Prime Minister as to what is the latest position in this case? Is Shri Doraiswamy being released? Is he alive? What are their conditions and who is acting as middle-man? The House should be taken into confidence in all these matters.