

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Dr. Subramaniam Swamy. Are you reading or not ?

(Interruptions)**

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Shri Ajit Kumar Saha. Are you reading or not ?

(Interruptions)**

12.15 hrs.

STATEMENT RE SITUATION IN SRI LANKA

THE MINISTRY OF STATE IN THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI A.A. RAHIM) : Sir, the situation in Sri Lanka is again becoming tense. There have been a spate of violent incidents in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka in recent weeks in which the lives of innocent people have been lost. These have caused deep concern and anguish in India ; specially in Tamil Nadu. Members of the House have given expression to the sentiments shared by people throughout the country at the wanton and senseless killings.

What has added to the gravity of the situation is the fact that there has been hardly any progress in the search for a lasting political solution to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka. As Honourable Members are aware, President Jayewardene convened a Conference of All Political Parties, social and religious groups in January, this year, to discuss this issue in depth. We welcomed this step in the hope that it would lead to a viable political settlement. We find, however, that nothing substantial has, as yet, emerged from the deliberations of the conference. It is our hope that the existing stalemate will be broken when discussions resume on 9th of May.

It is unfortunate that responsible members of the Sri Lankan Government have seen fit to make baseless allegations against India. These are

totally false and we have conveyed to the Sri Lankan Government that there are no caches of arms or training camps on Indian territory. We have nothing but goodwill for Sri Lanka and have done nothing to warrant the campaign being directed against us in recent days. This does not help to deal with this complex and sensitive issue in a rational and constructive manner. It only comes in the way of our long-standing and friendly relations.

In the wake of the ethnic violence in Sri Lanka last July a large number of persons have come to India and sought refuge. Their number is around 30,000 at present. The presence of such a large number of displaced persons here places us in a difficult situation. It is of the utmost importance that steps are taken to restore confidence and instil a sense of security amongst the minorities in Sri Lanka so that they do not feel compelled to come to India.

I would like to reaffirm that India poses no threat to Sri Lanka. We have repeatedly expressed our commitment to Sri Lanka's unity and integrity and our opposition to secession and all forms of violence. The Prime Minister herself has said so on the floor of this House. We have, at the same time, an abiding interest in the restoration of peace and harmony in Sri Lanka since developments in that country affect us closely. Prime Minister has made available India's good offices to Sri Lanka to facilitate a viable political settlement which we have striven sincerely to promote.

In the present critical situation it is all the more necessary that renewed efforts should be made to work out a political solution which would be acceptable to all communities in Sri Lanka.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : I am not permitting anybody unless the order is restored in the House.