

12.33 hrs.

STATEMENT ON PUNJAB

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI P. VENKATASUBBAIAH) : I beg to lay on the Table a statement on Punjab together with copies of the correspondence exchanged between the Ministry of Home Affairs and the president of the Shiromani Akali Dal since 30th May, 1983.

Statement

Sir, as the Hon'ble Members are aware, I informed the House during the last session that it is the Government's endeavour to find a peaceful solution to the problems in Punjab. Hon'ble Members had also expressed the view that negotiations with the Shiromani Akali Dal leadership should be resumed in respect of the sharing of waters of Ravi-Beas and the territorial disputes between Punjab and Haryana. In pursuance of this, I invited the Akali Dal leaders to resume discussions, but, unfortunately, they have not responded favourably to my invitation. I take this opportunity to place on the Table of the House copies of the correspondence [Placed in Library. See No. LT-6703/83] exchanged between me and the President of the S.A. Dal since 30th May, 1983. Having failed to get a favourable response, as the Hon'ble Members are aware, I issued a Press statement on Punjab on 22nd June, 1983. Despite Government's clear offer to refer the two pending issues to tribunals, the Shiromani Akali Dal leaders have not reacted in a positive manner so far.

Our appeal to reconsider the call for 'Rail Roko' programme on 17th, 1983, was not heeded. Keeping in view the need for safety and security of the passengers and public property and the large scale violence by Akali workers during the 'Rasta-Roko' agitation, the Government decided to suspend rail traffic and State transport in Punjab. Despite the fact that Shiromani Akali Dal leadership called off the 'Rail Roko' agitation, agitators indulged in disruptive activities including squatting on railway tracks, cutting of signals/telephone/telegraph

wires, removal of fish plates, obstruction of railway tracks by placing wooden logs and flooding of railway track by cutting the canal bank. This caused loss of public property and inconvenience to the travelling public.

Hon'ble Members had earlier expressed their concern about using places of worship as sanctuaries for criminals and anti-national elements. Government expected the Shiromani Akali Dal to assure the nation that it would not permit the holy shrines to be used for the storage of arms or for harbouring wanted persons. It was suggested that a five member committee of Sikhs may be set up jointly by the State Government and Shiromani Akali Dal to screen the persons now living within the premises of holy shrines. It is unfortunate that the Shiromani Akali Dal leadership is not prepared to discuss the question of misuse of holy shrines.

Hon'ble Members had expressed their concern about violent and terrorist activities. Government has repeatedly appealed to the leadership of Shiromani Akali Dal to unequivocally condemn violent activities and not to say or do anything which may aggravate the situation. But unfortunately there have still been provocative and threatening speeches by some of the leaders. We have to be careful that continuing agitation does not spark off incidents of a communal nature.

Government has put forth proposals to resolve various issues as also to preserve the sanctity of holy shrines and to maintain amity among all sections of society. Hon'ble Members will agree with me that Government cannot countenance utterances of activities which tend to undermine the unity and integrity of the country.

I reiterate my appeal to the Shiromani Akali Dal and the S.G.P.C. leadership to respond to the proposals put forth by the Government in the proper spirit and give up the path of confrontation for the good of the people and in the interest of the State and the nation. I trust that in this, I echo the feelings of every section of the House.