

RAJYA SABHA

***SYNOPSIS OF DEBATE**

(Proceedings other than Questions and Answers)

Tuesday, March 20, 2018/ Phalguna 29, 1939 (Saka)

Information to the House

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ): Responding to a matter raised by Shri Partap Singh Bajwa on the 19th July, 2017, demanding the speedy return of 39 Indians stuck in Mosul, Iraq since 2014, I would like to share an important information with this House. We all know that in June, 2015, 39 Indians were abducted by ISIS in Iraq's Mosul. Hon'ble Bajwa ji had on 27th July, 2017 raised this matter during Zero Hour and the very next day I had come to this House to give a reply.

I would like to read out what I had stated on that day. I had said that I would not declare the 39 Indian's dead without any concrete proof or evidence. It is a sin to declare a person dead without concrete evidence. Today, I have concrete evidence with me. Firstly, the story of Harjit Masih was a lie and secondly, I am saying this with a heavy heart that those people have been killed. I would like to place before you evidence of both the things. Harjit Masih was speaking lie. I had requested Gen. V.K. Singh to go to Mosul and meet owner of the company to gather important evidence from there. So, General V.K. Singh met with the owner of the company who said that 40 Indians worked in his company and some of them were Bangladeshi

*This Synopsis is not an authoritative record of the proceedings of the Rajya Sabha.

nationals also. When ISIS started capturing Mosul, he requested people working there to evacuate themselves as early as possible. Iraqi nationals were evacuated first, followed by evacuation of citizens of different nationalities but Indian and Bangladeshi nationals were left behind. Then they called a caterer where these people used to dine. Thereafter, Indians and Bangladeshi nationals were taken to a textile factory under the control of ISIS. Both the nationals were separately placed. Thereafter, they have sent Bangladeshis were sent to Arbil. Then, it seems that Harjeet hobnobbed with factory owner and requested him to evacuate him along with Bangladeshis by giving him a Muslim name. He called a cook whose name was Ali and asked him to help him evacuate along with Bangladeshis. The cook stated he accompanied Harjeet Masih in the guise of Ali upto Arbil. Harjeet rang me up from Arbil and stated a different story in Punjabi and requested me to evacuate him from Arbil. I asked him as to how could he reach there and he reiterated many a times that he did not know that. He told me a concocted story that they were taken to a jungle and asked to stand in a queue. 39 people were shot in their head while he was shot in the leg. But his story was not true. He had already left with the cook. The company owner described that the very next day when ISIS people saw that they were 39 and not 40, they decided to shift them elsewhere and one ISIS commander was asked to take them to Badosh. He knew nothing more than that. Taking cue from him, General V. K. Singh, our Ambassador to Iraq and an official designated by the Iraqi Government started further enquiry in the matter because I had requested the Foreign Minister of Iraq to provide an official for facilitating the enquiry during bilateral talks. He acceded to my request. General V.K. Singh, our Ambassador to Iraq and an official from Iraq Government left for Badosh. They were told by a villager of Badosh that there is a mound in a village. It appears as if many people were buried there together. When they reached the mound, they could not find anything from outside. So, they sought for a deep penetration radar. From the Radar it was found that bodies were lying below. After that the General told the Iraqi Authorities to excavate it and exhume the bodies.

The mound was dug up, the bodies were exhumed and two signs were found on those bodies. One was long hairs, a kadaa (bangle) and some ID cards. Some shoes were found which were not Iraqi shoes. All the bodies were exhumed and their mortal remains were sent to Baghdad. Prior to that, after the liberation of Mosul the hopes of their being alive was getting diminished and we were searching for them from among the dead bodies.

There were graves on large scale. There is a Martyr's Foundation who was analysing the graves. We contacted them and requested them to find out the dead bodies of our own people. For this purpose, they asked us to provide the DNA sample of their parents or close relatives. For this, four state governments i.e, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar were to be contacted. We contacted all the four state governments, collected DNA samples as required and sent them to the respective authority. Dead bodies were sent to Baghdad and through our ambassador we requested them to proceed further on priority basis and we also told them that on the basis of signs available therein it seems that these dead bodies are of our own people. We are very thankful to Martyr's Foundation who acceded to our request. The first DNA which matched belonged to a boy named Sandip. As soon as we got information that sample was matching with Sandip, we were confirmed because the total dead bodies were 39. This was also one of the signs. Thereafter they kept on testing DNA one after another. Yesterday, we have been informed that DNA of 38 dead bodies has matched, whereas DNA of 39th dead body is matching only 70 percent because this sample did not belong to his parent but it was of one of his relatives. For this case they said that process is still on. We will reinvestigate it as the DNA was derived from the bones which is very complicated process. The Head of Martyr's Foundation will inform in Press Conference today that out of 39 dead bodies sent by Government of India, DNA of 38 dead bodies are matching and she will give details of the entire process adopted for DNA matching and also inform that the identification of 39th dead body is in process.

I have already stated that I have concrete proof for both cases. Harjeet Masih came out impersonating as Ali, it was proved by the owner of company, where he worked. No proof can be more concrete than the DNA matching of the persons who have been killed. I would like to say that this was very complicated and tough task. There were many hindrances. So big country, large unpopulated desert area and very cruel terrorist organisation! When this area was freed, there were only heap of dead bodies. It was very difficult to locate dead bodies of our own people. For this I would like to thank Gen. V.K. Singh. He suffered all difficulties and surpassed all impediments. I had stated that I would not declare anyone dead without proof. He brought the proof. I would thank the Government of Iraq for acceding to our request. I would like to thank Martyr's Foundation for using Deep Penetrating Radar for search, digging of the mount, exhumation of dead bodies, taking them to Baghdad for investigation. I would like to thank our Prime Minister for allowing the search to continue with patience for three years. He never let me demoralised.

We do not confine ourselves to declaration only. Gen. V. K. Singh will go to Iraq. He will bring their dead bodies not only with their names and passport numbers but alongwith the certificates that their DNA is matching with the sample provided and these are the same people. Aircraft will land in Amritsar as 31 dead people belong to Punjab and 4 to Himachal Pradesh, and their dead bodies will be handed over to their relatives and then Aircraft will go to Patna for handing over the dead bodies to their relatives. Thereafter, he will go to Kolkata for handing over the dead bodies in West Bengal.

Getting dead body of a missing one provides consolation to some extent to the bereaved family. I had stated that I would close the case with solid proof. I would like to say that when the dead bodies will be handed over to their relatives, somehow with the agony and grief they will accept the fact and close the case. I wish that this House to pay homage to them by observing silence in their memory and console the bereaved families. Though they could not get

their children alive after three years of search, at least they are able to access to their dead bodies.

(One Minute's silence was observed as a mark of respect to the memory of the departed.)

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Secretary-General.

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