

SITUATION IN PUNJAB -1

Introduction

1. Every one of us is concerned about what has been happening in Punjab. It requires our serious reappraisal of the whole situation and the factors that brought the Nation at the most crucial point where no other option was left except calling in the Army to restore law and order. We do not propose to discuss the political issues which have been debated for a long time, but we are concerned with those elements which have been causing irreparable damage to the life and property of our innocent people. The time has come when we have to think seriously and consider the circumstances which culminated into the present tragic situation.

Brief Background

2. The Government have been discussing over a long period with the Shiromani Akali Dal the various demands raised by them. The demands fall into three categories—

- (a) those which concern the Sikh Community as a religious group;
- (b) those which relate to the State of Punjab vis-a-vis other States; and
- (c) those which relate to certain general issues.

3. Out of these, the religious demands have already been accepted. Sincere efforts were being made to settle river waters issue, territorial disputes and State-Centre relationship. In course of negotiations, the Government sought assurance from the Akali Dal that religious places would not be used for storage of arms or for harbouring those who are wanted by law enforcement authorities. Contrary to these efforts, violence escalated and terrorists enjoyed complete control over the Temple Complex and used it for providing shelter to criminals, murderers, smugglers and enemy agents. It has now been established beyond doubt that it was also used for storing and manufacturing of weapons and training of terrorists.

4. In this process, it is also significant to note that the demands of Akali Dal knew no end. Whenever the settlement appeared feasible, they always came out with fresh demands like the Amendment of Article 25 of the Constitution. The terrorists, in the mean time, entrenched themselves strongly and started killing innocent people and damaging property on a large scale. The police and para-military forces were initially employed to apprehend the terrorists and restore peace but they were not able to deal with them effectively and the situation deteriorated. This was because the terrorists were well armed and motivated as evident from the stiff resistance offered by them when army started tackling the situation.

Involvement of Foreign Countries

5. In this context, it is significant to note that the involvement of foreign countries in these tragic happenings has now been established beyond doubt. The make and markings on the arms and ammunition recovered during the army action bear clear testimony to this fact.

False Rumour and Malicious Propaganda

6. Taking advantage of the prevailing situation, enemy agents are spreading false rumours and carrying out malicious propaganda against the Army. It is wrongly being said that—

- (a) The army stormed the Golden Temple.
- (b) Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takhat have been damaged.
- (c) Army personnel have revolted enmasse and so on.

The army, in fact, took up the task of removing the terrorists from the Golden Temple Complex after making a sincere appeal to the terrorists to come out. The appeal was made before entering the adjoining buildings of the complex, but it fell on deaf ears. It must be appreciated that at this juncture the army had to take action. However, the troops were given clear instructions not to fire or even aim towards the Harmandir Sahib. A set of four photographs sent to you along with the special Baatchheet testify the truth. There is not even a scratch on the Harmandir Sahib, though in this crucial process the troops had to pay a high price and suffer heavy casualties. The apprehended terrorists further confirm the design of the extremists to blow up the Akal Takhat which they could not accomplish due to timely action taken by the army. Thus the army in reality has restored the sanctity of the Harmandir Sahib defiled by the extremists and saved Akal Takhat from destruction although a certain amount of damage has been caused to it. It is however repaired. To say that army personnel have revolted is ridiculous. There have been a few cases where jawans out of sheer ignorance and as a result of malicious propaganda deserted with arms and were moving towards Punjab. They have since been apprehended.

Conclusion

7. It is a trying time for all of us. We must guard against false and malicious propaganda. The situation in Punjab is under control. Most of the extremists have been apprehended or killed. There is no cause for undue worry. Gradually the situation is returning to normal. Curfew is being lifted, transport and communications reactivated and essential commodities being provided. The army has shown once again that it is capable of discharging its duties in the national interest in keeping with its noble traditions.