

APPENDIX I

(Vide para 22 of the report)

STATEMENT BY UNION HOME MINISTER ON THE DEMAND OF PUNJABI SUBA MADE IN THE LOK SABHA ON SEPTEMBER 6, 1965

Sir,

It is natural for the House to be concerned about the recent developments arising from Sant Fateh Singh's intention to fast from September 10 to achieve Punjabi Suba and to immolate himself on September 25, if it was not conceded by then and also from Master Tara Singh's repeated demand for an "independent and self-determined status within the Indian Union".

2. I have already laid on the Table of the House the record note of Prime Minister's talks with Sant Fateh Singh. As has been made clear by the Prime Minister both during his talks with Sant Fateh Singh and in his speech in Rajya Sabha on August 24, no efforts would be spared by Government to remove the sense of grievance from the mind of Sant Fateh Singh in regard to the language question and the functioning of regional committee. The Prime Minister had also assured Sant Fateh Singh that the question regarding the regional formula, sacrilege cases, amendment of the Gurudwara Act and other points would be looked into and that if there was any shortcoming or deficiency, he would see to it that things were put right. The Government is also prepared to associate Sant Fateh Singh's representative with any inquiry that may be instituted or with any other step that may be taken to remove his complaints.

3. It may be recalled that in recent years, several steps have been taken to arrive at an amicable arrangement for meeting the needs of the Punjabi speaking region and the Hindi speaking region of the Punjab State. Controversy over the reorganisation of the Punjab State was it was thought laid at rest in 1956, when the Government of India evolved the Regional Committee scheme in consultation with the Akalis. The demand for a Punjabi-speaking State was, however, taken up again and on this issue Sant Fateh Singh entered upon an indefinite fast on the 18th December, 1960. The late Prime Minister, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, made a statement on the 8th January, 1961, in the course of which he declared, "The Punjab itself is, broadly speaking, a Punjabi Suba as it is with Punjabi as the dominant language there. It is true that some parts of the Punjab have Hindi; but essentially Punjabi is the dominant language and it should be encouraged in every way".

4. Sant Fateh Singh gave up his fast on receiving the following telegram from Master Tara Singh:

“Am satisfied with today’s speech of the Prime Minister at Sardarnagar. Request you to break your fast. It fulfils the requirements of your vow”.

The agitation was then withdrawn.

5. The demand for a Punjabi Suba has now been revived by Sant Fateh Singh. It seems to stem mainly from a sense of dissatisfaction with the manner in which the previous undertakings have been implemented. The Prime Minister’s assurance that effective steps will be taken for the redress of grievances and the full implementation of arrangements agreed upon earlier should meet the needs of the situation. Sant Fateh Singh, however, persists in the demand for the creation of the Punjabi Suba. I may submit that recourse to fasts and counter fasts to exert pressure on the Government to accept or reject a demand should be avoided; otherwise it will not be possible for the Government to carry on normal administration and discharge its responsibilities to the people. A considerable element of the population in the Punjab insists that a separate State should be formed for the Punjabi-speaking area on the linguistic basis. There is also a considerable section which is strongly opposed to the adoption of such a course. Strong sentiments of a section of the people have, however, to be given consideration.

6. The whole question can be examined afresh with an open mind. Government would be prepared to have further talks on the subject. We may hope that a cooperative solution will be discovered based on goodwill and a reasoned approach. The final test of the good of the various sections in conformity with the national interest should prevail. In these discussions, all unresolved matters can be taken up. For this, an atmosphere of goodwill and amity should be created.

7. I would urge that the present is not the time for doing anything which may deflect the energy of the Government and the people from the task of facing the very serious threat to our security from across our borders. As the House is aware, our security forces are engaged in dealing with the armed infiltrators from Pakistan and attacks by Pakistani armed forces and we are facing a situation with very serious possibilities. I hope, the House will join me in an appeal to Sant Fateh Singh to give up the proposed action and to join in the mighty effort the country is putting forth for thwarting Pakistan’s aggression and the preservation of the integrity and independence of India.

8. It is not necessary for me to say much about the stand of Master Tara Singh. No demand which impinges in any manner on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country can possibly be given any consideration. I am confident that all the people of India, and among them Sikhs have a notable and honoured place, will whole-heartedly endorse Government’s views on this vital matter.