

[22 March, 2001]

RAJYA SABHA

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI KRISHNAMRAJU): (a) Yes. Sir.

(b) India and Sri Lanka agreed that the SAARC Standing Committee would meet in the second half of May subject to the convenience of all member countries.

(c) and (d) The two sides noted with satisfaction the progress in the implementation of the India — Sri Lankan Free Trade Agreement, which took effect from March 1, 2000 and reiterated their commitment to the realisation of the full potential of the Agreement. The Sri Lankan President apprised the Indian leadership of the current status of the process to initiate talks to end the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and to pursue constitutional reforms. India reiterated its consistent support for the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and for a negotiated political settlement of the conflict, as the only way to restore lasting peace which would meet the aspirations of all elements of Sri Lankan society.

Indian passports in possession of ISI agents

† 2925. SHRI BACHANI LEKHRAJ: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Indian passports have been found in possession of the terrorists and the people connected with the ISI;

(b) if so, whether Government have conducted so far any investigation in this matter;

(c) if so, the number of such cases brought into the notice and the action taken by Government in this regard; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI KRISHNAMRAJU): (a) to (c) There have been six cases where passports were issued to

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

applicants who were suspected of being ISI agents/terrorists. Investigations have been carried out and action taken by the Government *inter alia* includes arrest of six passport office employees, three police personnel, two postal employees and nineteen other people.

(d) Does not arise.

Recognition of India as Regional Superpower

2926. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA:

SHRI SWARAJ KAUSHAL:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to refer to answer to Unstarred Question 751 given in the Rajya Sabha on 1st March, 2001 and state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the new Government of USA has also gone on record to State, that India should be recognised as a regional superpower; and

(b) if so, what has been Government's response on this important statement?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI KRISHNAMRAJU): (a) In his statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 17th January 2001, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said,

"We must deal more wisely with the world's largest democracy. Soon to be the most populous country in the world, India has the potential to help keep peace in the vast Indian Ocean area and its periphery".

(b) Government has consistently maintained that India has vital stake in, and a shared responsibility for, the maintenance of peace and stability in the region. In the Vision Statement issued in New Delhi in March 2000, the two sides agreed to engage in regular consultations on, and work together and with others for, strategic stability in Asia and beyond. Government is engaged in bilateral dialogue with several countries, including