

155. [The questioner (Shri K. L. N. Prasad) was absent. For answer, vide col. 35 infra.]

*267. [The questioner (Shri Kalyan Roy) was absent. For answer vide cols. 35-36 infra.]

*268. [The questioners (Shri Krishan Kant, Dr. Z. A. Ahmad, Shri Gulam Nubi Untoo, Dr. D.P. Singh, Shri Chandra Shekhar) were absent. For answer vide col. 37 infra.]

CONFERENCE OF THE HEADS OF THE MISSIONS

269. SHRI CHANDRAMOULI JAGARLAMUDI: SHRI K.C. PANDA: SHRI SUNDAR MANI PATEL: SHRI LOKANATH MISRA : y SHRI K.L.N. PRASAD: SHRI SITARAM KESRI: SHRI M.K. MOHTA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a conference of Indian Heads of Missions in the South East Asian countries was recently held in New Delhi; and

(b) if so, the details of the discussions held at this meeting ?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SARDAR SWARAN SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir. From the 11th to 15th April, 1972.

(b) Among the subjects discussed at the meeting were the situation in the region country-wis? with emphasis on India's bilateral relations with each country in the political, economic, technical, scientific and cultural fields. The policies of the Great Powers towards this region, the situation in the Indian Ocean and the possibility of an international agreement or convention to ensure respect for the

fThe question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Lokanath Misra.

sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the countries of this region were discussed. The prospects for regional economic cooperation and trade and transit agreements were also reviewed.

SHRI LOKANATH MISRA: May I know which were the countries that participated in discussions in this Conference?

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA: Not countries but representatives.

SARDAR SWARAN SINGH: India alone participated in this because these are Indian Ambassadors serving in other countries.

MR. CHAIRMAN: India participated with India !

SHRI LOKANATH MISRA: lam sorry...

MR. CHAIRMAN: He means to say which representatives.

SHRI LOKANATH MISRA: No.no. I wanted to put the question—Which were the Missions of India from which our representatives participated in this Conference ?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now the question is clear.

SARDAR SWARAN SINGH: Our representatives in all the countries of South-East Asia, starting from Burma right up to Tokyo—all the representatives in this region—were present. Besides these, our last High Commissioner in Pakistan, our High Commissioners in Bangla Desh and Ceylon and our Ambassador in Nepal and also our Ambassador in Afghanistan were also invited to participate in this.

SHRI M. K. MOHTA: May I ask the hon. Minister whether the idea of collective security in the region was discussed in this Conference and what exactly were the proposals in respect of collective security and what are the details that came out as a result of such discussions ?

SARDAR SWARAN SINGH: I would not say that any proposal as such about the collective security of the region was discussed. There is no doubt that the idea of security of the countries in this region was discussed. The idea as to what is the best way to ensure the security and sovereignty of the countries in this region was discussed but no proposal as such about the collective security was discussed. As a matter of fact, there is no such proposal in the field.

SHRI M. K. MOHTA: My question has been bypassed. What I wanted know is not only the general question of security of the region but the idea of collective security, whether that was discussed, or not and if that was discussed in what from the conclusions came out of that Conference.

SARDAR SWARAN SINGH: I have already said that, my reply is in the negative.

SHRI BABUBHAI M. CHINAI: May I know from the hon. Minister as to what steps the Government has taken or proposes to take with a view to making our Embassies more commercial-minded, so that our interests are better served, and also whether there was any complaint that the economic counterparts of our Embassies have not been working satisfactorily with the result that our trade with those countries has suffered?

SARDAR SWARAN SINGH: We attach a great deal of importance to the strengthening of economic relations with all countries, particularly in this region because this region is in our neighbourhood. During the course of this Conference, the steps that have to be taken to strengthen economic relations including trade, were discussed at great length. A meeting was also arranged with the representatives of the 'commercial community' also.

SHRI HARSH DEO MALAVIYA : The hon. Minister has said that among the questions discussed was a question relating to the Indian Ocean. The view that the Indian Ocean should be the 'Ocean of Peace' has been advanced by our representatives at many forums

in the world. May I ask the hon. Minister whether it is in the mind of the Government of India to call a Conference of representatives of countries around the Indian Ocean to secure that the Indian Ocean remains an Ocean of Peace and free from nuclear armaments? Will the Government support such a move at an official level or if a Conference is held at a non-official level?

SARDAR SWARAN SINGH : Sir, we will broadly be in favour of such a move and in a matter like this a great deal of probing has to be done before we actually make any formal proposal. In principle, I do accept that there is an advantage in the countries surrounding the Indian Ocean to keep in touch with one another or even to meet formally so that the objective of ensuring that the Indian Ocean remains an area of peace is achieved, but I am not quite certain as to whether a non-official Conference will be of any great use in this respect.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Last question. Mr. Bhupesh Gupta.

SHRI BHUPESH GUPTA : At such meetings, generally I think a kind of briefing also takes place with the Heads of the Indian Missions. May I know, Sir, whether at this particular Conference, apart from spelling out vaguely an idea of some kind of security for the region, the Government did consider or the representatives of the Government of India here did make any proposal for consideration by the Heads of the Missions about getting these nations together for collective security, protection of sovereignty and all that? Were any such concrete proposals made with a view to informing the public opinion and the Governments of the countries in which our Heads of the Missions are there? I would like to know whether such a thing has been done.

SARDAR SWARAN SINGH : This matter was discussed in considerable detail and the views would certainly be conveyed to the countries concerned. Already I have a feeling that there is a great deal of awareness about the necessity of taking steps to ensure the security and sovereignty of the countries in the region.