

(f) if not, the steps taken by the Government on the issue of joining the Indian Ocean Rim ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI RAMAKANT D. KHALAP) : (a) Yes, Sir. The first meeting of the Council of Ministers held in Mauritius in March 1997 adopted the Charter and formally launched the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC)

(b) The objectives and purpose of IOR-ARC include:-

(i) To promote the sustained growth and balanced development of the region and of the Member States, and to create common ground for regional economic cooperation;

(ii) To focus on those areas of economic cooperation which provide maximum opportunities to develop shared interests and reap mutual benefits. Towards this end, to formulate and implement projects for economic cooperation relating to trade facilitation, promotion and liberalisation; promotion of foreign investment, scientific and technological exchanges, and tourism, movement of natural persons and service providers; and development of infrastructure and human resources;

(iii) To encourage close interaction of trade and industry, academic institutions, scholars and the peoples of the Member States;

(iv) To strengthen cooperation and dialogue among Member States in international fora on global economic issues.

(v) To promote cooperation in development of human resources, particularly through closer linkages among training institutions, universities and other specialised institutions of the Member States

(c) The IOR-ARC consists of fourteen members, viz. Australia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Singapore, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Tanzania and Yemen. A 'pilot mechanism' for coordination, servicing and monitoring implementation of policy decisions as well as for administrative matters is to be set up in Mauritius.

(d) India had successfully coordinated the preparation of the IOR-ARC Charter. Presently, India is coordinating the implementation of four economic cooperation projects included in the Work Programme of IOR-ARC, viz. (i) Indian Ocean Rim Business Centre and IORNET; (ii) Trade Promotion Programme and IOR Trade Fair In India; (iii) IOR Chair in Indian Ocean Studies and Associate Fellows; and (iv) Investment facilitation and Promotion. At the same time, India will also be participating in the economic cooperation projects being coordinated by other IOR-ARC member countries.

(e) and (f) No, Sir. Cooperation within IOR-ARC is without prejudice to rights and obligations entered into by

Member States within the framework of other economic and trade cooperation arrangements. It is not a substitute for, but seeks to reinforce, be complementary to and consistent with bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral obligations of member States.

Hydrocarbon Reserve

6136. DR. C. SILVERA:

SHRI A.G.S. RAMBABU:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether some recent survey undertaken in the north-east part of the Bay of Bengal has indicated huge reserves of hydrocarbon;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the Government propose to get scientific data of the survey analysed in the interest of the country; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) to (d) Under the Joint Venture Speculative Survey Programme, DGH in association with Western Geophysical Co., USA, has carried out 2D seismic surveys together with gravity and magnetic surveys in the deep water areas of Eastern offshore of India including Andaman offshore. The processing of the data is currently under progress and interpretation work will commence soon immediately after completion of processing.

[translation]

Fate of Hostages

6137. KUMARI UMA BHARATI :

SHRI ANAND RATNA MAURYA :

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government are aware of the statements issued by the relatives and well wishers of the foreign hostages, who were made hostages around two years back, in which they have stated that Pakistan know about the abductors of their near and dear ones;

(b) if so, whether the Government have held any talk with Pakistan to get the foreign hostages freed; and

(c) if so, the details thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES AND PENSIONS AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRI. S.R. BALASUBRAMONIYAN) : (a) Government are aware of reports in the media in this regard.

(b) and (c) The Government has, through diplomatic