

(b) whether Government are taking steps for releasing the pay for December, 1979 to staff?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH (SHRI NIHAR RANJAN LASKAR): (a) The pay of such of the employees who went on strike was withheld in accordance with the principle of 'No-Work-No-Pay'.

(b) No.

**Deaths due to Silicosis by Silica Cutters Engaged in Slate Pencil Mining**

1284. DR. VASANT KUMAR PANDIT: Will the Minister of HEALTH be pleased to state:

(a) whether the attention of Government have been drawn to the increasing number of deaths due to Silicosis by Silica cutters engaged in Slate-pencil Mining;

(b) whether Government have carried out any survey in the District of Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh, where the largest deposits of Silica are being exploited for making Slate-pencils; and

(c) if so, what immediate steps Government have taken to prevent death of over 600 persons now affected by Silicosis?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH (SHRI NIHAR RANJAN LASKAR): (a) to (c). The required information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the Sabha.

**Steps Taken to Defuse Tension in South Asia**

1285. SHRI CHIRANJI LAL SHARMA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the steps taken or proposed to be taken to defuse the present tension in South Asia; and

(b) the results thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI P. V. NARASIMHA RAO): (a) Government of India have initiated and continued, through diplomatic channels and through bilateral contacts, the process of consultation with a large number of countries with a view to finding ways and means of defusing the situation in the South-Asian region and for moving towards creation of conditions that would facilitate a political solution.

(b) Our consultations have convinced us that the Indian view point is well appreciated. An important outcome has been that there has been no escalation in the situation in the past few months. The initial over-reaction of some countries appears to have been modified and there seems to be a realisation that a militaristic response is not the answer. Although there is no plan of action or outline of a solution visible so far, there is general agreement that there has to be a negotiated political settlement and in the meantime an observance of restraint by all concerned.

**India's mediation between USA and USSR on Afghanistan Issue**

1286. SHRI P. RAJAGOPAL NAIDU: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are mediating between U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. to diffuse Afghanistan issue; and

(b) if so, the results thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI P. V. NARASIMHA RAO): (a) No Sir.

(b) Does not arise.