

Mining of Polymetallic Nodules

5135. SHRI FRANCISCO SARDINHA : Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government have sought an international collaboration for seabed mining for polymetallic nodules in the Indian Ocean Region;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES AND PENSIONS AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (BANKING, REVENUE AND INSURANCE) (SHRI KADAMBUR M.R. JANARTHANAN) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), Chennai, a technical arm of the Department of Ocean Development (DOD) has entered into an agreement with University of Siegen, Germany, for collaboration for technology development in the field of deep seabed mining of polymetallic nodules.

The collaboration agreement entered in January 1998, envisages the following :

- (i) Refurbishing and modifying an existing crawler with necessary subsystems, control and lifting and other accessories to demonstrate shallow bed mining up to 500m depth in the open sea in the Indian sea water.
- (ii) Transfer of technology relating to seabed mining by generating a detailed technical report for establishing a deep seabed mining system of 25,000 tonnes/year capacity of polymetallic nodules from the potential mine site at Central Indian Ocean Basin.

The duration of the project is two years at an estimated cost of Rs. 16.09 crores.

(c) Does not arise.

Economic Understanding with Neighbouring Countries

5136. SHRI RAVINDRA KUMAR PANDEY : Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government are aware of the new trading bloc the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in addition to the already existing trading blocs like the European Economic Community and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) comprising the US, Mexico and Canada;

(b) if so, whether India and its South Asian neighbours are out of all these groups;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) the steps taken by the Government to forge a viable economic understanding among neighbouring countries especially the SAARC countries?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE) : (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. However, unlike the European Union (EU) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), is not a "Free Trade Agreement", and open regionalism and liberalization on a 'Most Favoured Nation' (MFN) basis, is its basic premise.

(c) India has formally indicated its interest to participate in the activities of APEC since 1991 and has more recently participated as a Guest in its Regional Energy Cooperation Working Group.

The Fifth APEC Leaders' Meeting in Vancouver held in November 1997 decided on a "10-year period of consolidation" after which membership issues would be considered. Since this effectively stalls the admission of new members for a ten-year period, no immediate steps in this regard are contemplated. However, we have adequately conveyed our interest on this to APEC as we do believe that we can make a significant contribution to the grouping while ourselves benefiting from participation in the same. It is now upto APEC members themselves to recognize the potential of India's participation.

As regards EU and NAFTA, India cannot be a member of either grouping as it does not fulfil the geographical criteria currently prescribed for members of these organisations.

Government is, however, pursuing closer and stronger trade and investment relations and economic cooperation with members of these groupings.

(d) The Government has taken tangible steps to forge viable economic partnerships with countries in our immediate and extended neighbourhood. Both in the context of SAARC and SAPTA, as well as Dialogue Partnership with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Government is actively pursuing initiatives for regional economic cooperation in significant sectors like trade, investment, tourism, science and technology, etc. Similar efforts are also being made in the context of establishing linkages under the auspices of the BBNI-GQ (Bangladesh-Bhutan-Nepal-India Growth Quadrangle), the BIMST-EC (Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation) and the IOR-ARC (Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation).