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For favour of publication

Bombay, February 5.

Mr. M. R. Masani, General Secretary of the Swatantra Party, has issued the following statement to the Press:

A spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs, while speaking to pressmen in Delhi on February 3, denied that the Union Government had given any assurance to the Prime Minister of Ceylon that India would not move her troops up to the McMahon line. When asked whether Government would take up the matter with Mrs. Bandaranaike, the Prime Minister of Ceylon, in view of her having conveyed such an assurance to Mr. Chou En-lai, the MEA spokesman said that this need not be done on the basis of a press report and that the Ministry had not seen the text of the letter from Mrs. Bandaranaike to Mr. Chou En-lai.

There are two interesting things about this statement. The first is the attempt to evade the issue raised by Mrs. Bandaranaike's letter in which she states clearly that the Prime Minister of India gave her the assurance in the presence of Mr. Ali Sabri and Mr. Ofori Atta but in the absence of any Indian officials. The question is therefore not whether the Government of India gave any such assurance but whether the Prime Minister did so.

The second point that arises is that, since the spokesman of the MEA spoke to the press, things have changed. I have sent the text of the letter to Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri, who is attending to the Ministry of External Affairs and by now it will be with the Ministry. The technical objection raised by the Ministry's spokesman to moving in the matter is thus no longer tenable. It is also worth noting that Mrs. Bandaranaike has not denied the authenticity of her letter. Since the Ministry claims that no assurance of the nature mentioned in Mrs. Bandaranaike's letter was given, it is surely up to the Government now to take this matter up with Mrs. Bandaranaike and ask her to correct herself and inform Mr. Chou En-lai accordingly. So long as this is not done, a peculiar situation will exist, namely, that Mr. Chou En-lai will be in firm possession of this assurance from our Prime Minister, while the people of India will be expected to believe that no such assurance was given. Would this not lead to a natural suspicion among our people that the true facts are being withheld from them once again, as had already happened during the occupation of Aksaichin by Chinese Communist troops when the information had been withheld from Parliament and people over a number of years, and that the Indian people are again being misled in the interest of appeasing Communist China?

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Not for publication:

*M. R. Masani*

(M. R. Masani)