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For Favour of Publication

"While the Indian people have their eyes glued to the Himalayas watching to see whether the bandits advance further into our territory, the Chinese Communist enemy is busy setting our backyard in South East Asia on fire without our Government moving even a finger to stop it", said Mr. M.R. Masani, M.P., General Secretary of the Swatantra Party, while addressing the Lions Club of Bombay this evening. "This," said the speaker, "is a part of the unfortunate legacy of neglect of our neighbours left to us from the decade of Mr. Nehru's disastrous stewardship of our international relations".

In reality the Himalayas, Laos, Viet Nam and Malaysia were, according to Mr. Masani, all sectors of the same front and it was not at all intelligent to seek to defend one sector while refusing to help in the common fight against Chinese Communist expansionism on other sectors.

Recalling how Tunku Abdul Rahman had, on the very day the Chinese Communists had attacked in NEFA in October 1962, rushed forward to express solidarity with India and offer assistance while Indonesia sat on the fence, the speaker asked whether the Indian Government's silence at this juncture, when the brave Gurkhas were fighting Indonesian infiltrators in Borneo in defence of a country nearly a fourth of whose population was of Indian origin reflected well on the honour of this country.

In Laos, where neutralism had inevitably met its nemesis as in NEFA, our Ambassador had refused to join the United States, British, Canadian, Thai and Viet Nam envoys in demanding the withdrawal of North Viet Nam communist troops which had entered Laos in breach of the Geneva Convention. It seemed that the dead hand of the past still lay heavily on the making of our foreign policy.

For fifteen years the people of India had been lulled by bad leadership into a sense of smug complacency by the oft repeated use of the mantra of non-alignment. They must now shake off this sleeping draught and wake up betimes to the danger.

"Laos and Viet Nam are not just a bone of contention between Communist China and the United States, as some people seem to imagine. The defence of South-East Asia is vital to our own survival. In failing to line up against communist expansionism we are once again, as in Tibet earlier, scuttling our own defence", concluded the speaker.

Not for publication

M.R. Masani