

[1 March, 2001]

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has confirmed detention of only 112 Indian fishermen. Pakistan has not indicated the number of civilian prisoners in its custody.

(c) to (e) The issue of early release and repatriation of Indian nationals under detention in Pakistani jails has been taken up repeatedly at all levels with the Government of Pakistan. Our efforts at securing the early release of Indian nationals in Pakistani custody will continue.

Relaxation in visa regulations

763. SHRI YADLAPATI VENKAT RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether visa regulations to Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are likely to be relaxed for tourists and businessmen;

(b) whether Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand are going to pool resources for better tapping of natural gas resources and visualising an ambitious plan for laying Singapore-Europe Highway; and

(c) if so, the details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) Yes Sir. The members of Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand (BIMST-EC) have acknowledged the need for better mobility for tourists and business people. As far as India is concerned, there is already a liberal visa policy particularly for tourism and business purposes for visitors from this region.

(b) and (c) (i) Under the sectoral cooperation in the field of energy, the focus is on natural gas infrastructure as well as new and renewable sources of energy.

(ii) Transport and communication have also been identified for cooperation among BIMST-EC member countries. Among the areas of focus in this sector would be transportation linkages among the member countries including the BIMST-EC section of the Trans-Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian Railway, so as to facilitate closer trade linkages and mutually beneficial economic cooperation.