

of the leaders of all national political parties and try to resolve this issue. That is the only solution which will pave the way for providing reservation for women. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Question Hour. Question No. 141. (*Interruptions*)...

SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT: Sir, please ask the Prime Minister to give a statement on all these things.

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH): Mr. Chairman, Sir, on the occasion of International Women's Day, I greet all the women of our country and reaffirm our Government's commitment to work steadfastly for the political, social and economic empowerment of our women.

As far as the issue of reservation in legislatures is concerned, this is a commitment which the UPA coalition has endorsed through its Common Minimum Programme. I have been working quite hard to build a broad-based consensus on this issue. Some months ago I had nearly succeeded, but at the last minute some problems arose and, therefore, we could not bring that Bill in the last session of Parliament. I wish to assure you and, through you, Sir, to all the hon. Members that I remain committed and our Government remains committed to work towards a broad-based consensus and that we will bring forward a Bill to this effect as soon as possible. Thank you.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Meeting of Indo-Pak Foreign Ministers

*141. SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India and Pakistan's Foreign Ministers met in Islamabad on the 13th January, 2007 and also at New Delhi and discussed a number of issues and signed a number of agreements;

(b) if so, the issues that were discussed;

(c) the number of agreements that have been signed;

(d) whether most of the outstanding issues of trade and visa were reached and finalized;

(e) if so, to what extent the meeting has been successful; and

(f) whether ground work for Prime Minister's visit to Pakistan has also been finalized?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (f) A Statement is placed on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) and (b) Yes. The External Affairs Minister visited Pakistan on January 13-14, 2007 to convey the invitation of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz to attend the 14th SAARC Summit to be held in New Delhi in April 2007. During his visit, EAM held bilateral talks with President Pervez Musharraf, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri. Both sides agreed to establish a committee on prisoners comprising retired judges of the superior judiciary to visit jails in the two countries and propose steps to ensure humane treatment and expedite release of prisoners who have completed their prison terms; to expedite the liberalisation of the visa regime and agreed to complete the work in February 2007; to conclude agreements which are close to finalisation including the Agreement on (a) Reducing the Risk from Accidents relating to Nuclear Weapons; (b) Speedy return of inadvertent Line Crossers; and (c) Prevention of incidents at Sea. On Siachen, both sides discussed the issue and decided that the officials would meet at an early date to address the issue. Both sides also agreed to facilitate movement of diplomats to Noida and Gurgaon in India and Taxila and Hasan Abdal in Pakistan. They also agreed that the first meeting of joint anti-terrorism mechanism would take place before the end of March 2007. Regarding Sir Creek, the officials concerned would be directed to expedite their work and the joint survey of Sir Creek would begin on 15th January 2007. Both sides also decided to launch the Fourth Round of Composite Dialogue with the Foreign Secretary talks on 13-14 March 2007. Both Ministers again met in New Delhi on February 21, 2007 as co-chairmen of India-Pak Joint Commission and reviewed the progress made by the eight Technical Level Working Committees on eight areas namely Agriculture,

Health, Science & Technology, Information, Education, IT & Telecommunications, Environment and Tourism.

(c) to (e) The Agreement on Reducing the Risk from Accidents relating to Nuclear Weapons was signed on February 21, 2007. Government have conveyed names of Indian judges for the Committee on Prisoners. Government have proposed the visit of a delegation of family members of missing defence personnel in April 2007. The Visa agreement, Agreement on Speedy return of inadvertent Line Crossers and Agreement on Prevention of incidents at Sea are being examined by Government. The Joint Survey of Sir Creek started on January 15, 2007 and its report is expected by the end of March 2007.

(f) The Prime Minister has accepted President Musharraf's invitation to visit Pakistan.

SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA: Sir, terrorism, and particularly Pakistan's role in fostering terrorist outfits, has been an area of tremendous concern. Recently, the U.S. Vice-President, Mr. Dick Cheney, visited Islamabad, and issued a stern warning to President Musharraf on dismantling the terrorist outfits and also Musharraf's support for the Taliban. In view of our extensive interest in Afghanistan, I want to ask the hon. Minister as to how this would impact us and whether the U.S. has shared any of these intelligence reports with us.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, so far as terrorism is concerned, as the hon. Member and the whole House is aware, this is a very important issue and this, in fact, stands in the way of normalisation of relationship between our two countries and exploitation of the full potentialities which exist in this sub-continent. Therefore, we are trying to resolve this issue, and this is a continuing process. Sir, last September, when our Prime Minister met President Musharraf on the eve of the Non-Aligned Summit, it was decided to set up an Anti-terror Mechanism. Thereafter, the composite dialogue, which was suspended, as a sequence to the Mumbai blasts, resumed. So far as the information of the hon. member is concerned, it is true that certain other countries are exercising their influences over Pakistan to ensure that terrorist outfits, which are located there, should be dismantled, and this is also our demand. As early as 6th January, 2004, in the Joint Statement issued by the then Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and President Musharraf, President Musharraf made a

firm commitment that the land of Pakistan will not be allowed to be used by the terrorists. So far as the Talibans are concerned, there is no two opinion on it that the Talibans should be contained, and they produce nothing but hatred and terror. Therefore, efforts should be made to contain them.

SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA: Before putting my second supplementary, I asked the hon. Minister as to whether the U.S. has shared any information with us.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, certain information cannot be shared with the hon. Members. She is fully aware of it.

SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA: Sir, my second supplementary is this. On liberalisation of visa regime, have any proposals been made about 'group tourist visas' are being considered? Also, I would like to know whether both Governments are looking at multi-entry visas for business travellers to encourage trade and commerce.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: In fact, this issue also came up during my visit, and while having discussions, I requested my counterpart that Pakistan's response to our visa proposals should be expedited. Thereafter, we got a response from Pakistan. But, I am afraid, instead of liberalising it, it is going to be more constricted. Therefore, we have suggested that particularly for businessmen, professionals, students, journalists and certain other categories, this should be liberalised. And, we are carrying on the negotiations with them.

SHRI YASHWANT SINHA: Sir, my question relates to trade. As we are aware, the South Asia Free Trade Agreement came into force on 1st January this year. And, despite the coming into force of SAFTA, Pakistan has not thought it fit to liberalise its trade with India, especially, Indian exports to Pakistan. Unlike the understanding reached in the past, they still go by the Positive List rather than by the Negative List. They have not extended the Most Favoured Nation treatment to India. And the statements which emanate from Pakistan, from responsible quarters like the Pakistani Commerce Minister, suggest that Pakistan is not prepared to adhere to the terms of SAFTA as far as India is concerned and that Pakistan would continue to insist that India should remove its non-tariff restrictions first.

Now, my question to the hon. External Affairs Minister is: what are the non-tariff restrictions that India has, specifically for Pakistan exports to India and did he take up the issue during his visit to Islamabad and, if he did, then, what was the Pakistani response to the implementation of the provisions of SAFTA?

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, so far as Pakistan's response is concerned, it is almost known to everybody. They also do not hesitate to articulate it. Take, for example, the non-extension of the Most Favoured Nations treatment, which every country under the WTO, or, even under the old GATT, is obliged to extend to those who are members of the old GATT or the WTO. But it has not been extended; it is a fact.

So far as operationalisation of SAFTA is concerned, there have been several rounds of discussion. It was discussed in last August at SAARC Council of Ministers' meeting. At the fringe of the General Assembly Session, I myself took it up with the SAARC Ministers. Thereafter, on 26th February, at the SAARC Ministerial Meeting, our Commerce Minister participated and tried to resolve this issue but, unfortunately, it has not been possible to resolve it.

Currently, Pakistan is engaged in trade with India on the basis of a Positive List. But there has been one positive development too; they have expanded the number of categories within this List, from 773 to additional 300. So, a large number of items have come within the Positive List itself. But, so far as tariff reduction is concerned, there has not been any movement. And the Joint Statement which has been issued after the Ministerial Meeting, is known; the Positive List still remains; now, it is for us to decide whether we take certain action unilaterally or not.

So far as non-tariff restrictions are concerned, I would like to assure the hon. Member — and he is fully aware of it because he dealt with the Finance Ministry for a pretty long time — that there is no Pakistan-specific non-tariff barrier, so far as India is concerned.

श्री अमर सिंह: सभापति जी, माननीय विदेश मंत्री जी ने अभी-अभी वाणिज्य और व्यापार की बात की। इस संदर्भ में मैं आपके माध्यम से उनसे यह निवेदन करना चाहता हूँ कि World Bank की एक्सपर्ट कमेटी द्वारा जम्मू और कश्मीर की Chenab नदी पर प्रस्तावित Baglihar Power Project की अनुमति दी गई थी। इस संबंध में जनवरी, 2007 में इस्लामाबाद में विदेश मंत्रियों की

जो बैठक हुई थी, उसमें इस प्रोजेक्ट को कार्यान्वित करने के संबंध में क्या कोई निर्णय हुआ या कोई चर्चा हुई, अगर हुई, तो उसका क्या नतीजा निकला और क्या इस संबंध में कोई कार्यवाही हुई है?

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, we are encouraging trade between the two parts of Jammu and Kashmir and we have suggested that, specially, the local products should be allowed to be traded between the two parts without any restriction.

SHRI AMAR SINGH: I am asking about the Baglihar Power Project, Sir.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: I did not discuss that with them.

PROF. P.J. KURIEN: Sir, my question is about Indian prisoners languishing in Pakistani jails. In his reply, the hon. Minister has said that a committee of judges is being appointed to find out whether humane treatment is being meted out to prisoners there. इसका मतलब है कि अभी तक कुछ नहीं किया गया है, यह कमेटी अभी इसको देखेगी। Recently, I read a newspapers report about an Indian pilot, Muralidharan. According to the Indian Army reports, he is dead. But that Indian pilot who fought the war in 1971 is alive in Pakistan jail. This report came in newspapers. I don't know whether it has come to the notice of the hon. Minister. If it has come to his notice, then I would like to know his reaction. Sir, this leads me to put a question. Is it that the Government is not having the list of Indians languishing in Pakistan jails? If you have the list, if you have the correct list, have you got the details of them? If you have the details, what steps you have taken and you are taking to see that these prisoners who are in Pakistan are released?

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, so far as the PoW is concerned, we have given to Pakistan authorities from time to time, over a number of years, about 74 persons' list. But Pakistan has flatly denied on each occasion stating that there is not a single prisoner of war in any of the jails of Pakistan. Even during my talk with President Musharraf, this time on 13-14 January, this issue was raised. The hon. Members have confused between two issues. These two are separate. So far as the PoW is concerned, Pakistan has denied this time and on earlier occasions that there is no PoW there. Therefore, we suggested that there is a persistent demand from the relations of these families that they would like to go and visit the Pakistan jails and satisfy themselves. President Musharraf has

agreed to receive a small delegation of Indian families. So, we have decided to send a group sometimes in April. Pakistan Government has agreed to provide facilities. They can go; they can themselves verify it.

So far as appointment of the Judges' Committee is concerned, sometimes it happens and it happens on both sides, India and Pakistan, that somebody when they inadvertently cross the border, they are detained. Sometimes, even after completing the jail sentence, the prisoners are not released in time. It is applicable to a large number of fishermen who are normally detained because of their crossing to the other side in the water. So, it was decided that both sides will agree to appoint a committee consisting of the retired superior judges. This decision was taken on 13-14 January when we held our talks. We have to identify the person. The Committee has just been appointed, and surely, it will take some time to work. They will visit the jails of both Pakistan and India; will make recommendations to the Government concerned to improve the jail conditions and will also examine whether there is unusual delay in releasing the prisoners who have completed their jail sentence.

PROF. P.J. KURIEN: Have you got any information on that particular issue?

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: So far as Muralidharan is concerned, this has been debated, at least, half-a-dozen times.

PROF. P.J. KURIEN: I want to know about Muralidharan's case.

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: I am talking of Mr. Muralidharan. Even yesterday, I replied to another Member's question in Lok Sabha. He was one of those 74 persons who are listed there, but Pakistan Government has flatly denied it.

KUMARI NIRMALA DESHPANDE: Sir, it is common knowledge that terrorism has its victims not only in India but in Pakistan also, and Pakistan's President, General Musharraf was also attacked thrice by the terrorists. So, what is being done to fight this menace of terrorism jointly? ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, as I mentioned, we have established a Joint Anti-Terror Mechanism headed by Additional Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs in both countries. The first meeting has taken

place yesterday and the day before. They have decided about the parameters of the functioning of this Joint Anti-Terror Mechanism. It has also been decided that they would meet quarterly, exchange information, and on the basis of the information what action is being taken by the countries concerned will also be reviewed. This is an initiative which we have taken just now and let us see how does it act and what the outcome of it is.

श्रीमती सुषमा स्वराज: धन्यवाद सभापति जी। सभापति जी, मैं मंत्री महोदय से जानना चाहती हूँ कि क्या इस बातचीत के दौरान पाकिस्तान ने भारत पर यह इल्जाम भी लगाया है कि भारत बलूचिस्तान में आतंकवादी गतिविधियों को समर्थन दे रहा है, क्या खुद पाकिस्तान द्वारा जम्मू-काश्मीर में चलायी जा रही आतंकवादी गतिविधियों से यह ध्यान बंटाने की कोशिश नहीं है और क्या भारत के उत्तर से पाकिस्तान संतुष्ट है या वह अंतर्राष्ट्रीय मंचों पर इस नए विषय को अब उठाता रहेगा?

SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE: Sir, this type of allegations are being brought by Pakistan from time to time. Even when we set up some consulates in Afghanistan, they say that there is no adequate business between India and Afghanistan, so why they are having consulates. We clearly pointed out to them and it is known to the international community that India is engaged heavily in the construction activities in Afghanistan by construction of roads, construction of Parliament building, construction of power projects and some of these consulates look after these construction activities and they are not engaged in meddling with what is happening on the other side of the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. So far as involvement of Indian agencies in Baluchistan is concerned, yesterday itself it was denied and today also I am going to categorically deny this allegation that neither any Indian agency nor any Indian consulate is involved in any type of activities against Pakistan.

Facilitation of AC installation in Government quarters

*142. SHRI MOTIUR RAHMAN: Will the MINISTER OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether the residents in type II and III Government houses in Delhi have demanded modification of window designs to facilitate installation of air conditioners to meet the onslaught of summer season and to fight the breeding of dengue mosquitoes in desert coolers;