

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) and (b) Yes. The case is currently being tried at the Federal Court in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Our Mission in Abuja, through the lawyer engaged, is seeking an expeditious hearing in the case.

Negotiation on fishermen with Sri Lanka

817. DR. E. M. SUDARSANA NATCHIAPPAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Ministry has negotiated with Sri Lanka to customarily allow the fishermen from Tamil Nadu to use the Sri Lankan waters further affirmed by the Memorandum of Understanding between two countries which has settled in three round talks of both countries' fishermen and officials taken place from 2010 to 2014; and

(b) if so, the barriers in bringing back 55 boats seized by Sri Lanka and stopping recurring arrests of Indian fishermen by Sri Lanka?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) and (b) Government attaches the highest importance to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen. As soon as reports of apprehension of Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan authorities are received, Government, through diplomatic channels, immediately takes up the matter with Government of Sri Lanka to secure their early release and repatriation along with their vessels. The number of fishermen apprehended by Sri Lankan Navy in 2012 was 197, in 2013 it was 676, in 2014 it was 787 and in 2015 was 454. Due to efforts made, all these fishermen have been released and repatriated. Government remains engaged with the Government of Sri Lanka to secure the expeditious release and repatriation of 27 Indian fishermen and 79 vessels which are currently in Sri Lankan custody; India has 9 Sri Lankan fishermen and 13 boats in its custody.

Seven rounds of talks have been held between the Fishermen's Associations of India and Sri Lanka (May, 2004, April, 2010, March, 2011, Jan., 2012, Jan., 2014, May, 2014 and the last round at Chennai on March 24, 2015). However, no understanding was reached.

Talks with Pakistan despite tension

†818. SHRI NARESH AGRAWAL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that despite of tension with Pakistan, Government is considering to continue talks; and

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) if so, the reasons therefor and the change in the stand of Pakistan by the visit of India's Prime Minister to Pakistan and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) and (b) The Government is committed to working towards a normal relationship with Pakistan by addressing all outstanding issues through bilateral peaceful dialogue. Following talks between National Security Advisors of India and Pakistan in Bangkok on 6 December 2015, which focused *inter alia* on peace and security, terrorism and tranquility along the Line of Control, and the express assurance by Pakistan to take steps for expediting the Mumbai Terror Attack trial underway in Pakistan, both sides agreed on 9 December 2015 to a Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue on all outstanding issues. Leadership of Pakistan viewed positively the gesture of Prime Minister in briefly stopping over at Lahore on 25 December.

In the aftermath of the Pathankot attack on 2-4 January 2016, it was conveyed to Pakistan at the highest level that it must take firm and immediate action against the organizations and individuals in Pakistan responsible for and linked to the attack. After a series of high level meetings in Pakistan chaired by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Government of Pakistan stated on 13 January 2016 that based on initial investigation in Pakistan and the information provided (by India), several individuals belonging to Jaish-e- Mohammad (JeM) – implicated in the Pathankot attack – were apprehended and offices of the organization were also being traced and sealed. It was also mentioned that the Government of Pakistan would send a Special Investigation Team (SIT), in consultation with Government of India. On 18 February 2016 First Information Report was filed by Pakistani authorities in the Pathankot attack case against unknown persons. Sartaj Aziz, the Foreign Policy Advisor to Prime Minister of Pakistan, told an Indian TV channel recently that according to reports by Pakistan's agencies, the chief of JeM Maulana Masood Azhar was placed in protective custody in Pakistan.

Crimes committed under 498A

819. SHRI PALVAI GOVARDHAN REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what are the reasons that Indians committing offences under Section 498A and fleeing foreign countries and also committing offences in foreign land remains scot free without punishment;

(b) if so, what steps Government of India contemplates to take to protect the harassed women and bringing such elements to book and face trial according to our laws;