

professionals, including under the H1-B visa programme. The Government has emphasized that Indian skilled professionals have contributed to the growth and development of the U.S. economy and have helped the U.S. retain its competitive edge and innovation advantage. They are a big stakeholder in India-U.S. relations and their backward linkages to India have helped U.S. businesses.

Restrictions on migration to gulf countries

807. DR. PRADEEP KUMAR BALMUCHU: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that Government is imposing restrictions on migration to gulf countries, in view of problems being faced by Indians there;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) the steps taken/being taken by Government to bring the already migrated Indians back to India; and
- (d) the details regarding the number of people benefited by such steps?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) and (b) No. However, Indian nationals are advised not to travel to Yemen in the Gulf region in view of the security situation.

In addition, the Government has also taken further measures to safeguard the interests of Indian female workers migrating to ECR countries in view of complaints of exploitation and harassment of domestic sector workers by unscrupulous agents and employers in the Gulf countries. As per extant guidelines, the minimum age of ECR category female workers proceeding for overseas employment to ECR countries is 30 years. Their emigration for overseas employment is permitted only through the six designated state run recruitment agencies or through the Foreign Employer registered on e-Migrate system. In case of Foreign Employer, attestation of work contract by the Indian Mission in the destination country and submission of a bank guarantee of US \$ 2500 is mandatory before the emigration clearance is granted by the office of Protector of Emigrants.

(c) and (d) The Government is monitoring the situation arising from ongoing economic downturn in the Gulf countries and is working in close coordination with the Governments in Gulf States towards extending all possible assistance to Indian nationals abroad. Presently, a section of Indian workers facing difficulties in two major Saudi

companies namely, Saudi Oger and the Saad Group are returning back to India. The process is nearing completion and 4830 Indian workers have returned so far. The Saudi authorities are extending necessary support to the affected Indian workers of these companies including in waiver of fines on *Iqama* (resident permit) related violations, providing exit visas and one way return tickets to India as well as transfer of sponsorship, wherever possible, on *gratis* basis.

Trade through South China Sea

808. SHRI V. VIJAYASAI REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether more than 50 per cent of India's trade passes through South China Sea;

(b) whether any assessment has been made by the Ministry in view of the recent judgement of the International Court of Arbitration and subsequent position taken by China on the South China Sea;

(c) if so, how India would have a smooth sail as far as navigation over flight and unimpeded commerce, through South China Sea;

(d) whether any consultation between India and China have been held in the recent bilateral meeting between our PM and Chinese Premier; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) to (c) South China Sea is a major waterway and over US\$ 5 trillion trade passes through the sea lanes in this region. As per information available, over 55% of India's trade passes through South China Sea and Malacca Straits. Peace and stability in the region is of great significance to India. India undertakes various activities, including cooperation in oil and gas sector, with littoral states of South China Sea.

The Tribunal constituted under Annex VII to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in the arbitration instituted by the Republic of Philippines against the People's Republic of China delivered its Award on 12 July, 2016 clarifying issues concerning maritime entitlements in the South China Sea.

Government's position on this issue and the ruling is clear. The authority of Annex VII Tribunal and its award is recognized in Part XV of the UNCLOS itself. India's own