

(b) and (c) According to the U.S. State Department data, the total number of H-1B visas issued to Indian nationals increased from 119,952 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 to 126,692 in FY 2016 respectively, indicating an increase of 5.6%.

According to a report released by the National Foundation for American Policy, a US-based non-profit research organization, analysing the data obtained by it from the US Government, the top 7 “Indian-based companies” received 9,356 new H-1B petitions for initial employment in FY 2016, in comparison to 14,792 petitions in FY 2015.

(d) The Government of India remains closely engaged with the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Administration on this issue. There is positive recognition in the US of the contributions made by Indian skilled professionals to the growth and development of the U.S. economy as well as in helping the U.S. retain its competitive edge and innovation advantage.

Bilateral agreements with Portugal

1289. DR. PRADEEP KUMAR BALMUCHU:

SHRI DHARMAPURI SRINIVAS:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Prime Minister has recently visited Portugal and if so, the details thereof; and

(b) the details of the bilateral discussions pertaining to combating terrorism, curtailing dual taxes, nano technology, exchange of astronomical knowledge, climate study, establishment of start up industries etc., held with that country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI M. J. AKBAR): (a) and (b) Prime Minister visited Portugal on 24 June, 2017. During the visit, he held talks with Portuguese Prime Minister on a wide range of bilateral and global issues of mutual interest. The two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthen cooperation in fields of trade and investment, science and technology, culture, education, tourism and security. They also conveyed their desire to deepen bilateral and multilateral cooperation to combat terrorism and climate change. An India-Portugal Start-up Hub was launched during the visit. This would enable Start-ups, investors, incubators and entrepreneurs of both countries to

connect and collaborate with one another. During the visit, six MoUs in the fields of Nanotechnology, Culture, Space, Amendment to Double Taxation Agreement, Youth and Sports and Public Administration were signed.

Security bridges with ASEAN countries

1290. SHRI RITABRATA BANERJEE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India is building security bridges with other Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) members; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V.K. SINGH]: (a) and (b) Our partnership with ASEAN is firmly based on cooperation. In this, the foremost is Political and Security Cooperation. India has been working with ASEAN to develop an open, transparent, inclusive and evolutionary regional security architecture which would address both traditional and non-traditional security challenges. Mutually, India and ASEAN have also been working towards evolving a regional security architecture in the Asia Pacific Region that hinges on emphasising the peaceful settlement of disputes, finding collaborative solutions to emerging and non-traditional challenges, and support for the centrality of ASEAN. India will continue working with the ASEAN member countries bilaterally as well as multilaterally to maintain peace, stability, growth and prosperity in Asia and beyond.

Fishermen and boats detained by Pakistan

1291. SHRI K. R. ARJUNAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Pakistan has detained more than hundred Indian fishermen and eighteen fishing trawlers on 26th March, 2017;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government has taken up this issue with the Government of Pakistan; and

(d) if so, details thereof?