

(c) the number of fishermen and boats captured and languishing in jails of Sri Lanka, at present;

(d) the details of policy decision taken in this regard; and

(e) whether Government has any proposal to retrieve Katchatheevu back as it was ceded to Sri Lanka as per agreements of 1974 and 1976?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN): (a) to (d) Government regularly takes up the matter of early release and repatriation of Indian fishermen with the Government of Sri Lanka. This issue has been discussed at high level meetings between the two sides. It was discussed during bilateral meetings held during the visit of President of Sri Lanka to India from 30-31 May, 2019 and the visit of Prime Minister of India to Sri Lanka on 9 June, 2019.

A Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries has been set up with Sri Lanka, as a bilateral institutional mechanism to help find a long-standing solution to all fishermen issues. It has also been agreed that Ministers for Fisheries of the two countries meet every six months to review the progress. Ministers of Fisheries of both the countries have met two times, in January, 2017 in Colombo and in October, 2017 in New Delhi. Also, three rounds of JWG have been held. The first meeting of the JWG on Fisheries was held in New Delhi in December, 2016 where both sides agreed to a set of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). The 2nd and 3rd meetings of the JWG held in April, 2017 in Colombo and in October, 2017 in New Delhi, took stock of the implementation of the CBMs.

Currently, there are 5 Indian fishermen and 34 fishing vessels in Sri Lankan custody. It has been Government's constant endeavour to secure early release of the Indian fishermen and fishing boats in Sri Lankan custody.

(e) No.

### **Sending people abroad on fake passports**

†1453. SHRI LAL SINH VADODIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the business of sending people illegally to foreign countries through fake passports is growing rapidly in the country;

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) if so, whether Government proposes to take strong and effective action to prevent it; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN): (a) Attention of the Ministry has been drawn to media reports regarding attempts by people using fake travel documents to travel out of the country.

(b) and (c) Some of the measures that have been put in place by the Ministry to prevent usage of fake passports are given below:—

- (i) Issuance of machine-readable passports with improved security features and in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) guidelines issued from time to time. Machine Readable Zone (MRZ) has been included in the passports. Details available in MRZ are proving instrumental in detection of forgery in passports.
- (ii) Changing the design of Indian Passports with reverse stitching and non-tearable papers to make it more secure.
- (iii) Installation of Passport Reading Machines (PRMs) and Questionable Document Examiner (QDX) machines at International Check Posts for verifying the genuineness of the passports and detection of sophisticated forgeries in the travel documents.
- (iv) Installation of Immigration Control System (ICS) software which verifies the passport details of passengers to prevent impersonation.
- (v) Introduction of Supplementary Letter Screen Image (LSI) in passports to prevent any forgery in data pages.
- (vi) The passport database of Ministry of External Affairs has been integrated with Immigration Control System of Bureau of Immigration, which helps in detecting fake/forged Indian passports at the Immigration Counters on real time basis and strict legal action as per law is taken against persons found involved in forgery of passports.