

which should be nurtured. 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. Most recently, issues of H-1B visa were raised during the visit of the U.S. Secretary of State, Michael R. Pompeo, to India on 26 June, 2019. We have conveyed our expectation to the U.S. Administration for a non-discriminatory and predictable H-1B visa regime.

### **Relationship with SAARC countries**

3698. SHRI SASMIT PATRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the status of relations between India and the SAARC countries at present; and

(b) the measures proposed to be taken for improving relations between India and the SAARC countries during the next five years?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN): (a) and (b) India enjoys excellent bilateral relations with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. As per our 'Neighbourhood First' policy, Government is committed to developing friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all its neighbours. India is an active development partner and is engaged in several projects in these countries. Our engagement with these countries will continue to be based on a consultative, non-reciprocal and outcome-oriented approach, while focussing on delivering benefits like greater connectivity, improved infrastructure, stronger development cooperation in various sectors area, security and broader people-to-people contacts. With regards to Pakistan, the Government has conveyed that it desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan in an atmosphere free from terror, hostility and violence. The onus is on Pakistan for creating such an environment.

### **Funding of Kashmiri separatists**

3699. SHRI G. V. L. NARASIMHA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Ministry has sought any explanation from Pakistan Government about the funding received by Kashmiri separatists from Pakistan or on its behalf;

- (b) if so, the nature of communication sent;
- (c) the nature of violations committed by Pakistan by lending such financial support to Kashmiri separatists;
- (d) the response of Government of Pakistan to such communications; and
- (e) if no communications has been sent, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN): (a) to (e) The Government has, through diplomatic channels, persistently taken up with Pakistan, the issue of cross-border terrorism, including funding of secessionist and terrorist activities in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan has been asked to abide by its commitment to not allow any territory under its control to be used for terrorism against India in any manner and take credible, verifiable and irreversible steps in the matter. Pakistan is yet to demonstrate such steps.

#### **India-UAE relations**

3700. SHRI SANJAY SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the current status of India-UAE relations;
- (b) whether the meeting with Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed would result in a change in the relations between the two nations;
- (c) if so, the details thereof; and
- (d) the details of plans for action in the international sphere if any?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN): (a) to (c) India-UAE bilateral relations are deep rooted in age-old trade and cultural links and nourished by people to people contacts. In the last five years, with intensive high-level engagements, the relationship has been elevated to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'. UAE is India's third largest trading partner and fourth largest energy supplier. UAE is the first foreign country to participate in the India's 'Strategic Petroleum Reserves'.

His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed, Foreign Minister of the UAE paid an official visit on 7-9 July, 2019 to India. During the visit he called on Prime Minister and