

Ties with USA and Russia

2148. SHRI SABIR ALI:
SHRI MOHAMMED ADEEB:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the present policy *vis-à-vis* USA and Russia; and
- (b) the steps that are proposed to further strengthen the ties with those countries?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI PRENEET KAUR): (a) and (b) Government of India desires to strengthen and deepen relations with the United States of America in the existing areas of bilateral cooperation such as defence and security, energy, space, education, economy and commerce, science and technology, health, people to people contacts among others and to identify possible areas of collaboration in newer areas of cooperation to take the bilateral ties to a higher level of engagement. It also seeks to intensify engagement with the US on global issues of common concern such as Climate Change, Disarmament, international terrorism and maritime security to strengthen Indo-US strategic partnership.

Russia is a strategic partner of India. India-Russia strategic partnership provides a solid framework for long-term and all-round development of relations. Mutual development and prosperity of our peoples are core objectives of this partnership. Rashtrapatiiji will pay a State Visit to Russia in September, 2009. The India-Russia Annual Summit meeting between the Prime Minister of India and the President of Russia will take place in Moscow in December, 2009. The 15th session of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission (IRIGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation, co-chaired by the External Affairs Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia will take place in Moscow in October, 2009. The 9th session of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC), co-chaired by the Defence Ministers of India and Russia will take place in Moscow in October, 2009. During these visits, discussions will take place with the Russian leadership on all strategic areas of bilateral cooperation with Russia such as defence, space, energy including nuclear energy, science and technology and trade and economy.

Religious protection to Sikhs in US

†2149. SHRI BRIJ BHUSHAN TIWARI:
SHRI BHAGWATI SINGH:
SHRI JANESHWAR MISHRA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that Sikhs in American army have been banned from using their religious symbol;
- (b) if so, whether Government plans to take any concrete initiative to provide religious protection to overseas Indians; and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI PRENEET KAUR): (a) to (c) No. The Religious Accommodation Policy of the Government of the United States of America, as contained in Army Regulation 600-20, dated 18 March, 2008 of the US army provides for officers and soldiers to practice their religious preferences in terms of dress, food, worship etc.

Haj quota for MPs

2150. SHRI NAND KISHORE YADAV:

SHRI KAMAL AKHTAR:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether all Members of Parliament have been given quota to recommend two persons for Haj;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether all MPs utilize this every year;

(d) if so, the details thereof during the last three years, MP-wise;

(e) whether Government would increase the Haj quota of MPs from 2 to at least 25 per year who represent the constituency where ratio of Muslim population is higher; and

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

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SHASHI THAROOR): (a) and (b) Yes. Each Member of Parliament can recommend two persons for Haj.

(c) and (d) No. Not all MPs utilize it every year. However, the requests received are given due consideration.

(e) and (f) No. At present there is no proposal for increasing the Haj quota of MPs from 2 to 25 per year since the overall quota allocated by Saudi Government to India is based on the Muslim population of the country. The quota made available is accordingly distributed among various States in proportion to the Muslim population there.

Haj quota for States

2151. SHRI KAMAL AKHTAR:

SHRI NAND KISHORE YADAV:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has any plan to increase Haj quota to those States or areas where Muslim population is comparatively more concentrated;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?