

(c) whether these events are in response to the immense upsurge of interest in Indian culture and history throughout the world;

(d) if so, to what extent these measures have helped in improving the tourism between these countries; and

(e) if so, to what extent this has also helped in spreading Indian culture in France?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI PRENEET KAUR): (a) Yes. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) is coordinating Festival of India in China as well as Festival of India in France called Namaste France in 2010-11. These festivals were formally inaugurated in Beijing and Paris on April 7th and April 14th 2010 respectively.

(b) Yes. It will be ICCR's endeavor to showcase diverse forms of Indian dance, music and theatre. ICCR would also coordinate events such as Indian Food Festivals, Indian Film Festivals, Fashion Shows, Tourism Road Shows and exhibitions of paintings and Indian antiquities being organized by other Ministries / Departments.

(c) and (d) Due to the emergence of India as major economic and knowledge hub, there has been a growing interest in Indian culture and civilization. These two festivals aim to satisfy the curiosity and to further enhance this interest. Indian Festivals abroad help create awareness about India, its culture, its history, architecture and culture leading to a substantial increase in tourism for us.

(e) Presenting the dynamic and ever-evolving culture of India, the 15 month long Indian Festival in France will bring to the doorsteps of French people a comprehensive package of Indian culture including dance, music, literature, theatre, painting, sculpture, cinema, gastronomy, fashion, yoga and Ayurveda. The Festival began with an exhibition on indigenous art and Folk / Tribal dances and is scheduled to end with an exhibition of paintings by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore whose 150th Birth Anniversary will be celebrated next year.

Outsourcing of passport/visa work

3742. SHRI P. R. RAJAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether visa, passport processing is being outsourced to private agencies;

(b) the number of countries where outsourcing is being practised; and

(c) whether there is a plan to outsource police verification?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI PRENEET KAUR): (a) Yes.

(b) Visa services have been outsourced in 50 Indian Missions and Posts located in 31 countries so far. Out of these, 31 countries, Passport services also have been outsourced in 6 countries. Visa services are being outsourced in four more countries.

(c) No.

Attack on religious places in Australia

†3743. SHRI Y.P. TRIVEDI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether religious places of Sikhs are being targeted now in Australia after the fatal attacks made only on the Indians, so far;

(b) whether Government has urged Government of Australia to be more strict in the matter now; and

(c) if so, the details of the assurance given to Government of India by Australia?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI PRENEET KAUR): (a) There is no evidence of targeting of Sikh religious places in Australia. So far only one case of arson in a Gurudwara in Cranbourne, near Melbourne on 13 Jan., 2010 has come to our notice. Police investigations are still going in the case but preliminary indications are that it may be a case of teenage vandalism, rather than a specific attack on a religious place.

(b) and (c) The High Commission of India, Canberra as well as the Consulate General of India, Melbourne have taken up the matter both at the federal as well as state level, including the Ministers, senior officers and the police authorities besides, the Australian Foreign Office, and impressed upon them that such attacks cannot be allowed to happen and the authorities should take stringent measures to stop these attacks as well as to apprehend the culprits. The High Commissioner of India in Canberra visited the Gurudwara on 17 Jan., 2010. Australian authorities have been fully apprised of the gravity of the situation. Both at the state as well as the federal level, they have reassured their commitment to ensure safety and security of the Indian community and properties and that crimes motivated by hatred or prejudice will not be tolerated. They are making efforts to meet our concerns.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.