

city of Trivandrum. The proposed twinning agreement aims to promote between the cities of Barcelona and Trivandrum, exchange of information especially in the areas of economic development, urban and strategic planning, conservation of urban and culture heritage, environmental programmes and sustainable development, education, science and technology, research and innovation, culture, tourism, sports and all sectors of civil society. The draft Agreement was forwarded to the Government of Kerala for seeking their views/comments in February 2010. However, the response of the Government of Kerala in this matter is still awaited.

Agreements such as that offered by Barcelona are not signed at the level of the Government of India with foreign countries.

Sanctioning of RPOs for Gujarat

1755. SHRI BHARATSINH PRABHATSINH PARMAR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that the Ministry has sanctioned two more Regional Passport Offices for Gujarat to be established at Rajkot and Vadodara respectively in 2009;
- (b) if so, the action taken thereon in this direction and whether any official notification has been issued so far for the purpose;
- (c) whether both the offices have become functional with the deployment of the staff and officers who have posted there;
- (d) if not, the reasons therefor and whether the Ministry is facing difficulties to finding office space at both the centres; and
- (e) if so, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI PRENEET KAUR): (a) to (c) The Government has no plan to open two more Regional Passport Offices in Gujarat at Rajkot and Vadodara. However, the Government has launched the Passport Seva Project and has made notification in this respect in the Gazette of India on May 3, 2010. Under the Project, it is proposed to open 5 (five) Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) in the State of Gujarat out of which 2 (two) will be in Ahmedabad and one each in Vadodara, Rajkot and Surat. The PSKs in Rajkot and Vadodara will function under the operational control of the Regional Passport Office, Ahmedabad. The PSKs in Gujarat are expected to be operational during the year 2011.

(d) and (e) The Government does not anticipate any difficulties in operationalisation of the PSKs in Gujarat.

Chinese interest in Indian ocean

1756. SHRI T.M. SELVAGANAPATHI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that China was showing more than the normal interest in the Indian ocean affairs;

- (b) if so, the details thereof;
 - (c) whether Government is closely monitoring the Chinese intentions in Indian ocean;
- and
- (d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI PRENEET KAUR):
 (a) to (d) China participates in international anti-piracy patrols off the coast of Somalia under the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) mechanism. It is a mechanism of coordination and communication of Navies from various countries, including India and China, which are protecting shipping lanes off the Horn of Africa. Government keeps a constant watch on all developments having a bearing on India's national interest and takes all necessary measures to safeguard it.

Visit of US diplomat to India

1757. DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether American diplomat visited India in October and had various types of discussions with Foreign Secretary and finalized agenda for US President's visit to India in November;
 - (b) if so, whether US has shown its commitment in continuing to support India's emergence and to work together to adapt internal architecture to reflect realities of 21st Century;
 - (c) if so, to what extent US President's visit to India has been a successful;
 - (d) whether a number of agreements between the two countries have been signed;
- and
- (e) if so, to what extent it has resulted in good relations between two countries?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI PRENEET KAUR):
 (a) Yes. US Under Secretary of State William Burns visited India on 21-22 October, 2010 and held discussions with Foreign Secretary, including on preparations for the visit of US President Obama to India.

(b) During the visit of President Obama to India from 6-9 November, 2010, Prime Minister and President Obama reaffirmed that India-U.S. strategic partnership is indispensable not only for their two countries but also for global stability and prosperity in the 21st century. To that end, President Obama welcomed India's emergence as a major regional and global power and affirmed his country's interest in India's rise, its economic prosperity, and its security. President Obama affirmed his country's support for India's permanent membership of a reformed UN Security Council and the intention of the United States to support India's full membership in the multilateral export control regimes.