

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI PRENEET KAUR): (a) and (b) The Mauritanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has conveyed to our Ambassador in Bamako, Mali, that it was unlikely that such a large group of foreigners would be in illegal custody in Mauritania. Our Embassy is, however, pursuing the matter further with the Mauritanian authorities.

Leasing of area of Gilgit-Baltistan to China

367. DR. CHANDAN MITRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware of a move by the Pakistan to lease a substantial area of Gilgit-Baltistan in Pak occupied Kashmir (PoK) to China for fifty years;

(b) whether Government is also aware of massive protests in the Northern Territories of Undivided Jammu and Kashmir State against various projects being constructed by China in this region;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) whether Government has taken up this issue with Pakistan during the ongoing Foreign Secretary level talks?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED): (a) Government has not seen any official statement or report by the Government of Pakistan on leasing a substantial area of Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) to China. However, under the so called China-Pakistan "Boundary Agreement" of 1963, Pakistan illegally ceded 5,180 Sq. Kms. of Indian territory in PoK to China. Government remains firm in its resolve to take all necessary steps to effectively safeguard India's security and territorial integrity.

(b) and (c) According to media reports, in July 2011, hundreds of labourers and contractors protested against non-payment of wages, in front of the office of a Chinese construction company which was upgrading the Karakoram Highway in PoK.

(d) The issue of Jammu and Kashmir is discussed at the Foreign Secretary level talks between India and Pakistan.

Present Status of Kargil to Skardu Road

368. DR. CHANDAN MITRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the present status of the proposed reopening of Kargil to Skardu Road to facilitate introduction of Bus Service for the benefit of the people of Ladakh and Gilgit on the lines of Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Road;

(b) whether any time-frame has been decided between India and Pakistan for the introduction of this service;