

counters at PSKs, (vi) technical support for PSKs, POs, DC, DRC and CPPF, (vii) training of staff on the application software, general computer skills, soft skills, customer service and delivery, (viii) Call centre and grievance handling, (ix) compliance with the Service Level Agreement, (x) Change Management and communication strategy and implementation and (xi) obtaining ISO (9001, 27001, 20000) certifications for the Passport System.

Opening of fourth mission by China

639. SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Chinese Foreign Minister in the recent meeting in China with External Affairs Minister of India raised the issue to open a fourth Mission in India possibly in Chennai to further expand growing trade and business ties with India;

(b) whether China has also expressed interest in creating 'Sister City' ties with Indian cities; and

(c) if so, the reaction of Government of India thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED): (a) India and China are discussing the possibility of opening additional Consulates General in each other's country.

(b) and (c) During the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister to India in March, 2012, it was agreed that "to promote provincial and local-level cooperation between the two countries, the External Affairs Ministry of India and the China International Friendship Cities Association would conclude an umbrella agreement". This agreement is currently being negotiated.

Fishermen in custody of Pakistan

640. SHRI MANSUKH L. MANDAVIYA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Indian fishermen who are in the custody of Pakistan as on 31 July, 2012;

(b) the number out of these captured fishermen who are from Gujarat;

(c) the steps are taken by Government of India for their release from Pakistan;

(d) the number of boats of these captured fishermen that have been received back;

(e) the number of boats that are still in illegal possession of Pakistan; and

(f) the steps that have been taken to rehabilitate those fishermen and their families whose boats have been captured by Pakistan?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED): (a) and (b) According to available information, as on 31 July, 2012, 136 fishermen believed to be Indian are in Pakistan's custody. Out of 108 fishermen whose nationality has been confirmed as Indians, 89 are from Gujarat.

(c) Government has been consistently taking up the issue concerning all Indian fishermen and their boats in Pakistani custody with the Government of Pakistan at all appropriate levels. The matter was taken up at the Foreign Secretary level talks in February, 2010, June, 2010, June, 2011 and July, 2012; at the Home/Interior Secretary level talks in March, 2011 and May, 2012 and at Foreign Minister level talks in July, 2010 and July, 2011. Home Minister also raised the issue during his visit to Islamabad in June, 2010. An India-Pakistan Judicial Committee has also been set up consisting of retired judges from both countries to ensure humane treatment and expeditious release of prisoners, including fishermen, who have completed their prison term. India-Pakistan Joint Working Group between Indian Coast Guard and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) met at New Delhi on July 12, 2012 for working out a mechanism for release of fishermen and their boats who cross maritime borders inadvertently. High Commission of India, Islamabad, on a continuing basis, monitors the status of Indian prisoners including fishermen in Pakistani jails and takes up the matter with the Government of Pakistan for their early release and return of their boats. Due to Government's consistent efforts, 547 Indian fishermen have been released by Pakistan in 2012 so far; 103 fishermen were released in 2011, 454 fishermen in 2010 and 100 fishermen were released in 2009.

(d) and (e) Pakistan has not released any boat belonging to these fishermen. There are approximately 575 Indian boats in Pakistan's custody.

(f) The Ministry of Agriculture (Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries) is the nodal agency for payment of compensation to the fishermen lodged in Pakistani jails and the scheme — "Soft Loan Package for Replacement of Fishing vessels held in captivity in Pakistan" which is being implemented by Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA).

Improvement in Haj arrangements

641. SHRI MOHAMMED ADEEB: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of improvement in Haj arrangements and facilities for Haj pilgrims this year over those of the last year;

(b) the details of the problems being reported/encountered by the prospective Haj pilgrims this year;

(c) the action taken in each case; and