

Indian diplomats accused of anti-Pakistan activities

2572. SHRI DEREK O' BRIEN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that eight Indian diplomats have been accused of alleged anti-Pakistan activities by Islamabad; and

(b) whether the Ministry is taking any steps to assist the diplomats and resolve the issue, if so, the details thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V.K. SINGH]: (a) and (b) On November 3, 2016, Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in its regular press briefing that eight Indian diplomats and staff of the High Commission of India, Islamabad had been found "involved in subversive activities in Pakistan". A litany of baseless and unsubstantiated charges were leveled against these officials.

This step by Government of Pakistan followed reports in Pakistani media giving out details of Indian officials along with their photographs in a manner blatantly violative of established diplomatic norms and practices.

The Government rejected the baseless and unsubstantiated allegations made by Pakistan against these officials and expressed regret that Pakistan authorities chose to level such allegations after deciding to recall, on their own, six officials of the Pakistan High Commission, some of whom may have been named to Indian authorities by a Pakistani spy - Mehmood Akhtar - working in the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi, when he was apprehended by Law Enforcement Authorities on October 27, 2016 indulging in anti-India activities. The allegations against Indian officials represent an afterthought and a crude attempt to tarnish the image of these officials for no logical reason or fault of theirs.

These eight Indian officials were subsequently withdrawn by the Government from Pakistan in view of their safety and security. All necessary assistance was provided to them and their families in this regard.

In declaring Mehmood Akhtar *persona non grata* and asking for his return to Pakistan, the Government acted in the interest of national security. It is not Government's intention to add to the strain in the relationship with Pakistan, which is caused by the latter's continued policy of directing cross border terrorism against India and supporting other anti-India activities.