

was in violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 and the spirit of the Bilateral Protocol on visit to religious shrines of 1974.

Pakistan's claim that the Indian pilgrims declined to meet the High Commission officials was categorically refuted. It was conveyed to Pakistan that the Indian organisers, Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), have expressed grave concern and dismay that Indian High Commissioner and the High Commission officials were denied access despite the visiting pilgrims from India having asked Pakistan organisers to facilitate a meeting with them.

Relationship with countries of Indian ocean

188. SHRI SAMBHAJI CHHATRAPATI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has taken any fresh initiative to strengthen the cultural relationship with the countries of Indian Ocean, especially with those having age-old cultural and trade relations with India as known from archaeological and historical data apart from Cultural Exchange Programmes;

(b) if so, the details of the steps taken by Government to strengthen the relationship with Indian Ocean countries; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GEN. (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) and (b) India and the countries of Indian Ocean Region share age old historical, religious, trade and cultural links. Government has been taking steps to strengthen these ties by way of establishing Cultural Centres, sponsoring visits of performing art groups, organizing/supporting conferences/ seminars, running Chairs of Indian Studies, offering scholarships to students to study in India, supporting visits of eminent academicians/dignitaries to India, promotion of Hindi and other Indian languages, sending busts/statues and visual art exhibitions, conferring award to distinguished alumni, organizing International Day of Yoga, organizing festivals/India Week, conducting workshops and seminars in various fields including Yoga & Ayurveda etc.

Some of the major initiatives taken by the Ministry are: (i) organizing the World Hindi Conference in Mauritius from 18-20 August 2018; (ii) taking the sacred relics from Sarnath for public exposition in Sri Lanka; (iii) a special 3-day visit of 80 armed forces

personnel along with their families from Sri Lanka to Bodh Gaya in India; (iv) visit of a delegation of the Mahabodhi Society of India to Sri Lanka; (v) celebration of India and Sri Lanka @70, a joint celebration of 70 years of Independence of the two countries; and (vi) joint celebration of the First Settlers Day, Seychelles-India Day and Kreole Day in Seychelles; etc.

- (c) Not applicable.

Payment of salary to Indian workers in Bahrain

189. SHRI K.R. ARJUNAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that hundreds of Indian workers in Bahrain were not paid their salaries for several months by the companies where they were employed;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether Government has taken any action to help those workers getting their salaries; and
- (d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GEN. (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) and (b) It has been informed by the Indian Embassy in Bahrain that 350 Indian expatriate workers from the following three companies had not been paid salaries for four to six months:-

- (i) M/s GP Zachariades Overseas Ltd.
- (ii) M/s Orlando Construction Company WLL
- (iii) M/s First Uniforms Company WLL

(c) and (d) The matter was taken-up by the Indian Embassy with concerned authorities. Part dues have been paid and defaulting companies have agreed to settle the balance amount.

H-1B visas to Indian professionals

190. SHRI T. RATHINAVEL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that the U.S. Congress had not passed any Bills that