

(d) the steps taken by Government to attract the brightest and best talent to foreign services?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN): (a) Vacancies in Indian Missions/Posts abroad, under the various MEA cadres, are regularly determined and officers appointed thereto from time to time. Generally, gaps between the departure of the incumbents and arrival of their successors are kept to the minimum. However, as the posting chains often involve several officers, on some occasions, the Missions/Posts abroad do have to face some short-term vacancies. It is not possible to determine the exact number of vacancies on any particular day, since officers are demitting charge in some of our 192 Missions/Posts abroad and others are assuming charge in some. As on 01.06.2019, there are around 7 such vacancies where officers are still to be posted. Additionally, when new posts are created, it takes time to fill them up as indent needs to be placed with UPSC, which then recruits officers through a three-step examination process. Once officers are recruited, they go through a probation period before confirmation in service.

(b) and (c) In recent years, India's diplomatic engagement both in bilateral and multilateral frameworks has grown significantly. To address the growing demands, posts at various levels were created through the MEA Expansion Plan, including 187 posts of IFS and 122 posts at the staff level. More recently, the Union Cabinet, on 21 March, 2018, has approved opening of 18 new Missions in Africa in a phased manner from 2018 to 2021, which also entails creation of posts. Accordingly, the opening of Missions is under implementation in a phased manner and Missions have already been opened in 5 countries.

(d) Recruitment to the Indian Foreign Service is through the common Civil Service Examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission. The Indian Foreign Service attracts some of the best talent from diverse fields. On its part, the Ministry also endeavours to introduce and acquaint people within the country, including the student community, with India's foreign policy objectives, thereby fostering greater awareness on foreign policy issues as well as interest in joining the Indian Foreign Service.

European Union Parliament report on minority groups in Pakistan

651. SHRIMATI WANSUK SYIEM: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has examined the report on minority groups in Pakistan recently released by European Union Parliament alleging State role in institutionalised discrimination and persecution of minorities;

(b) whether the report objectively examined the nature of persecution faced by religious minority groups in Pakistan, providing case studies on oppression faced by women from minority communities; and

(c) whether Government would use the report for inputs needed to make its own assessment of the plight of minority communities in Pakistan for possible use in international fora on human rights?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN): (a) to (c) As per available information, a report has recently been released by a group of five Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) entitled "Religious Minorities in Pakistan" which *inter-alia* highlights the plight of religious minorities in Pakistan who are facing persecution, discrimination, violence, forced conversion, abduction and forced marriage of women/girls belonging to minority communities. The report also highlights that blasphemy laws institutionalise discrimination against religious minorities into codified law.

There have been reports about the problems and persecution faced by members of the minority communities in Pakistan. It is the responsibility of the Government of Pakistan to discharge its constitutional obligations towards its citizens, including those from the minority community. Based on reports of persecution, discrimination and oppression of minority groups in Pakistan, Government has, from time to time, taken up the matter with the Government of Pakistan and asked it to take steps to protect and to promote the safety, security and well-being of its minority communities. Concerns in the matter have also been raised at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Community development projects in various countries

†652. SHRI P. L. PUNIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number and details of countries including Afghanistan in which community development projects are being run by India;

(b) the details of funds provided for those projects, project-wise and country-wise during the last three years; and

(c) the number of projects out of these which are also meant for the Non-Resident Indians residing there and the details of beneficiaries including Indians from these projects?

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.