

(b) The two sides are pursuing a broad-based dialogue, both at the political level and through established bilateral forums, to deepen understanding and expand cooperation in all areas of mutual interest.

(c) The two sides are in agreement on a number of bilateral, regional and international issues and have entered into signed agreements, memorandums of understanding or programmes of collaborative activities, where necessary, in areas such as high technology commerce, space, energy, environment, health, science and technology, economic relations, counter-terrorism and defence.

(d) There are presently no such agreements.

(e) There has been a significant improvement in India-United States relations.

Ban on Celebration of Bengal New Year

2404. SHRI C.P. THIRUNAVUKKARASU: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that in Bangladesh some movements are demanding a ban on celebration of Bengal New Year and on Indian TV Channels; and

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Articles and comments advocating ban/restriction on celebration of Bengal New Year and on broadcast of Indian TV channels appear from time to time in sections of the Bangladeshi media.

(b) The government has not taken cognisance of such media reports.

Harassment of Employees of Indian High Commission in Pakistan

†2405. SHRI JAYANTILAL BAROT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of employees posted in the office of Indian High Commission in Pakistan;

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

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(b) the number of the incidents of harassment of the employees of Indian High Commission by Pakistan came into light during the last five years and the details of the action taken by Government in this regard;

(c) whether Government are contemplating to formulate any concrete diplomatic action plan to protect these employees from harassment; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) As a result of Government's decision announced on 27th December, 2001 to reduce the strength of respective High Commissions in India and Pakistan by 50%, from 110 to 55, and subsequent withdrawal of 8 more Indian officials with their replacements, following their expulsion by Pakistan in an act of retaliation after Pakistani officials were expelled from India in January/February 2003 for indulging in activities incompatible with their official status, the strength of Indian and Pakistani officials in their respective Missions presently stands capped at 47.

(b) Government are aware of frequent harassment of Indian High Commission officials in Islamabad by Pakistani authorities. There have been 111 incidents of harassment of Indian High Commission officials in Islamabad during the last five years (1998 to 2003—till 8th March, 2003).

(c) and (d) Under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961 and the "Bilateral Code of Conduct for Treatment of Diplomatic/ Consular Personnel in India and Pakistan" signed by the two countries in 1992, the responsibility for the safety and security of personnel of High Commission rests with the host Government. Government of India protests strongly to Government of Pakistan against such cases of harassment of officials of Indian High Commission in Islamabad and reminds them of their obligation under the Vienna Convention and Bilateral Code of Conduct. Government remains committed to taking all necessary measures for the safety and security of the personnel in Indian Missions abroad.