

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:2040

ANSWERED ON:09.03.2016

Visit to Places of Pilgrimage

Nete Shri Ashok Mahadeorao;Shetti Shri Raju alias Devappa Anna

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

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- (a) whether for the last few years, Pakistan has not been making timely issuance of visa to Indian Sikh pilgrims desirous of going on a pilgrimage to Nankana Sahib and if so, the details thereof;
- (b) whether the said issue has been taken up with Pakistan;
- (c) if so, the details and the outcome thereof; and
- (d) the measures taken or proposed to be taken by the Government to ensure that the pilgrims are able to smoothly undertake the said pilgrimage?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
[GEN. (DR) V. K. SINGH (RETD)]

(a) Government is aware that on account of a number of factors, including the process for applying and issuance of necessary visas, there have been occasions wherein pilgrims undertaking visits to various shrines in Pakistan under the 'Bilateral Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines-1974' waited for the requisite visas till very close to their scheduled departure.

(b) to (d) Yes. All aspects related to visit of pilgrims under the Protocol are regularly taken up with the concerned authorities of the Government of Pakistan with the view to facilitate such visits.

The Visa Agreement signed between India and Pakistan in September 2012 introduced a new category of 'pilgrim visa' issued to persons intending to visit religious shrines in India and Pakistan under the Protocol. It also stipulates that the visa applications will need to be applied at least 45 days before the commencement of the intended tour and the visas will be issued at least 10 days before the commencement of travel.

Further, in line with the understanding reached between the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan at Ufa (Russia) in July 2015 to facilitate religious tourism, both the sides agreed during the meeting of External Affairs Minister with her Pakistani counterpart in December 2015 to include religious tourism in the Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue for which modalities are to be decided by the Foreign Secretaries.