

'Rescued 90,000 Indians in last 4 yrs'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: External affairs minister Sushma Swaraj on Monday sounded firm on Maldives, saying she had received several letters of invitation from the island nation's foreign minister to visit it but would only go there after its government took "certain steps".

Addressing her annual press conference, Swaraj gave a report card of the achievements of her ministry in the four years BJP has been in office. Swaraj said, her government had engaged with 186 out of 192 members of the UN. The last five countries on the list would get ministerial visits soon. "We have rescued 90,000 Indians in distress in the past four years," she said, appreciating junior minister V K Singh's role in responding to pleas for help. The NDA gov-

ernment had added 227 passport kendras to the 77 put in place by the UPA government.

India may try to reactivate methods used to circumvent sanctions in the previous round of sanctions on Iran like reverting to rupee trade, and getting the Iranians to take on the burdens of re-insurance for oil tankers coming to India.

What is unclear is the way

to tackle the system of secondary sanctions that is built into the re-imposition of US sanctions. The last time round, India was not put on the list of secondary sanctions.

Iran wants India to complete sending some necessary equipment for the Chahbahar port. Iran also wants India to build a railway line all the way to Mashad which would ease

cargo flow to Central Asia. India is hoping there will be a carve-out for Chahbahar when the waiver period of 180 days expire. India and US are expected to discuss this issue during the forthcoming 2+2 talks.

On Maldives, Swaraj said there would be "no cutting off ties" with Maldives, though India was in the position of a counsellor to Maldives, advising them on the best way forward. "Our humanitarian assistance has not stopped and will not stop," she added. "Maldives is our neighbour. 'India First' is part of their foreign policy. In ties with Maldives, whichever government has been in power, there have been ups and downs," Swaraj said.

Separately, Swaraj said the government was engaged with the US to ease the visa situation for Indians. Questioned on the H4 visas.