

- The points test used to assess migrants will be reviewed to ensure it selects the best and brightest.
- Certain occupations may be capped to ensure skill needs are met across the board.

The new arrangements will give first priority to skilled migrants who are sponsored by an Australian employer. According to new rules, those international students who hold a vocational, higher education or postgraduate student visa will still be able to apply for a permanent visa if their occupation is on the new Skilled Occupations List. If their occupation is not on the new SOL, they will have until 31 December, 2012 to apply for a temporary skilled graduate visa on completion of their studies, which will enable them to spend up to 18 months in Australia to acquire work experience and seek sponsorship from an employer.

Privatization of passport system

4499. SHRI S. ANBALAGAN:

DR. K. MALAISAMY:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether there is a move to privatize passport system through Passport Seva Project;
- (b) if so, the features of the scheme in brief;
- (c) whether instead of generating its own adequate technology and staff at a lower cost, the Department has decided to obtain technology and staff from private vendor on higher cost;
- (d) whether there has been a strong protest and objection for the privatization in question from employees associations; and
- (e) whether it would not lead to security problem by giving the monopoly and total control of software to private sector?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S.M. KRISHNA): (a) No. There is no move to privatize passport system through Passport Seva Project.

(b) and (c) Rapid increase in demand for passports necessitated comprehensive overhaul of passport issuance system. A study was conducted by the National Institute for Smart Government who recommended a Public-Private-Partnership model project to meet this demand and provide better services to citizens. The basic design of the Project involves outsourcing of non-sensitive front-end activities to a service provider and retaining sovereign and sensitive functions with the Government. Under the Project, 77 Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) are proposed to be set up across the country. Each PSK will be headed by an officer from the Central Passport Organization. There will be dedicated Data Centre, Disaster Recovery Centre, Central Passport Printing Facility and Network Operations Centre for the Project. In

addition to these assets, Application Software and System Software will be owned by the Government to have the strategic control over the passport system.

(d) All India Passport Employees Association (AIPEA) has conveyed no objection to implementation of the Project with certain observations.

(e) No. The Government will have complete control over the software.

Relations between Iran and China

†4500. SHRI SHIVANAND TIWARI:

SHRI RAJ MOHINDER SINGH MAJITHA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that over the years Iran and China appear to be getting closer in the fields of commerce and politics;

(b) if so, the facts in this regard;

(c) whether it is also a fact that the impact of the relationship of both these countries over India has been assessed; and

(d) if so, the reaction of Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S.M. KRISHNA): (a) and (b) According to reports, economic, commercial and political relations between China and Iran have grown in recent years. Iran is currently a major supplier of crude oil and natural gas to China. Iran is also an important destination for Chinese investment and goods. Trade between Iran and China was reported to have reached US\$ 29 billion in 2009. It has been reported that Chinese companies have concluded a number of agreements with their Iranian counterparts in the area of oil and gas, and in the areas of construction and investment.

(c) and (d) Government takes all such steps as are necessary to safeguard the country's interest.

Passport Seva Project

4501. SHRI M.V. MYSURA REDDY:

SHRI PENUMALLI MADHU:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) The Aims and Objectives of Passport Seva Project;

(b) whether it is a fact that 77 Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) are proposed to be set up in the country;

(c) if so, the details of PSKs going to be set up in Andhra Pradesh;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.