

(c) and (d) Yes, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister on 14th June, 2011 requesting, *inter alia*, the suspension of ferry services between Tuticorin and Colombo.

#### **Denial of Visa to people of Arunachal Pradesh**

1298. SHRI N.K. SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi has been denying Visas to residents of Arunachal Pradesh;

(b) if so, whether a 45 member Indian contingent of Karate Team was granted Stapled visas except five members who were from Arunachal Pradesh;

(c) if so, the facts thereof and whether Government has taken up the matter with Beijing; and

(d) if so, the response of the Chinese Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED): (a) to (d) Government is aware that the Chinese Embassy issued stapled visas to five Indian nationals from Arunachal Pradesh visiting China for a Karate Championship. The fact that Arunachal Pradesh is an integral and inalienable part of India has been clearly conveyed to the Chinese side. Government's position that there should be no discrimination against visa applicants of Indian nationality on grounds of domicile and ethnicity has also been clearly conveyed to the Chinese Government on several occasions, including during the visit to India by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in December, 2010.

#### **Workers from Rajasthan in Gulf**

†1299. SHRI ASHK ALI TAK: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that thousands of labourers from Rajasthan go to gulf countries for employment every year;

(b) whether Government has received any complaints with regard to the exploitation of workers in year 2010-11;

(c) if so, the details of the action taken in this regard; and

(d) the details of the measures taken by Government so far to stop the exploitation of the workers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED): (a) It is estimated that about 6 million Indians from various states including Rajasthan live and work in the Gulf region.

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) The Government of India does receive complaints regarding problems being faced by Indian workers in Gulf countries.

(c) and (d) The Government of India through its Missions in Gulf countries has taken several measures and initiatives to protect the rights of Indian workers and to address the problem of exploitation of workers. Whenever complaints are received, they are taken up by the Missions with the concerned employers and/or with the local authorities on priority basis with a view to arrive at an amicable resolution of the grievances. The measures taken by the Indian Missions include: (i) a dedicated Community Welfare Wing; (ii) compulsory attestation of Service Agreement of all household workers; (iii) open House sessions on publicized days to provide additional informal platform of grievance redressal and information; (iv) provision of advice and assistance to Indian workers through local law firms as well as through free legal counseling sessions; (v) provision of shelter to Indian women workers in distress; (vi) setting up of Labour Welfare Fund to financially assist overseas Indian workers in distress, extending emergency medical care, providing air passage to stranded Indians in need, expenditure on incidentals and for airlifting the mortal remains to India or local burial/cremation of the deceased workers and (vii) setting up of 24x7 helplines by Missions. These steps have enhanced our Missions' availability to Indian workers abroad.

#### **Simplification of passport system**

1300. SARDAR SUKHDEV SINGH DHINDSA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has introduced reforms to make the passport issuance system simpler and speedier;

(b) the number of passport applications as on date lying pending in passport office covering Punjab; and

(c) the steps taken to clear the backlog?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIE. AHAMED): (a) Yes. The Passport Seva Project (PSP), a flagship e-Governance initiative has been undertaken by the Ministry of External Affairs to comprehensively reform the passport issuance system. The PSP aims at delivering all passport related services to the citizens in a timely, transparent, more accessible and reliable manner.

The PSP envisages setting up of 77 Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) across the country, a Call Centre operating 24x7 in 18 languages, and a centralised nationwide computerised system for the issuance of passports. So far, 13 PSKs have been successfully launched including one each at Chandigarh and Ludhiana (Punjab).

The benefits to the citizens include service provisioning within defined service levels and larger number of access points for services, availability of a *portfolio* of on-line services with real-