

(b) if so, whether Government of India is taking up the matter with US Government; and

(c) the reaction of the US Government?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED):

(a) The U.S. has enacted the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act in August 2010 to raise \$ 600 million for augmenting US Border Security by hiking the fee applicable to H1B and L category visas until 2014. In a legislation enacted in December 2010 termed 9/11 Health and Compensation Act, the period of enhanced fees on H1B and L visa categories has been further extended by a year to 2015. The Government is conscious of the potential adverse impact of recent increase in H1B and L category visa fees on the Indian IT companies.

(b) and (c) The Government has repeatedly conveyed to the United States Government its concerns over the increase in fees for H1B and L category visas. External Affairs Minister had raised this issue once again with the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during the Indo-US Strategic Dialogue held in New Delhi on 19 July 2011. The US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton assured us that she would convey our concerns to the appropriate agencies in the US Government.

Plight of migrant labourers abroad

1919. SHRI RAMA CHANDRA KHUNTIA: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that Many Migrant Labourers from Jajpur, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapada, Ganjam and Gajapati districts of Orissa who are working in South Africa, Central Africa and Sudan are being harassed and forced to work for more than eighteen hours a day and also not allowed to come back to India;

(b) whether it is a fact that in Bangshree Cement Factory of Africa one Narendra Mallick of Bari Jajpur district died and many of them are suffering from serious diseases;

(c) whether Government has taken any steps to identify them and evacuate them and bring them back to their home State; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) Indian High Commission at South Africa has informed that no case of migrant Indian labourer being harassed and forced to work for more than 18 hours, a day, has come to their notice. Government has received

report of 23 workers from Orissa deployed at the site of commissioning of a cement plant at Bangui, Central African Republic, living in poor and unhygienic conditions.

In another case, 216 workers from Orissa who were deployed for the execution of a power plant in Sudan, a project under execution by Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) have complained of harassment and non-payment of assured wages, food, shelter etc. and have requested for their repatriation.

(b) Indian Embassy at Kinshasa has reported that Shri Narendra Malik had died of sickness on 24th June, 2011 in Bangui, Central African Republic which is a malaria-prone country. Living conditions in the country are difficult and medical facilities are poor. However it cannot be said that many of the 23 Indian workers are suffering from serious diseases.

(c) and (d) Embassy of India, Sudan has informed that of 216 workers, 198 have returned to India by 31.12.2010 and 18 workers have agreed to continue to work in Sudan. Regarding the 23 workers in Bangui, the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs had taken up the matter with the Indian Embassy, Kinshasa for their immediate and safe return to India. With the intervention of Embassy of India, Kinshasa, all the 23 workers have since been repatriated.

Election of Panchayat Member without Political parties

1920. SHRI P. RAJEEV: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) the number of States where elections are held for Panchayat Members without the participation of political parties;

(b) the details thereof;

(c) in such States, the average period a person spends as a Panchayat Member after becoming one; and

(d) State-wise details of such members who are women?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI V. KISHORE CHANDRA DEO): (a) and (b) As per Article 243K of the Constitution of India, the Legislature of State may, by law, make provision with respect to matters relating to elections to Panchayats. Different States/UTs have different laws and rules regarding participation of political parties in Panchayat elections. In some States