

**Oil Exploration in South China Sea by Indian Companies**

2977. SHRIMATI KUSUM RAI:

SHRI PRABHAT JHA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that India is working on a project of oil exploration in South China Sea;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether China has raised objection over this;
- (d) if so, the details thereof;
- (e) whether Government of India has registered its protest against the objection of China;
- (f) if so, the details thereof; and
- (g) if not, the reasons thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED): (a) to (g) ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL), in collaboration with Vietnamese companies, has been engaged in exploration activity in the South China Sea since 1988. China, which is a party to the South China Sea dispute, has raised its concerns on India's hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation projects in the South China Sea off the coast of Vietnam. Government has clearly conveyed that such activity by Indian companies is purely commercial in nature and that the dispute must be resolved peacefully by the countries concerned.

**Travel Subsidy for Haj**

2978. SHRI RAM KRIPAL YADAV: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government has any plan to withdraw travel subsidy that is being given to Haj pilgrims;
- (b) if so, the reasons therefor;
- (c) the amount of subsidy that is provided to every Haj Pilgrims; and
- (d) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AHAMED): (a) and (b) In 2009, Government took a decision to increase the air

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† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi

fare chargeable from the Haj Pilgrims going through Haj Committee of India (HCOI) from Rs. 12,000 to Rs. 16,000 per pilgrim. The decision has been implemented with effect from Haj-2010.

(c) and (d) During Haj-2011, each Haj pilgrim, who traveled through HCOI, paid an amount of Rs. 16,000/- towards the air fare and the balance was paid by Government to the Airlines. For Haj-2011, the per pilgrim cost borne by Government was approximately Rs. 48,380/- (excluding service tax).

#### **Hike in Visa Fee by US**

2979. SHRIMATI MOHSINA KIDWAI:

SHRI N.K. SINGH:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the United States has hiked the visa fee specifically aimed at professionals from the IT industry;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether India has raised this issue at the WTO; and

(d) the steps being taken by Government to prevent negative treatment of the Indian IT industry in the United States?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED): (a) and (b) The Emergency Border Security Supplemental Appropriation Act, 2010 {Public Law - 111(230)} was enacted on 13th August 2010. It increases the fees for H1B and LI categories of visas for applicants that employ more than 50 employees in the United States or have more than 50 per cent of their employees admitted on non immigrant visas. The Act provides for an increase of (i) US \$ 2000 for the application fee for L-1 visas (for a total of US \$ 2,820) for applicants that employ more than 50 employees in the United States and have more than 50 per cent of their employees on H-1B or L-1 visas and (ii) US \$ 2,250 in the application for H-1B visas (for total of US \$ 4,750) for applicants that employ more than 50 employees in the United States and have more than 50 per cent of their employees on L-1 visas only.

(c) and (d) India has raised this issue informally with the US on the sidelines of the WTO. India has also raised the issue of problems related to visas for the US at various levels with the US Government including at the level of Commerce Secretary in their Commercial Dialogue as well as at Ministerial level interaction.