

prisoners, who have completed their prison sentence and nationality has been confirmed as Indian. The India-Pakistan Judicial Committee, consisting of retired judges of the superior judiciary from India and Pakistan to ensure humane treatment and expeditious release of prisoners who have completed their prison terms, visits periodically prisons in India and Pakistan and makes recommendations to the two Governments regarding prisoners of each country in the other.

Due to Government's efforts, 26 civil prisoners and 677 Indian fishermen were released by Pakistan in 2012 and 04 civil prisoners and 07 fishermen have been released so far in 2013.

#### **Difficulties in Dehradun Passport Office**

†2668. SHRI MAHENDRA SINGH MAHRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware of the fact that presently people have to face difficulties in the Dehradun Passport Office in Uttarakhand;

(b) whether it is also a fact that middlemen keep moving around the office to provide their services to the people to rectify small mistakes in their passports; and

(c) if so, the action Government proposes to take in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMED): (a) Under the Passport Seva Project (PSP), the Government has endeavored to streamline the passport services across India, including in the State of Uttarakhand by Opening of a Passport Seva Kendra (PSK) in May 2012. However, in this transitional phase, some cases of people facing difficulties have come to the notice of the Government. On receipt of a complaint, a team of senior officials of the Ministry made a visit in December 2012 to Passport Office, Dehradun to have on the spot study of the problems faced by the general public and also the Passport Office in delivering efficient services to the public. Necessary measures including strengthening of staff position have since been taken in this regard.

(b) and (c) Rare cases of middlemen moving around the Passport Office to

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† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

provide their services to the people have come to our notice. Under the Passport Seva Project, there is limited role for middlemen which *inter alia* includes on-line filling up of passport applications and status enquiry of applicants. In this new system for submission of passport applications, physical presence of applicant is required for bio-metrics and photographs, thereby eliminating the role of middlemen in the Passport Offices. In order to obviate any need to approach any middlemen for any kind of service, passport application procedures are prominently displayed in all the Passport Offices. Advisories cautioning the public against middlemen are also displayed prominently. Whenever middlemen activities are noticed, Passport Officers, with the assistance of local police, conduct raids to eliminate this.

#### **Responsibility for attack on Indian Fishermen**

2669. DR. V. MAITREYAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Sri Lankan Navy has denied responsibility in all such incidents of their attack on Indian fishermen;

(b) if so, in what manner they were captured and lodged in Sri Lankan prisons;

(c) whether Government has any definite safety measures to be implemented for the benefit of Indian fishermen from any imminent attacks from the Sri Lankan Navy; and

(d) the reasons for not providing satellite phones to fishermen as a safety measure?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMAD): (a) to (d) From time to time, there are reports of apprehension and attacks on Indian fishermen allegedly by the Sri Lankan Navy. According to the Sri Lankan authorities, apprehensions have been made in Sri Lankan waters and the Sri Lankan Navy has denied allegations of attack or firing on Indian fishing vessels.

The Government attaches the highest priority to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen. As soon as reports of apprehension and attacks on Indian fishermen are received, the Government has, through diplomatic channels, immediately and consistently taken up the matter with the Government of Sri Lanka.