

(d) The Government has consistently expressed its displeasure to the United States Government over such incidents. It has urged the U.S. Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security to ensure prevention of such occurrences in future. The Government has also conveyed that while it respects the rights of each country to institute necessary security procedures at their airports, internationally recognized diplomatic courtesies and privileges, as also religious and cultural sensitivities, must be respected. The U.S. Government has expressed regret for several of these incidents and conveyed that it would look at ways to prevent such incidents.

Expansion and modernization programme of SAIL

*326. SHRI TAPAN KUMAR SEN: Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

- (a) the total projected investment to be made by the Steel Authority of India Ltd. (SAIL) in the current expansion and modernization programme;
- (b) the likely share for the special and alloy steel plants; and
- (c) whether there is any long term plan to increase SAIL's presence and market share in special and alloy steel market?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL (SHRI BENI PRASAD VERMA): (a) The projected investment to be made by Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) in the current phase of Modernization and Expansion Plan of its steel plants including mines is Rs.72,134 crore.

(b) The likely share for the special and alloy steel plants is Rs.1902 crore.

(c) Currently, the special and alloy steel market is in a depressed state on account of weak demand from Auto and Engineering segments. The emphasis, therefore, is on devising plans for improving SAIL's presence and market share in the special steel and alloy market through strategies to reduce cost of production through reducing input costs, increasing order availability, liquidation of old stocks and sale of idle assets etc.

Upgradation of facilities of PSKS in Tamil Nadu

*327. DR. R. LAKSHMANAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Tamil Nadu is one of the top five States with high number of Passport Applications;

(b) if so, the steps taken by Government to upgrade the facilities available at Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs), which are the extended arms of Regional Passport Office, so that delivery mechanism pertaining to issuance of passport is suitably augmented; and

(c) if no such steps have been taken so far by Government, whether it would come forward to take such steps in the coming days?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SALMAN KHURSHID): (a) Yes, Sir. Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, are the top five States with high number of Passport Applications.

(b) and (c) With the view to improve passport services to citizens, the Government is constantly endeavouring to improve delivery mechanisms by optimizing use of available physical passport infrastructure and human capital. At present, there are four Passport Offices functioning in Tamil Nadu — in Chennai, Tiruchirappalli, Madurai and Coimbatore, which are supported by eight Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) — three in Chennai and one each in Tiruchirappalli, Thanjavur, Madurai, Tirunelveli and Coimbatore. The PSKs in Tamil Nadu are part of the 77 PSKs set up and operationalised across the country following implementation of Passport Seva Project (PSP) in Public-Private-Partnership mode, approved by the Union Cabinet in September, 2007. The PSP entails features including (i) increased network/capacity, (ii) anywhere-anytime access by anyone, (iii) state-of-the-art infrastructure comprising *inter alia* 11 PSKs, (iv) National Call Centre and e-mail based helpdesk working round the clock and (v) integration of PSP network with Police and India Post. The Ministry has (a) introduced online payment of passport fees or optionally through SBI Challans at the time of filing the application online to redress the difficulty of obtaining appointment, (b) upgraded Passport Portal to make it more user-friendly, (c) launched mPassport Seva app, (d) made available an optional premium SMS facility on nominal payment, in addition to the free of cost systemic SMSs and (e) circulated a detailed Handbook of Standard Documents and Procedures for PSK officials to smoothly deal with Passport service related applications. Adequate manpower besides sufficient number of computers, Passport Printers and laminators have been provided to Passport Offices in Tamil Nadu to ensure timely delivery of passport services. The facilities and amenities at the PSKs, including those in Tamil

Nadu, comprise photocopying, food and beverage facilities, public phone booth, information kiosks, baby care, newspapers and magazines, television and helpful guides. All the PSKs are air-conditioned. The Electronic Queue Management System ensures the 'first-in-first-out' principle in application processing. The outcome of the steps taken by the Government to improve passport service mechanism is established by the fact that out of 8.5 lakh passport service related applications received by the Passport Offices in Tamil Nadu during the calendar year 2013, 8.3 lakh passport services have already been rendered.

Protection of reserves and forests in Assam

*328. SHRI SANTIUSE KUJUR: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that most reserves and forests in Assam are under encroachment where people began cultivation by destroying the forest and as a result, the habitat of various species is in danger and on the verge of extinction, if so, the details thereof; and

(b) the steps taken by the State and the Central Government, to protect forests?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI M. VEERAPPA MOILY): (a) As per the report received from State Government, 3304 sq. Kms. of forest area is under encroachment in the State of Assam. No such reports that habitat of various species are in danger and the species are on verge of extinction due to encroachment in Assam, have been received in the Ministry.

(b) The responsibility for protection of forests lies with the State/Union Territory Governments. Under various Plan and Non Plan schemes, State/Union Territory Governments undertake various measures for forest protection including regular patrolling of the forest areas, establishment of protection camps, building of watch towers, survey and demarcation of forest areas, strengthening of forest infrastructure etc. Further, the Ministry provides financial assistance to the States/ Union Territories including the State of Assam for strengthening the protection mechanism under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme — Intensification of Forest Management. Financial assistance is also provided to the State for protection and conservation of wildlife and its habitat.