

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.