

find a permanent solution to the fishermen issues. The Terms of Reference of JWG include (i) expediting the transition towards ending the practice of bottom trawling at the earliest, (ii) working out the modalities for the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for handing over of apprehended fishermen, and (iii) ascertaining possibilities for cooperation on patrolling. The JWG is also mandated to discuss the issue of release of detained fishing vessels.

(c) and (d) Government attaches the highest priority to the safety, security and welfare of Indian fishermen. Our Missions and Posts regularly seek consular access to Indian fishermen detained in foreign countries, ensure their welfare and also pursue their early release and repatriation, along with their boats. Given the humanitarian and livelihood dimensions of this issue, the Government has put in place several bilateral mechanisms to ensure cooperation and understanding between India and countries concerned, to promote the safety and security of Indian fishermen.

Removal of difficulties in getting passport

†1778. SHRI RAM NATH THAKUR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government is considering seriously to reduce the difficulties and paper work in getting passport so that the difficulties being faced by the common man in getting passport could be removed;

(b) if so, whether Government would ensure that it would not be misused by the people and there would be no compromise in terms of safety; and

(c) if so, the details of the norms thereof proposed to be relaxed by Government?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI M. J. AKBAR): (a) to (c) Yes. With the implementation of the Passport Seva Project, the process of passport issuance has become very transparent and easy. Under this system, the applicants are required to apply for their passports online, upload relevant documents, make the payment online through debit/credit card or SBI net-banking/SBI Challan, schedule an appointment and then visit the designated Passport Seva Kendra (PSK). A user friendly portal has been made available. When an applicant visits the PSK, an Electronic Queue Management System (EQMS) working on the principle of First-in First-out is available at all PSKs to monitor the flow of applicants. After completing the non-sovereign activities by the staff of the Service Provider, applicants move to the Passport Office Staff for verification of documents and granting of passports. The shortcoming(s), if any, in the documentation

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

is conveyed to the applicant there itself. Exit letter giving position of the application ensuring fairness is provided to the applicant at the time of exit. The applicants can track the status of their applications themselves through portal and also SMS services. In the current system of passport issuance, there is no manual intervention at any stage, complete process is digitally flown with re-engineered process through a single visit clearance.

The Government has simplified the process of issuance of passport in order to make it more expedient, convenient and transparent. The Ministry of External Affairs made two major changes w.e.f. 26 January, 2016 that have expedited the process for first time passport applicants as well as made it more convenient to secure an online appointment at the local Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs). As per these changes, the first time passport applicants who furnish Aadhaar Card, Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC), PAN Card and an affidavit in the prescribed format, will get faster service, without payment of additional fees, subject to successful online validation of Aadhaar, EPIC and PAN Cards from the respective databases. The passports under this liberal dispensation will be issued on Post-Police Verification basis.

Securing online Appointments for submission of passport applications at PSKs has been made easier and convenient. The new provision is allowing applicants to choose any appointment date from the earliest five available dates (working days) for scheduling/rescheduling an appointment for passport related services. Earlier, the System used to offer only one available date to the applicant for seeking appointment for passport related services. These measures have simplified the process of passport issuance and reduced the difficulties faced by the applicants.

The Ministry has also reviewed the policy regarding changing the Date of Birth (DOB) in the existing passport. As per the revised guidelines, the Passport Issuing Authorities (PIA) have been authorized to consider the explanation of each applicant seeking change in the DOB (irrespective of the period that would have lapsed after the issue of the passport) to find the genuineness of the claim and if the PIA is satisfied with the claim and with the document(s) submitted by the applicant in support of the claim, the PIA shall accept all such requests made by the applicant to issue the passport with revised DOB.

In addition, necessary instructions have been issued to the Passport Issuing Authorities to accept digitally signed Marriage Certificates and Birth Certificates as valid proofs of marriage and birth respectively.

The Government is exploring the possibility of making amendments in the Passport Rules, 1980 in order to further simplify the documentation process necessary

for issuing passports in a timely, transparent, more accessible, reliable manner and through streamlined processes.

The process of issuance of passports has been made foolproof under the new system which is capable of leaving no scope for misuse by anti-national elements. Before granting any passport, in-person appearance is mandatory for avoiding chances of impersonation. Background check is carried out from the entire Passport database for duplication and criminality status. Capture of Biometric data and photograph on the spot and matching of biometric data with Aadhar database, fully integrated since August 2015, also ensure issuance of the passport to the right person. Police Verification of personal particulars and antecedents of applicants including address, where required, is very critical to issue of passports. All these measures and precautions available in the system have made the passport issuance process foolproof.

Fall in consumer price index

1779. SHRIMATI THOTA SEETHARAMA LAKSHMI: Will the Minister of STATISTICS AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether the consumer price index (CPI) for September has fallen to a 13-month low but overshadowed by the fall in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) in August by 0.7 per cent for the second month;

(b) whether the implication of the fall in IIP is serious because it signals that IIP may not pick up because private investment is still not happening; and

(c) if so, what corrective steps Government is taking to spurt private investment?

THE MINISTER OF STATISTICS AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (SHRI D. V. SADANANDA GOWDA): (a) Though All India Consumer Price Index (General) for the combined sector (rural and urban put together) for the month of September 2016 has not fallen to a thirteen month low, year on year inflation rate, based on this index, was the lowest (4.39%) for September 2016 during the same period. The interdependence of Growth of CPI and Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is very limited as the consumer goods have only 29.81% share (in terms of weights) in the basket of IIP. Therefore, it may not be appropriate to infer direct influence of IIP on CPI.

(b) Rise and fall in overall IIP depends on many factors which *inter alia* includes movement of output of high weighted items or significant change in the output of a particular industry. Though IIP in August 2016 has registered negative (year on year) growth (-0.7 per cent), other months of this year namely, February 2016, March 2016, May 2016, June 2016 and September 2016 have witnessed positive growth.