

route, and 10 batches with 50 slots each for the Yatra through the Nathu La route. Government of India does not organize Yatra along the Nepal route.

(b) The Ministry of External Affairs provides assistance, on self-financing basis, to the Yatris undertaking the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra by providing facilities like transportation, accommodation, food, medical tests, guides etc, in coordination with the State Governments of Uttarakhand, Delhi and Sikkim, along with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP).

(c) to (e) During the period 30 June to 8 July, 2018, approximately 1500 pilgrims on the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra organised by private tour operators through Nepal were stranded along the Hilsa-Simikot-Nepalganj route in Nepal while returning from Kailash-Manasarovar, as a result of cancellation of flight operations in this route due to inclement weather. The Government, through the Embassy of India in Kathmandu, arranged safe return of all the pilgrims in close coordination with the Government of Nepal, tour operators, and local airline/helicopter service providers in Nepal.

As on 7 August, 2018, about 160 Indian pilgrims are held up at Hilsa and Simikot in Nepal due to inclement weather. The Government, through the Embassy of India in Kathmandu, continues to monitor the situation in order to ensure early return of all the pilgrims in coordination with the Government of Nepal and other concerned agencies.

Grievance of women workers in foreign countries

2571. DR. SASIKALA PUSHPA RAMASWAMY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware of various grievances raised by India women working in foreign countries;

(b) if so, the details of steps taken by Government on the complaints received from such women;

(c) whether Government has taken preventive/prohibitive steps in this regard;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD.) V. K. SINGH]: (a) and (b) Yes. The Indian Missions receive complaints from women workers, generally on account of poor working conditions, non-payment or delay in payment of salaries and denial of other benefits such as

medical facilities, refusal of leave or denial of exit/re-entry permits for visits to India, denial of final exit visas to the workers to return to India after completion of the contract, maltreatment by the employers etc. Incidents of confinement, physical abuse, abandoning of housemaids by their sponsors have also been reported. Most of the complaints pertain to female workers, who do not have proper employment contracts and have migrated illegally, in violation of Government norms for recruitment of ECR workers from India.

The complaints received by the Missions are dealt with on priority basis by taking up the same with the local employer, the agent in India and the local Government authorities for resolution of the complaints. The Embassy offers free boarding and lodging facility for the distressed workers in suitable accommodation maintained by the Missions. They are also provided free one way air ticket and travel expenses, emergency certificates on gratis basis, in cases where there were no travel documents. Further immigration clearances are also obtained from the concerned authorities for their smooth travel to India. If the emigrant is recruited through a registered Recruiting Agent (RA), Show-cause notice is served on the RA against whom complaints are received and the agency is directed to settle/resolve the complaint.

(c) to (e) The Government has taken several steps to safeguard the interests of Indian female emigrants going for employment to the ECR countries, these are:-

- (i) Age restriction of 30 years has been made mandatory in respect of all women emigrants (Except Nurses) emigrating on ECR passports to ECR countries irrespective of nature/category of employment;
- (ii) Since August, 2016, emigration clearance of all female workers having ECR passports, for overseas employment in 18 ECR countries has been made mandatory through six State-run recruiting agencies only. These are NORKA Roots and Overseas Development and Employment Promotion Consultants (ODEPC) of Kerala, Overseas Manpower Corporation Ltd. (OMCL) of Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh Financial Corporation (UPFC) of Uttar Pradesh, Overseas Manpower Company Andhra Pradesh Limited (OMCAP) of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Overseas Manpower Company Limited (TOMCOM) of Telangana.
- (iii) Every Foreign Employer desirous of directly recruiting a female ECR worker is required to deposit a Bank Guarantee equivalent to US \$2500 in the respective Indian Missions.
- (iv) Embassy attestation has been made mandatory in respect of direct recruitment of all ECR passport holder women workers in respect of all ECR countries;

- (v) For the safety, security and welfare of Indian Domestic Service Workers (DSWs), the Government of India has signed Domestic Service Workers (DSWs) Agreement with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in January, 2014, on Labour Cooperation for Domestic Workers Recruitment.
- (vi) The on-line MADAD portal enables the emigrant workers and their family members to register their consular grievances online and track their redressal.
- (vii) Grievances related to Overseas Employment in notified ECR countries including gulf countries, can also be logged in directly by emigrants/ relatives or through the Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendra (PBSK) on e-Migrate portal. A multi-lingual 24x7 Helpline of PBSK is operational in New Delhi, which provides information, guidance and grievance redressal on all issues and problems pertaining to overseas employment of Indian nationals.
- (viii) Missions in Gulf countries also conduct Open Houses on a regular basis where workers can seek redressal of their grievances.
- (ix) Missions in Gulf countries have also established 24x7 helplines and Toll Free help lines for the benefit of Indian workers to seek help.
- (x) Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendra (PBSK) have been set up at Dubai (UAE), Sharjah (UAE), Riyadh, Jeddah (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), to provide guidance and counselling on all matters pertaining to overseas Indian workers.
- (xi) Shelter Homes for distressed Indian nationals including women workers have been set up in Bahrain, Kuwait, Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates.
- (xii) Labour and Manpower Cooperation MoUs/Agreements are already in place with the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries that provide the institutional framework to comprehensively discuss and review labour related issues.

Simplification of process for issuance of passports

†2572. SHRI NARAYAN RANE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has taken any steps to make the process of getting the passport simple and transparent and if so, the details thereof;

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.