

Simplifying visa process for different countries

450. SHRI HISHEY LACHUNGPA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has taken any steps to simplify the process of obtaining visa from different countries of the world, especially the most visited ones and particularly in the case of tourism related visit to these places;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether at present the visa application process for most of the favoured destinations is a very cumbersome affair, as a result of which many cases of cheating and frauds occur;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) what steps Government has taken to prevent such exploitation of gullible visa-seeking people from fraudsters?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD) V. K. SINGH]: (a) to (e) Granting visa is a sovereign and unilateral decision of the respective country. The Government of India has been continuously liberalizing visa policy with the objective of promoting investments and tourism into India from other countries. The e-Visa scheme has been expanded to include 166 countries and territories till date. These initiatives are expected to encourage other countries to reciprocate and facilitate travel of Indian passport holders in their countries. Whenever specific instances of problems being faced by Indian nationals are brought to the attention of the Ministry, these are taken up with country concerned and/or law enforcement agencies, as appropriate for assistance.

Relooking India's Africa policy

451. DR. K. V. P. RAMACHANDRA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government proposes to relook India's Africa policy to match the growing presence of China in that region; and

(b) if so, what steps are taken/proposed to be taken to grab the opportunities that Africa offers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD) V. K. SINGH]: (a) India's relations with Africa are historical and friendly underpinned by geographical and cultural affinities. Our engagement and

relations with Africa have taken a robust and dynamic character which is independent of Africa's relations with any third country.

(b) Our engagement with Africa is comprehensive, multi-dimensional and involves a wide spectrum of activities. During the last four years, our engagement with Africa has intensified particularly in the realm of political, defence, commercial, economy, scientific and technical cooperation. We moved from Banjul formula at 3rd India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-III) held in October, 2015 and adopted a truly continental and inclusive approach by inviting all 54 African countries. All African countries including 41 African HOG/HOS attended the Summit. Since IAFS-III, there have been unprecedented 29 outgoing visits by the Troika of Rashtrapati, Vice President and Prime Minister while we have hosted over 35 leaders from Africa for various events in the last four years. Every single African country has been visited at least by an Indian Minister in the past four years.

In order to have a more meaningful diplomatic presence, Government has decided to open 18 new Missions in Africa taking the total number to 47.

The Government of India has taken several steps to strengthen relations with African countries. Following are the some of the major decisions:-

- (i) After South Asia, the African continent is the largest recipient of Indian overseas assistance. 181 Lines of Credit have been extended to 41 countries for a total amount of more than 11 billion dollars, which is 42% of the total amount under LoCs.
- (ii) Under our development cooperation programmes, India has undertaken power projects and dams in Sudan and Rwanda to water treatment in Tanzania, sugar factories in Ethiopia and IT Parks in Mozambique and Swaziland. We have set up seven (7) Vocational Training Centres and six (6) Information Technology Centers in Africa. Entrepreneurial Training Centres are also being set up in many African countries.
- (iii) India sources nearly 18% of its crude oil and LNG requirement mostly from the West African region. We import crude oil from Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Chad and Sudan/South Sudan and LNG from Nigeria. We are into Oil exploration in Sudan/South Sudan, Gabon, Libya and LNG and Coal mining in Mozambique etc. South Africa and Ghana supply more than a quarter of our total Coal requirements.
- (iv) The Duty Free Tariff Preference (DFTP) Scheme announced by India for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) benefitted African nations and has contributed towards steady increase in our trade figures by extending

duty-free access to 98.2% of India's total tariff lines. 38 African countries enjoy the benefits of our DFTP Scheme.

- (v) India has become the fifth largest investor in Africa with cumulative investments at USD 54 billion. Sizeable investments have been made in Oil and Gas, mining, banking, pharma, textiles and other sectors in African countries.
- (vi) Our trade with Africa has increased to \$ 62.16 billion (2017-18), an increase of nearly 22% from the previous year.
- (vii) Several training programs under ITEC, ICCR and IAFS programmes, are also being undertaken for capacity building of Africans. Public Private Partnership training programs in the healthcare sector have been initiated by us.
- (viii) International Solar Alliance, another major initiative of Government of India, has been overwhelmingly joined by African countries thereby providing tremendous scope in cooperation on solar energy.
- (ix) In order to facilitate increased people-to-people contact e-tourist visa facility has been extended to 33 African countries.

We are looking at enhanced engagement with the Africa Continent. We want to build upon our partnerships and create jobs and opportunities for all our peoples.

Emergency plan for evacuation of migrant workers

452. DR. BANDA PRAKASH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government proposes to frame an emergency plan with standard operating procedures and an institutional mechanism to evacuate migrant workers, especially the millions in West Asia;

(b) if so, details thereof; and

(c) by when the guidelines would be framed?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS [GENERAL (RETD) V. K. SINGH]: (a) Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs (2018-19) of the 16th Lok Sabha in its 23rd Report presented on January 2, 2019 on "Issues relating to migrant workers including appropriate legislative framework and skill development initiatives for prospective migrants" has recommended that "the Government should chalk out an emergency plan that clearly delineates Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and also forge an institutionalized mechanism with host