

points for financial services across the country. As of now, 30th June, 2019, total 12,242 VLEs out of 3,66,525 functional CSCs (Urban and Rural) are engaged as Business Correspondent (BC).

(c) Does not arise.

Broadband Readiness Index of States

2883. DR. BANDA PRAKASH: Will the Minister of ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is planning to launch broadband services readiness index of States based on parameters like infrastructure, approval processes and utilisation of high speed internet;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD): (a) to (c) As part of National Digital Communication Policy-2018 (NDCP), Government envisages to launch Broadband Readiness Index report of States/UTs to be performed annually, with the following objectives:—

- (i) Create robust and high quality Digital Communications (DC) infrastructure.
- (ii) Attract investments in creating next generation DC infrastructure.
- (iii) Simplification of compliances and procedures.
- (iv) Create a collaborative institutional mechanism between Centre, States and Local Bodies.

E-Passports service

2884. SHRI K. R. ARJUNAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Passport Seva Project has been issuing one crore passports every year;

(b) whether Government proposes to issue e-passports on priority; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN): (a) Yes. The Ministry issued more than 1.12 crore passports in 2018 and 1.08 crore passports in 2017 in India.

(b) and (c) The Ministry has plans to issue chip enabled e-passports to citizens with advanced security features. The personal particulars of the applicants would be digitally signed and stored in the chip which would be embedded in the physical passport booklet. In case anyone tampers with the chip, the system shall be able to identify it resulting in the failure of the passport authentication.

The Government has given its approval for procurement of electronic contactless inlays for manufacturing of e-passports to India Security Press (ISP) Nasik. In this regard, ISP, Nasik, has been authorized to float a Global three-stage tender for procurement of International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)-compliant electronic contactless inlays along with its operating system which is required for manufacture of e-passports. Manufacture of e-passport will commence on the successful completion of the tendering and procurement process by ISP, Nasik.

Number of overseas Indians abroad

2885. SHRI MANISH GUPTA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of overseas Indian abroad, country-wise;

(b) whether the presence of overseas Indians in significant numbers is an important factor in our relationship with countries of their settlement and if so, the details thereof; and

(c) whether Government has any action plan of engagement with overseas Indians in the developed countries and if so, details thereof, country-wise ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI V. MURALEEDHARAN): (a) There are about 31 million overseas Indians abroad. A statement indicating estimated country-wise population of overseas Indians abroad, compiled in December, 2018, on the basis of inputs received from Indian Missions/Posts abroad, is given in Statement (*See below*).

(b) Yes, Sir. The presence of overseas Indians in significant numbers is an important factor in our relationship with countries of their settlement. The Indian diaspora does contribute in the strengthening of India's relationship with countries of their settlement in various fields including trade and investment, business exchanges, tourism promotion, technology transfer, research and development, higher education, etc. Besides, many of our diaspora members are placed at top level positions in industry, including Heads of Global Corporations; a number of them also have high level positions in politics, including Parliamentarians, and a few Heads of Government.