

available there 24 hours. Earlier you had to wait for five to ten working hours. Now you can file it any time, day or night, sitting from wherever possible. When I made this announcement, I said 'कई बार श्रानोदय रात को 12 बजे के बाद होता है!'; you can wake up and file an RTI. Secondly, we have timelines fixed, and that is inherent to RTI. So, we have a fixed timeline, for example, in most cases, four weeks. Also, in a given case, if the information is not provided, then the authorities or the Information Commission is expected to provide valid reasons for that.

SHRI S. MUTHUKARUPPAN: Sir, there are no uniform standards adopted by various government agencies with regard to application and fee and the persons who need to be approached for filing applications. This is one of the difficulties being faced by the general public for RTI applications. So, I would like to know whether the Government is considering standardizing the application and fee in this regard and to direct the authorities to clearly mention the authority to whom application has to be filed.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA): That was a very lengthy question. Let us have a short reply.

DR. JITENDRA SINGH: Sir, I would rather like to share with the hon. Member, through you, Sir, and with the rest of the House that there is a very definite mechanism which is in place and it is being uniformly followed. The first application is made with the PIO and the first appellant is the local officer. The second appellant is the Information Commission, which can be done online. For each of these steps, you also have a definite timeline available. So, if you go to the website, the procedure and all the steps to be followed are very clearly given.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA): So, it is available online. Thank you. Now, Question No. 264; Shri Manish Gupta.

Differential tax issues in the textile industry

*264. SHRI MANISH GUPTA: Will the Minister of TEXTILES be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a differential tax treatment for cotton and Man-made Fibres (MMF), if so, the reasons therefor; and

(b) whether it is a fact that the fibre tax neutrality, if introduced, is likely to give clothing cotton product exports a boost and increase production, if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF TEXTILES (SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI): (a) and (b) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) Yes, Sir. GST on MMF and MMF textiles are higher as compared to Cotton. While GST on Cotton is uniform at 5% across its entire value chain, the rates on MMF textiles are 18%, 12% and 5% on fibre, filament/spun yarn and fabrics respectively. Thus, GST rate on MMF products is higher as compared to Cotton textiles. Further, uneven rates of GST have led to inverted duty structure in MMF textile value chain.

(b) Yes, Sir. Imports of MMF textiles and apparel constitutes largest share (40%) in total textile and apparel imports and are increasing at 5% CAGR in last five years. Fibre tax neutrality is expected to make production of MMF based textiles and apparel competitive in India. Improvement in manufacturing competitiveness may also boost India's export of MMF textiles and apparel which has remained stagnant at around US\$ 9.5 billion in last five years, and increase India's share in the large global MMF apparel segment.

SHRI MANISH GUPTA: Sir, the written document of the Textile Ministry says that it has the potential for doubling employment in this sector. The question is that this sector has a lot of traditional wealth and livelihoods are being supported in the rural areas. This is in direct conflict with the automation and the digitization that is taking place in this sector. Does the Government have any plan to counter this change?

SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI: Sir, I think the strength of the textile industry is that on the one hand, we celebrate the textile handcraft legacy of our country and, on the other hand, to be competitive on a global scale, we have the capacities to augment our technical facilities and become equally competitive in the MMF sector. I, as the Minister in-charge, have always held this publicly and within the Ministry that we want to ensure that there is absolutely no segment of the industry which shall be sacrificed for the growth of the other segment. Hence, we should not, in any way, discourage augmenting of technical facilities or productivity issues. In fact, at the same time, as I said earlier, our endeavour is to ensure that the legacy of handcrafted textile is equally strengthened.

SHRI MANISH GUPTA: Sir, the Ministry has launched the 'Samarth Scheme' which was aimed to train ten lakh youths in three years time. What is the progress so far?

SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI: Sir, we have, under the scheme, envisaged, as the hon. Member rightly pointed out, skilling of close to ten lakh citizens in the textile sector. In the first lag, we have, in conjunction with the State Governments, ensured that four lakh personnel are to be trained in the segment through MoLs with the State Governments. It is something that we have already dedicated to the nation. Currently, we are undergoing, through a tendering process, a system wherein the industry can come forth and become a part of the skilling segment because our endeavour is, once skilled, they need to be gainfully employed.

श्री लाल सिंह वड़ोदिया: माननीय उपसभाध्यक्ष महोदय, मैं आपके माध्यम से माननीय मंत्री जी से कहना चाहता हूँ कि खादी ग्रामोद्योग में khadi और polyvastra बनाया जाता है। महोदय, खादी के धागे पर टैक्स नहीं है, जबकि polyvastra को खादी ग्रामोद्योग संस्थान बनाता है और इसमें जो polyester इस्तेमाल होता है, उस पर टैक्स लगता है। तो मैं माननीय मंत्री महोदय से जानना चाहता हूँ कि जब हम गांधी जी की 150वीं जयंती celebrate करने जा रहे हैं, इस दौरान जो खादी का कपड़ा बनता है, उसमें जो polyester yarn है, क्या सरकार उस पर रियायत देना चाहती है?

श्रीमती स्मृति ज़ूबिन इरानी: उपसभाध्यक्ष महोदय, माननीय सांसद जी ने khadi और polyester के blend की यहां पर चर्चा की। प्रमुखतः सरकार की ओर से जो हमारा विशेष प्रावधान और समर्थन है, वह शुद्ध खादी के कपड़ों, उनके निर्यात अथवा उनके production पर है। जहां तक polyester का सवाल आता है तो tax structure को GST Council निर्धारित करती है, जिसमें सभी प्रदेश की सरकारें सम्मिलित होती हैं।

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: Sir, my question arises from the hon. Minister's answer where she has admitted that the inverted rate of structure has been a great deterrent to the growth of the man-made fibre industry and it is hurting exports particularly. The Finance Minister is also here. I would like to ask the hon. Minister what steps have been taken to address this problem of inverted duty structure because we are losing competitive edge in the man-made fibre industry.

SHRIMATI SMRITI ZUBIN IRANI: Sir, it is very rare that an environmentalist, as celebrated as Shri Jairam Ramesh, stands up for the plastic-based textile. I am very grateful that he has asked this question. Yes, he has pointed it out to the

hon. Finance Minister in this House. But I would like to say that while we, in the Textile Ministry, have communicated to the Finance Ministry with regard to ensuring that this challenge is met, we are extremely mindful of the fact that the GST Council has equal participation of State Governments. The State Governments are supporting production of apparel based on man-made fibre and hence it is not only the responsibility at this end but actually समन्वय के माध्यम से ही प्रदेश की सरकारें जब आगे आएंगी, तभी इस चुनौती का समाधान संभव होगा।

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA): Question No.265.

Wage revision of BSNL retired employees

*265. SHRI M. SHANMUGAM: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether after retirement the Department of Telecommunications is responsible to revise the pension of the retired BSNL employees;
- (b) whether the revision of pension has been kept pending for the wage revision due to which the pensioners are put to hardship; and
- (c) whether the Ministry would expedite the wage revision and accordingly address this grievance?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI DHOTRE SANJAY SHAMRAO): (a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) to (c) Sir, Pension revision of retired Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) employees gets linked to the pay-revision of the serving employees inasmuch as pension is calculated on the basic pay which the retired employee was earning at the time of retirement. Pension may be revised if the said basic pay is revised on account of pay revision of serving employees.

Since, Department of Telecommunications is the Administrative Department for BSNL, any pension revision proposal is to be piloted by the Department of Telecommunications for approval of the competent authority.

Due to poor financial condition of BSNL, it has not been possible for the Government to agree to the demand of pay revision. Hence, the issue of pension revision has also not been agreed to as on date.