

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have the ability to put it in a very sharp manner. You did it and are again trying to add.

DR. JITENDRA SINGH: Sir, the hon. Member is knowledgeable about the subject and I am glad he would be happy to know that in the year 2017, on the directions of the Prime Minister, there was a two-day extensive brain storming exercise which took place, wherein the scientists from the Department of Space interacted separately with each of the Ministries and Departments of Government of India, in order to work out wherein the space technology could come in to provide ease of living. So, in other words, I can say that they are the extra space applications of space technology. Today, space technology is extensively being used in our housing projects, including the smart city projects, in laying of the railway tracks, manning of the railway crossings. The GEO-MGNREGA has been a very successful experiment to which, of course, as the hon. Member said that we could also add the forest part. Sir, another example is the soil health card. In North East, we have even started obtaining and procuring utilization certificates through the medium of satellite which is real time and more authentic. So, as we are going on applying space technology in various sectoral areas, we are learning about more and more applications. Therefore, it is an ongoing process. As the founding father, Dr. Vikram Sarabhai of ISRO, and Dr. Dhawan said that ultimately this has to be done for the ease of living. Likewise, for atomic energy, Dr. Bhabha said that it has to be used for peaceful purposes. So, that objective is sacrosanct to us.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, Question No. 48. The questioner is not present. Are there any supplementaries?

*48. [*The Questioner was absent.*]

Rejection of H-1B visa requests by the US

*48. SHRI D. KUPENDRA REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that nearly a fourth of all fresh H-1B visa requests have been rejected by the US which has hit hard the IT companies of our country;
- (b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor; and
- (c) the remedial steps taken/being taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (DR. SUBRAHMANYAM JAISHANKAR): (a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) to (c) The H-1B visa application process has become more complex for employers worldwide, including for Indian IT companies, due to certain recent administrative changes in the H-1B programme which have increased documentation requirements on the petitioners. These changes have impacted the processing of H-1B petitions in general, entailing a higher level of scrutiny. According to statistics of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), a total 116,031 initial or new H-1B petitions were processed and completed in Fiscal Year 2019, out of which 27,707 petitions — accounting for about 23.9 per cent — were denied.

The USCIS statistics do not reflect data on H-1B visa granted. U.S. Department of State releases data on the number of H-1B visa issued. These show a marginal increase in the total number and share of H-1B visas issued to Indian nationals between Fiscal Years 2015 and 2018, as given below:

H-1B Visas	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018
Total H-1B Visas	172,748	180,057	179,049	179,660
Issued to Indian Nationals	119,952	126,692	129,097	125,528
% Share	69.4%	70.4%	72.1%	69.9%

Source: U.S. Department of State

Indian nationals account for nearly 70 per cent of all H-1B visa issued, even though the share of Indian IT companies in the H-1B visa is relatively small. Indian nationals also accounted for about 93 per cent of all Employment Authorization Document issued to H-4 visa holding spouses of H-1B beneficiaries as per statistics available till December 2017.

Government of India has closely consulted all stakeholders and engaged with the U.S. Administration and Congress on issues related to the movement of Indian professionals, including those pertaining to the H-1B programme. These issues were raised by External Affairs Minister with his U.S. counterpart in New Delhi in June, 2019 and with U.S. interlocutors in Washington D.C. in September/October, 2019. In our engagements, we have emphasized that this has been a mutually-beneficial partnership which should be nurtured.

SHRI SYED NASIR HUSSAIN: Sir, is it a fact that the USA Government has disqualified seven Indian IT companies from applying for H-1B visas? If so, what are the reasons for it, and what are the steps taken by the Government to address the concerns of Indian companies?

DR. SUBRAHMANYAM JAISHANKAR: Sir, with regard to the seven major Indian employers, there is no disqualification on any of them. The number of visas for which they have applied to has come down in the last few years. Denial rates have also gone up. But, denial rates have not gone up only for the Indian companies; denial rates have gone up for all companies. So, as far as these seven companies are concerned, even last year, they got 3,828 new visas, and 15,230 renewal of H-1B visas.

SHRI SWAPAN DASGUPTA: Sir, I understand the concerns over H-1B visas because they affect the competitiveness of our Indian companies. But, Sir, I want certain clarification or elaboration from the Minister on the issue which touches on a very delicate question of our interests and the question of the national sovereignty of another country. What is the position which we normally take with regard to work visas and emigration of Indians to overseas for work purposes?

DR. SUBRAHMANYAM JAISHANKAR: Sir, through you, I would like to say that the hon. Member recognizes that issuing visas is the sovereign prerogative of another State. But, at the same time, there are very important economic and business, and, even social interests at stake. So, we are constantly in touch with the American system, the American Government and Members of the Congress to persuade them and to convince them that tapping into the Indian talent pool is to our mutual benefit. In that, I think, we have been successful in large measure. Actually, if you look at the numbers, the number of H-1B visas has been going up in the last few years and the total rejection rate has been coming down.

SHRI K. J. ALPHONS: Sir, I think, there has been a move by the United States Government to prevent spouses of H-1B visa holders from working in the United States, which affects something like half-a-million spouses. Has any such order been issued by the United States and if so, what has the Government of India done?

DR. SUBRAHMANYAM JAISHANKAR: Sir, the ability of spouses to work was introduced in 2015 and this category of visa is called H4 visa. Indians today account for 93 per cent of the total number of visas issued in this category. There was some controversy whether this programme would be continued but right now, the programme is continued. There is a court order to the effect that it should be continued but the Trump Administration has indicated that it may review it at some point of time.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Ninety-three per cent!

DR. SUBRAHMANYAM JAISHANKAR: Yes, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Question No. 49. The questioner is absent. Are there any supplementaries?

*49. [*The Questioner was absent.*]

Internet and Wi-Fi facilities to villages

*49. SHRI VIJAY PAL SINGH TOMAR: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has provided internet and Wi-Fi facilities to all the villages of the country for the benefit of the farmers to increase their knowledge about the agriculture sector and keep them informed about the new developments in the agriculture sector;

(b) if so, the measures/action being taken by Government under this issue; and

(c) if not, by when this target would be completed to provide internet and Wifi facilities to all the villages across the country?

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) BharatNet project is being implemented in a phased manner to provide broadband/internet connectivity to all the Gram Panchayats (GPs) (approx. 2,50,000) in the country. A total of 1,28,376 GPs have been made Service Ready as on 07.11.2019. A total of 2 lakh GPs are targeted to be completed by March, 2020.

As part of BharatNet project, the Last Mile connectivity, through Wi-Fi or any other suitable broadband technology, to access broadband/internet services, is to be provided at all GPs in the country. Accordingly, work of provisioning of 2 Wi-Fi Access Points (APs) for about 1.25 lakh GPs under Phase-I is under implementation. As of now, Wi-Fi hotspots have been installed in 45,769 GPs and services are being provided in 16,151 GPs.

Internet is being currently accessed mainly through mobile wireless 2G,3G and 4G technologies which at present cover more than 95 per cent of population of the country.