

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

STARRED QUESTION NO:285

ANSWERED ON:25.04.2012

APPOINTMENT OF WELFARE OFFICERS IN MISSIONS

Abdulrahman Shri ;Kodikunnil Shri Suresh

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government proposes to appoint Welfare Officers in all its Missions abroad to assist Indian citizens particularly in the light of the recent incident in Norway regarding grant of custody of children to the parents;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) the nature of assistance that the Indian citizens living abroad seek from the Missions along with the details of requests received by each of the Indian Missions during the last three years and the current year, Mission-wise, year-wise;
- (d) whether the Missions have at times failed to respond to the requests/appeals by the Indian citizens; and
- (e) if so, the corrective steps taken by the Government in this regard along with the status of appointment of legally trained and qualified Welfare Officers in all its Missions?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S.M. KRISHNA)

(a) to (e) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (A) TO (E) OF LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO.285 REGARDING 'APPOINTMENT OF WELFARE OFFICERS IN MISSIONS' FOR ANSWER ON 25.04.2012

(a) & (b) Indian Missions and Posts abroad have Consular/Community Welfare Wings with designated Officers to attend to the welfare issues of distressed Indian nationals. There is no proposal to separately appoint Welfare Officers in all Missions abroad. The Consular/Community Welfare officers can be contacted by Indian nationals at any time during office hours as well after office hours and on holidays for advice and assistance. Contact details of these officers are displayed both on the website of the Indian Missions/Posts as well as on the Notice Boards in the Embassy premises. A 24x7 Helpline is established to deal with issues of urgent nature.

Ministry of External Affairs from time to time issue instructions to all Indian Missions/Posts abroad reiterating the need for a more proactive approach by our Heads of Missions/Posts in dealing with the problems faced by Indian nationals living in the country of their accreditation.

(c) The Consular/Community Welfare Wings in an Indian Mission/Post abroad is approached by Indian nationals for welfare assistance of different kinds - a few examples of which are given below:

- i) transportation to India of mortal remains of an Indian worker whose family is unable to bear the cost of such transportation and whose employer has refused to pay for the same,
- ii) repatriation to India of distressed Indian workers, including Indian housemaids. In countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, a Housemaid Shelter for runaway Indian housemaids and destitute Indian women is in place,
- iii) repatriation to India of those Indians who become victims of fake visa rackets,
- iv) provision of medical treatment or temporary financial relief to those visiting Indians who fall ill abroad or meet with some accident or to those Indian tourists who lost their belongings.
- v) settlement of labour disputes between expatriate Indian nationals and the local employer through amicable negotiations and correspondence. In some countries, free Interpreter services are also provided to the Indian worker to pursue his case at labour and other courts. These designated officials also attend hearings in Public Court for the settlement of death compensation claims of deceased Indian national on behalf of next of kin. These designated Officers ensure that the legitimate interests of Indian nationals are protected.
- vi) locating a missing Indian national,
- vii) distressed Indian women also approach Indian Missions/Posts to address issues like desertion, harassment and cruelty in marriage,
- viii) provision of miscellaneous services to Indian nationals like issue of Life Certificate, Marriage certificate, registration of births, deaths/marriage of Indian nationals and issue of birth, death and marriage certificates, attestation of Wills, Power of Attorney, Affidavits, Police Clearance Certificates

(PCCs). It may be mentioned here that our Indian Missions abroad provide free attestation of death-related documents. ix) provision of passport related services, x) visit to various jails abroad to meet personally the jailed Indian national to know about his/her welfare and sort out any problem on the basis of the consular access granted by the local government.

All Indian Missions/Posts abroad have now established the Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) which is being managed by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. This Fund is aimed at providing the following services to an Indian on a means tested basis:

(i) boarding and lodging for distressed Indian workers in household/domestic sectors and unskilled labourers, (ii) Extending emergency medical care to the distressed Indians, (iii) Providing air passage to stranded overseas Indian in need, (iv) Providing initial legal assistance to an Indian national in deserving cases, (v) Expenditure on incidentals and airlifting the mortal remains to India or local cremation/burial of the deceased Indian national in such cases where the sponsor is unable or unwilling to do so as per the contract and the family is unable to meet the cost.

Indian Missions/Posts in the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and the Gulf countries have also been providing legal/financial assistance to Indian women deserted by their overseas Indian/ foreigner husband, under a Scheme floated by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. The assistance is presently limited to US \$ 3000 per case for developed countries and US\$ 2000 per case for developing countries and will be released to the empanelled legal counsel of the applicant or Indian Community Association/Women's organization/NGO concerned to enable it to take steps to assist the woman in documentation and preparatory work for filing the case.

(d) Indian Missions/Posts abroad always strive to timely respond to the requests/appeals by Indian citizens who are in distress.

(e) Indian Missions/Posts abroad are periodically instructed to adopt a proactive and supportive attitude towards the needs of distressed Indian nationals under their jurisdictions. After the instance of taking over the custody of two Indian children by the Norwegian Social Service authorities and the cases of serious ill-treatment of Indian nationals in few other countries, the Ministry of External Affairs issued instructions to all the Heads of Indian Missions/Posts abroad in February this year to take initiatives to deal with the problems faced by Indian nationals. Some of the initiatives are, having an Open Day preferably once a fortnight to hear out directly grievances of Indian nationals in distress, making more effective the existing channels of communications in Indian Missions/Posts for interacting with the Indian nationals, having the well-established mechanism to improve the accountability of the concerned Mission Officers as regards redressal of Indian nationals' grievances, etc. All Heads of Missions/Posts have been directed to periodically inform the Ministry of the action taken at their end as far as providing timely assistance to distressed Indian national is concerned.