

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

STARRED QUESTION NO:193

ANSWERED ON:18.12.2013

INDIAN WORKERS ARRESTED ABROAD

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Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the details of the number of Indian citizens staying/employed in foreign/Gulf countries including Kuwait, country-wise;
- (b) whether a number of Indian workers have reportedly been arrested allegedly on charges of violating visa norms and threatened with deportation;
- (c) if so, the details thereof along with the procedure being followed with regard to deportation of such persons;
- (d) whether the Government/Indian Missions abroad and those located in the Gulf countries have raised their plight at high level bilateral exchanges including with Kuwait and allowed consular access to those affected Indian citizens; and
- (e) if so, the details and the success achieved as a result thereof along with the financial assistance provided to them for their safe passage to India?

Answer

MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI)

(a) to (e): A statement is laid on the table of the House

Statement as referred to in reply to the Lok Sabha Starred Question No.193 for 18/12/2013 regarding "Indian Workers Arrested Abroad".

(a) : There are approximately 10 million Non-Resident Indian(NRI) living in 205 countries abroad. The country-wise details of NRI population as per data available with the Ministry is in Annexure-A.

(b) and (c) : Some Indian workers have reportedly been arrested allegedly on charges of violation of visa norms and threatened with deportation primarily in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia(KSA), United Arab Emirates(UAE), Oman and Kuwait. The details are as below: -

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)

More than 1.4 million Indians availed of the concessions given by the Saudi authorities during the grace period announced by His Majesty King Abdullah on April 6th, 2013. Since April 2013 only 141301 (as on November 27, 2013) Indian workers left for India without facing any penal action or no ban on their return. There have been no reports of large scale arrest of Indian workers after the grace period although there may be a few cases of Indians from the very large Indian community who might fear deportation from Saudi Arabia as they did not avail the concession during the grace period.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Any illegal workers, employees, etc. overstaying on visa or any overseas worker found guilty in some civil/all criminal cases are deported from the UAE, including Indians. The UAE Government had declared a 60 day general amnesty for the illegal migrants from December 2012 to February 2013. A total of 7923 Indians availed the amnesty.

The Consular Officers make regular weekly visit to jails in Dubai & Sharjah and fortnightly /monthly visits to the other jails in the Northern Emirates to render consular assistance to the prisoners. Travel documents, tickets and financial assistance are provided to the deportees, on need basis.

Oman

The Royal Oman Police regularly conducts special operations in coordination with the Ministry of Manpower in a campaign to arrest violators of visa norms of different nationalities from time to time and detain them for deportation.

The details of such Indian workers who are arrested on violation of visa norms are not provided by the Omani authorities to the Mission. The detained violators of visa norms are kept in custody by the Omani authorities for a short period and deported. In case the travel documents of any detained worker are not available the Jail authorities bring them to the notice of the Indian Embassy for

consular assistance. In case the Indian workers are unable to arrange for the return passage, the Indian Embassy provides financial assistance in the form of air ticket for returning back to India.

KUWAIT

As per records, there are a number of Indians in Kuwait facing repatriation proceedings due to violation of residency/ visa rules. As soon as the cases of illegal migrants are brought to the Embassy's notice by the local authorities or by the resident himself/herself, the Embassy takes expeditious action to facilitate their repatriation in cooperation/coordination with the local authorities to ensure that they return to India in a safe manner. During early months of 2013, some Indian nationals were apprehended as they were not having valid residency visa to stay in Kuwait. The Embassy issued 1,081 Emergency Certificates for their early repatriation to India. In deserving cases, suitable financial assistance is provided by the Embassy to facilitate repatriation.

(d) and (e): India maintained high level engagement with Saudi leadership through our Mission and through Ministerial visits. A Ministerial delegation comprising Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs, MOS for External Affairs and Advisor to Prime Minister visited Saudi Arabia in April 2013. MOS for External Affairs visited Saudi Arabia in May 2013 and called on Crown Prince, Second Deputy Premier, Foreign Minister, Interior Minister and Labour Minister.

A Joint Committee was set up at the level of Deputy Minister of Labour and Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy, which interacted daily to follow-up all issues of concern to the Indian community with the Saudi Arabian authorities. The Mission maintained regular contacts with the Saudi officials at all levels including seeking consular access to Indians in jails/ deportation centers, etc.

In Oman whenever any case of harassment is reported to the Indian Embassy, the matter is immediately reported to the local government for redressal. The issues concerning protection of the interests of Indian nationals are also flagged during meetings with local dignitaries and during bilateral meetings like India – Oman Joint Commission, India- Oman Joint Working Group on Manpower, etc. The Omani authorities allow consular access to the affected Indian citizens and a team from the Mission regularly visits the detention center to see to the welfare of the detained Indian citizens and also to arrange their travel documents.

The matter relating to security checking and deportation of Indian nationals was taken up by the Embassy with the concerned authorities in Kuwait. During the visit of Hon'ble MOS (External Affairs) in July 2013, the matter was taken up for granting of a grace period (Amnesty) to Indian expatriates in Kuwait who have violated residency laws to enable them to return to India without the deportation process.

Similar arrangements exist in other countries also.

In Saudi Arabia, more than 1.4 million Indians availed concessions during the grace period. This includes 4,34,667 Indians who transferred their services to other firms, who are 'Nitaqat' compliant. Additionally 4,81,233 Indians changed their jobs/profession. Apart from this over 4,70,000 Indians got their licenses/job permits renewed.

During the grace period, Embassy of India, Riyadh received 66,729 applications for issue of Emergency Certificates (ECs), out of which, 41,283 Emergency Certificates were issued. Similarly, 26,600 applications were received in the Consulate General of India, Jeddha and out of which, 23,486 ECs were issued. The number of Indians who left on final exit availing the grace period (as on November 27, 2013) is 1, 41,301.

The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has (a) waived off a fee of 7 Saudi Riyals for contribution to Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) to issue Emergency Certificate (EC), (b) allowed Missions/Posts to bear cost of processing of EC of 40 Saudi Riyals per person, and to provide temporary accommodation, transportation, food etc. to Indian workers in need and (c) to make use of Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) to meet small penalties/fines in respect of workers who may require such payments for being permitted to return to India .

The local authorities do not share data on deportation from UAE. However, from Indian Community Welfare Fund, the Consulate has facilitated air tickets for 261 stranded Indian nationals during the period January to October 2013. The Consulate had extended financial assistance of approximately INR 12, 44,007 to 2396 amnesty seekers to return to India.

During last one year (December 2012 to November 2013), the Embassy of India, Muscat helped in repatriation of 404 Indians by providing them the travel documents and air tickets for their return to India.