

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF PORTS, SHIPPING AND WATERWAYS
LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO- 1596
ANSWERED ON 10/02/2023

WELFARE SCHEMES FOR SEAFARERS

1596. SHRIMATI SANGEETA KUMARI SINGH DEO:
DR. JAYANTA KUMAR ROY:

Will the Minister of PORTS, SHIPPING AND WATERWAYS be pleased to state:
पत्तन, पोत परिवहन और जलमार्ग मंत्री

- (a) whether the Government has taken steps to strengthen the welfare schemes for seafarers in the country including providing a safe working environment on ships and if so, the details thereof;
- (b) whether the Seafarer Welfare Fund Society (SWFS) has been set up for welfare of Indian seafarers and their families;
- (c) if so, the details and the salient features thereof along with the funds released/utilized during each of the last three years and the current year;
- (d) whether the Government has formalized any mechanism to safeguard the interest of the Indian crew members abroad in foreign vessels specially during exigencies like pirate hijacking or fatal accidents and if so, the details thereof; and
- (e) the steps taken/proposed to be taken by the Government for the welfare of seafarers and to resolve their grievances in the country?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF PORTS, SHIPPING AND WATERWAYS
(SHRI SARBANANDA SONOWAL)

(a) Yes Sir. The Government of India is very conscious of the need for continuous upskilling and welfare of the seafarers and their families. The Government has taken various measures to strengthen the welfare schemes for seafarers in the country including providing safe working environment on ships. The measures taken by the Government to strengthen welfare schemes for seafarers and their families are:

- i. The Government of India ratified the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC) of ILO which is a tripartite Convention of Government, Seafarers and employers and implemented the same by framing the Merchant Shipping (Maritime Labour) Rules, 2016 (ML Rules) and Merchant Shipping (Recruitment and Placement of Seafarers) Rules, 2016, (RPS Rules), providing for regulatory framework for manning and labour matters including Seafarers' employment agreements, wages, hours of work and rest, leave, repatriation, manning levels, career and skill development opportunities

for seafarers,accommodation and recreational facilities, food and catering, Health protection, Medical care, Welfare and Social protection, flag state and port state obligations and complaint procedures etc.

- ii. The Central Government through its organizations such as Seamen Provident Fund Organization (SPFO) and Seafarers Welfare Fund Society (SWFS) has implemented various schemes for the welfare of the seafarers and their families. The schemes being implemented by these organizations include Provident Fund Scheme, Survival Benefit Scheme, Invalidity Benefit Scheme, Maternity Benefit Scheme for female seafarers, the Old age benefit Welfare Scheme, Family Benefit Welfare Scheme, SWFS-Novel Corona-virus (Covid-19) Assistance Scheme and Ex-Gratia Assistance on Death.
- iii. In addition, various Seafarer's hostel/club / Welfare centres have been established and are functioning at various port cities across the country, for example, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Cochin, Port Blair, Haldia, Kandla, Kakinada, Gangavaram and Paradip which function under the supervision of the Mercantile Marine Departments (MMDs)/Ports.
- iv. For enhancement of skill and competence of seafarers, there are various schemes that have been implemented through the Maritime Training Trust under the DG Shipping including, the Skill enhancement program of GP Rating and cadets, E-Learning for Certificate of Competencies Courses, E-Learning for Modular Courses, Conduct of online Course on English Communication & Soft Skill for faculty, and Providing of enhanced financial support for women seafaring candidates.
- v. Several measures have been taken to ease the hardship faced by the seafarers due to COVID 19 pandemic including steps for combat corona virus on board ships, pre-board screening, vaccination of seafarers, e-pass facility, controlled crew change, crew change through chartered flights, extension of validity of certificates and continuation of training and examination system through e-mode etc.

(b)&(c) On recommendation made by the Sub-Committee of the National Welfare Board for Seafarers, the Central Government has set up the Seafarers Welfare Fund Society (SWFS) as an autonomous society in the year 1964 and it is registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.

The following welfare schemes are implemented by the SWFS for the benefit of the Indian seafarers and their family members:-

- i. Survival Benefit Scheme,
- ii. Invalidity Benefit Scheme,

- iii. Maternity Benefit Scheme (for women seafarers)
- iv. Old Age Benefit Scheme,
- v. Family Benefit Scheme.
- vi. Ex-Gratia Assistance on death (for registered foreign going seamen only)
- vii. SWFS-Novel Coronavirus COVID-19 Assistance Scheme) (Now discontinued from 30.06.2022).

Salient features of these Schemes are given in **Annexure I**. The details of amount spent on various welfare schemes during the last three years and the current year by SWFS is provided in the attached statement as **Annexure-II**.

(d)& (e) Yes sir, the Government has taken several steps to safeguard the interest of Indian seafarers during exigencies like pirate hijacking or fatal accidents and details are as follows:-

- i. To deal with potential maritime security situations arising out of any hijacking at sea of merchant vessels with Indian crew, an Inter-Ministerial Group of Officers (IMGO) has been set up by the Government of India, under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Govt. of India. Further, Anti-Piracy Contingency Plan for dealing with piracy and hijacking of merchant ships with Indian crew has been prepared by Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways and activated at the time of such an incident. This plan which aims at ensuring the safe release of Indian national crew taken to shore after piracy or unlawful interferences at sea sets into motion an immediate integrated response by concerned Ministries/Departments/Organizations.
- ii. The Govt. of India has also set up the Committee of Secretaries on Anti-Piracy and Hijacking at sea (COSAPH), under the chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary, Government of India, for such crisis management and to advise the Government on allied major policy and strategy decisions.
- iii. The Directorate General of Shipping, Govt. of India has issued various notices / maritime security advisories / circulars, laying down guidelines and actions to be initiated by Indian Merchant Ships, Shipping companies & other stakeholders to prevent and/or take action for piracy & armed robbery incidents. All the circulars/notices are made available in the Public domain and on the website of the Directorate General of Shipping (www.dgshipping.gov.in)
- iv. Furthermore, Naval escorts were being provided by Indian navy in coordination with the Directorate General of Shipping in the Gulf of Aden during the period beginning from 2008 when piracy was prevalent in this region. Accordingly, safe passage was being provided to the Indian flag merchant ships in the Gulf of Aden by utilizing the Indian Naval convoys.
- v. The Directorate General of Shipping, Govt. of India has approved a security training program which includes a piracy awareness module to sensitize and improve preparedness of seafarers in case of piracy & armed robbery incidents at sea. All Indian seafarers are mandatorily required to complete this course prior to joining a vessel.

- vi. India has also been actively participating in the security meetings of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) and other international fora such as the Shared Awareness & De-confliction (SHADE) and Friends of the Gulf of Guinea (FoGG) to ensure active participation of the international community to curb the menace of piracy.
- vii. India had taken up the matter of increased piracy activity in the Gulf of Guinea during the meeting of 101st Maritime Safety Committee of International Maritime Organization which is one of the reasons resulting in IMO taking action to enhance the coordination of initiatives among stakeholders, including facilitating meetings with representatives of the industry, the Nigeria Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) and the Inter-regional Coordination Centre (ICC).
- viii. As per Rule 5 (j) of Merchant Shipping (Recruitment and Placement of Seafarers) Rules, 2016, the Recruitment and Placement of Seafarers (RPS) service provider reports the incident or casualty on -board causing injury or death, disappearance, loss overboard or homicide by or of an Indian National to the Director General of Shipping at the earliest and not later than twenty four hours of the receipt of such information. On receipt of the report, as per the protocol followed by the Directorate General of Shipping, the following actions are being taken on each case:
 - a. Gather more information, if required, from the RPS providers.
 - b. Take up the matter with the Indian Mission and requesting them for providing necessary assistance as required in the matter.
 - c. To contact the Flag State and Port State authorities to carry out Marine Safety investigation in accordance with the International Convention on the Laws of the Sea and Casualty Investigation Code of International Maritime Organization and to furnish the investigation report.
 - d. Coordinate with P&I and Owners of the vessel for payment of death compensation to the next of kin of the deceased.
- ix. Further, the Directorate has set up DG Communication center (DG Commcentre) in 2004, acting as a Maritime Assistance Service (MAS) in accordance with IMO guidelines for dissemination of information 24x7 to stakeholders in the shipping fraternity on safety and security incident.
- x. The information related to shipping incidents occurring at sea on board the Indian ships globally and Indian nationals on board the Indian and a foreign vessel is shared with concerned Govt. authorities/agencies and shipping companies /operators to initiate action at their end. Each incident is being handled and monitored by DG Commcentre in order to respond to the incident by respective stakeholder. The Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre (MRCC) of concerned region is also responsible for co-coordinating air-sea rescue in that region.
- xi. To redress the grievances of seafarers related to welfare schemes, there is a grievance redressal mechanism prevalent in the SWFS as well as in the Office of the Directorate General of Shipping.

- xii. The Government attaches the highest priority to the safety, security and well-being of Indians, including seafarers, in foreign countries. Indian Missions/Posts abroad remain vigilant and closely monitor the incidents related to Indian nationals in foreign countries. As soon as the information about a stranded/distressed Indian national is received by an Indian Mission/Post, it immediately gets in touch with the Indian national, local Foreign Office and other concerned local authorities, as the case may be, to ascertain the facts of the case, confirm his Indian nationality and ensure his welfare.
- xiii. Apart from extending possible consular assistance to Indian nationals in distress, Indian Missions/Posts also assist in providing legal aid wherever needed. Missions/Posts also maintain a local panel of lawyers where Indian community is in sizeable numbers. The Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) is set up in Indian Missions/Posts abroad for assisting overseas Indian nationals in distress situations on a means tested basis in deserving cases. The support extended under ICWF includes financial assistance to Indian nationals for legal aid as well as travel documents / air tickets.

Annexure I

Note on Welfare Schemes run by Seafarer's Welfare Fund Society

- i. **Survival Benefit Scheme:** (effective from 21/08/2014) This scheme is applicable to the Indian seafarers, holding CDC book, and who are last recruited/engaged by the Indian ship owners or through registered RPSL, for either Indian or foreign flag vessel, before their death. Under this scheme the financial assistance of Rs 1,00,000/- (Rupees One Lac Only), on death of Indian seafarer is paid to the eligible beneficiary of the Indian seafarer, who has expired on or after 21/08/2014, within off article period of 12 months from the date of sign off from last vessel/ship as recruited/engaged above and have submitted claim within the period of 2 years from the date of death of the seafarer. ***The financial assistance enhanced to Rs. 2,00,000/- for beneficiary w.e.f. 16/03/2016.***
- ii. **Invalidity Benefit Scheme:** (effective from 21/08/2014) This scheme is applicable to the Indian seafarers, holding CDC book, and who are last recruited/engaged by the Indian ship owners or through registered RPLS, for either Indian or foreign flag vessel, before occurrence of injury due to which he/she become permanently unfit for seafaring profession. Under this scheme the financial assistance of Rs 1,00,000/- (Rupees One Lac only) is paid to the Indian seafarers, who became permanently unfit for seafaring profession, due to an injury that occurred on or after 21/08/2014, within off article period of 12 months from the date of signoff from the last vessel/ship as recruited /engaged above and have submitted claim within the period of 2 years from the date of certificate issued by the DGS approved medical practitioner. The financial assistance enhanced to Rs 2,00,000/- (Rupees Two Lakh per beneficiary w.e.f. 16/03/2016).
- iii. **Maternity Benefit Scheme for female seafarer:** This scheme is applicable to the Indian female seafarer for delivery of child w.e.f.21/08/2014. The seafarer holding CDC book, and who are last recruited/engaged by the Indian ship owners or through registered RPSL, for either Indian or foreign flag vessel, before the delivery date, are eligible under this scheme. Under this scheme the financial assistance of Rs. 25,000/- (Rupees Twenty Five Thousand only) is granted to the Indian female seafarer for delivery on or after 21/08/2014, within off articulated period of 60 months, from the date of sign off from the last

vessel/ship, as recruited/engaged above and have submitted claim within a period of 2 years from the date of delivery. Such financial assistance shall be paid, only for 2 deliveries, in the above case.

- iv. **The Old age benefit Welfare Scheme:** (effective from 01/01/2019) under this scheme the financial assistance of Rs.50,000/- is paid to the Indian seafarers who attend the age of 65(Sixty Five) years on 1st January 2019 or thereafter and fulfill all the following condition i.e.
- a. He/She should have at least 6 months sea service after 01/04/2014 after the age of 55 years;
 - b. He/She should have joined Indian flag vessel or engaged through Registered (RPSL) License holding company,
 - c. He/she should have an Indian CDC, which has since been cancelled.
- v. **Family Benefit Welfare Scheme:**

To pay the financial assistance to the Indian seafarers whose son/daughter completes the pre-sea training course from the DGS approved Institute on or after 01/01/2019 and obtains the Indian CDC for joining seafaring profession. The financial assistance of Rs.25,000/- in respect of son and Rs.50,000/- for daughter is paid to the seafarers.

To pay the financial assistance to the Indian seafarers whose son/daughter successfully completes 2 years full-time post-graduation degree/diploma in any discipline other than maritimestream, duly approved by UGC/Deemed University /AICTE on or after 01/01/2019. The financial assistance of Rs.10,000/- in respect of son and Rs.15,000/- for daughter is paid to the seafarers.

The seafarers who fulfil all the following conditions will be eligible for the benefits under the family benefit welfare scheme, and is restricted to 2 (two) children only:

- a. He/She should have at least 6 months sea service after 01/04/2014.
 - b. He/She should have joined Indian flag vessel or engaged through Registered License holding company, and
 - c. He/she should have an Indian CDC.
- vi. **SWFS-Novel Corona-virus (Covid-19) Assistance Scheme:** This scheme was implemented after the outburst of Corona-virus (Covid-19) in India. This scheme started w.e.f. 01/02/2020. Under this scheme SWFS provides financial assistance to the seafarers & their family members for 'in-patient hospitalization treatment for Corona-virus (Covid-19) and in case death of seafarers. Under this scheme the SWFS provides the financial assistance of 50% of hospitalization expenditure or maximum up to Rs. One Lac, for in-patient hospitalization treatment taken for novel corona-virus (Covid-19).

Further the financial assistance amounting to Rs. Two Lakh is paid to the next of kin of the seafarer in case of death of seafarer due to Corona-virus (Covid-19). The Scheme is time bound till the end of Corona-virus (Covid-19) pandemic in India.

- vii. **Ex-Gratia Assistance on Death:** This scheme is implemented w.e.f.01/01/1993 applicable only to the Indian seafarers who are registered under foreign going sector and expire on or after 1.1.1993 while in off articulated period and who are or were within the age of superannuation at the time of their death and hold or held valid registrations or were serving seamen whose registration were kept in abeyance or cancelled subsequently. (Registration with Seamen's Employment Office) Under this scheme an amount of Rs 2 Lakh (Rupees Two Lakh only) w.e.f. 16/03/2016 is paid towards Ex-Gratia Assistance on Death to widows/dependants of seafarer, for the death of seafarer occurred on or after 16/03/2016.

Annexure II

No	Name of the Welfare Scheme	F.Y. 2019-20		F.Y. 2020-21		F.Y. 2021-22		F.Y. 2022-23	
		No. of Beneficiaries	Amount (in Rupees)	No. of Beneficiaries	Amount (in Rupees)	No. of Beneficiaries	Amount (in Rupees)	No. of Beneficiaries	Amount (in Rupees)
1	Survival Benefit Scheme	29	56,80,000.00	16	32,00,000.00	59	1,19,00,000.00	27	54,00,000.00
2	Invalidity Benefit Scheme	1	2,00,000.00	1	2,00,000.00	1	2,00,000.00	1	2,00,000.00
3	Maternity Benefit Scheme				25,000.00		75,000.00		
4	Family Benefit Scheme-Pre-Sea Training							2	50,000.00
	Family Benefit Scheme-Post Graduation Degree / Diploma Course			1	15,000.00			1	10,000.00

5	Old Age Benefit Scheme		13,00,000.00		44,00,000.00	139	69,50,000.00	121	60,50,000.00
6	SWFS–Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Assistance Scheme			88	76,30,794.00	439	4,21,17,304.00	89	94,94,847.00
7	MEMA (Reg.FG seaman)	911	1,13,86,700.00	199	24,87,500.00	80	10,00,000.00	23	2,87,500.00
8	Ex-Gratia Assistance on death		2,00,000.00						
	Total	941	1,87,66,700.00	305	1,79,58,294.00	718	6,22,42,304.00	264	2,14,92,347.00
