

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

LOK SABHA
STARRED QUESTION NO.190
TO BE ANSWERED ON 10.12.2021

EMIGRANTS JOB LOSS DUE TO COVID-19

***190. ADV. A. M. ARIFF:**

Will the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state:

- (a) whether a large number of emigrants employed in Gulf countries were forced to return to India in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic;
- (b) if so, the number of returnees from Gulf countries since March 2020, State-wise;
- (c) whether the Government has any proposal to provide one-time financial assistance for the Gulf returnees who have lost their jobs and if not, the reasons therefor;
- (d) whether the Government has received any representation from the State of Kerala for providing one-time financial assistance to emigrant returnees and if so, the action taken thereon; and
- (e) whether the Government will instruct the Indian embassies abroad to expedite the process of payment of pending salaries and allowances of emigrant workers in Gulf countries to enable them to tide over the financial crisis caused by COVID-19 and if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER
THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(DR. SUBRAHMANYAM JAISHANKAR)

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

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a) TO (e) OF THE LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. *190 REGARDING “EMIGRANTS JOB LOSS DUE TO COVID-19” TO BE ANSWERED ON 10.12.2021

While a large number of Indian workers in the Gulf returned to India as a result of the impact of Covid-19, the economic recovery in that region and their increasing openness to travel from India has now seen a return by many of them.

2. As per Government’s estimates, about 7,16,662 workers returned from the six Gulf countries under the Vande Bharat Mission. Their country-wise breakup is given below:

S.No.	Name of ECR Countries	Estimated No. of Indian workers
1.	UAE	3,30,058
2.	Saudi Arabia	1,37,900
3.	Kuwait	97,802
4.	Oman	72,259
5.	Qatar	51,190
6.	Bahrain	27,453
	TOTAL	7,16,662

3. During the Covid-19 pandemic, our Missions and Posts proactively extended support to Indians both directly using the Indian Community Welfare Fund and by coordinating with community associations. This included expenses on a needs basis pertaining to boarding and lodging, air passages, emergency medical care, etc.

4. The robust framework established by the Government, especially since 2014, was extremely useful in meeting the emergency needs that arose during the pandemic. Apart from the liberalization of the usage of Indian Community Welfare Fund, the role of the Pravasi Bhartiya Sahayata Kendras, the Mission/Post helplines, the shelter homes, etc were notable in this regard.

5. It was the Government’s priority to ensure during the pandemic that its impact on Indian workers in terms of loss of employment was mitigated. To that end, the Ministry and all our Missions in the Gulf were continuously engaged with

the Governments of the Gulf nations to maintain the workers, ensure their welfare and facilitate financial payments due to them.

6. As the pandemic has receded in recent months, this focus has shifted to pressing for return of workers and families on an expeditious basis. To that end, all Gulf nations were pressed to establish air bubbles and ease visa, travel and health restrictions. All countries in the Gulf have responded favourably to these efforts by the Government as a result of which, there has been a steady flow of returnees back to the Gulf. Government will continue to make this its priority in engagement with the Gulf nations.

7. During 2020-21, Government has received many representations from different quarters regarding the welfare and livelihood of Indian workers in the Gulf. This includes the State of Kerala as well.

8. These issues have been taken up by the Government with its Gulf counterparts at the highest levels. Since March 2020, Prime Minister has had telephonic conversations with Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi (March, May 2020 & January 2021), King of Saudi Arabia (twice in September 2020) and Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia (March 2020 & March 2021), Amir of Qatar (March, May, December 2020 & April 2021), Sultan of Oman (April 2020 & February 2021), King of Bahrain (April 2020) and Amir of Kuwait (April 2020).

9. External Affairs Minister visited UAE (November 2020 & April, November, December 2021), Qatar (December 2020 & June, August 2021 on transit), Bahrain (November 2020) and Kuwait (June 2021). He spoke to Foreign Ministers of UAE (April, June, August 2020 & January, April 2021), Saudi Arabia (April, June, September 2020 & January, February, May, November 2021), Qatar (April, December 2020 & May 2021), Oman (April, August, September, December 2020 & September 2021), Bahrain (April 2020 and May 2021) and Kuwait (April 2020 & March, April, May 2021). EAM also met his counterparts from Gulf countries on sidelines of other meetings such as Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia on sideline of G-20 meeting in Italy in June 2021 and Foreign Ministers of Kuwait and Oman in Tehran in August 2021.

India also hosted visits of Foreign Ministers of UAE (February 2021), Saudi Arabia (September 2021), Bahrain (April 2021) and Kuwait (March 2021) as well as Secretary General of Gulf Cooperation Council (November 2021).

10. Minister of State (VM) similarly paid visits to Gulf nations UAE (January and October 2021), Oman (December 2020) and Bahrain (August-September 2021). MOS (VM) also held a virtual meeting with Indian community organisations and leaders in October 2021.

11. Government has convened regional (Gulf) Heads of Missions of India meetings on this specific subject inter alia physically in Kuwait in June 2021 and virtually in July 2021. Government also launched in January 2021 a program to upskill Indian blue collar workers in UAE to enhance their employability and wages.

12. Embassies are continuing to pursue with the Governments in the Gulf the return of Indian workers, the realization of payments due to them, new recruitment in the light of economic recovery, and other welfare measures as appropriate.
