

stable at a level higher than their domestic consumption. The production of onions has been fluctuating in the past, from year to year, and therefore export policy for an essential commodity like onions has to be reviewed each year and quota for export fixed keeping in view the size of the crop and the trends in domestic prices.

(c) Export of onions is canalised through NAFED who are advised about the quantity to be exported in a particular year. Since export of onions is canalised public announcement of quota is not considered necessary.

#### Take over of management of Ritz Continental Hotel Calcutta

527. SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: Will the Minister of TOURISM & CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether I.T.D.C. have received proposal to take over management of Ritz Continental Hotel, Calcutta;

(b) whether Government (I.T.D.C.) propose to consider the matter; and

(c) if not, the reasons thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI KARTIK ORAON): (a) to (c). Yes Sir. A proposal for the take over of the management of the Ritz Continental Hotel at Calcutta by ITDE is under consideration. As the hotel is suffering from acute sickness due to accumulated losses, outstanding statutory and other liabilities and heavy arrears of interest on loans, sound scheme of rehabilitation involving financial assistance has to be formulated and the the Hotel Company is seeking advice from an expert agency in this regard.

#### Excise Duty on Branded Bidis

528. SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that as a result of excise duty on branded Bidis by imposing duty at the rate of Rs. 3.60 per thousand Bidis has adversely affected the industry;

(b) if so, whether Government have received a number of representations from Bidis Industry on this issue;

(c) if so, details therein; and

(d) action taken or proposed to be taken by the Government to consider the matter in this year's budget?

#### THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI JAGANNATH PAHADIA):

(a) to (d). Government have received a number of representations from various quarters requesting for relief in the existing central excise duty burden on biris. The requests made in these representations are generally as below:

(i) Incidence of excise duty on biris should be reduced;

(ii) Biris should be exempted from the levy of excise duty and, in its place, excise duty should be reimposed on biri tobacco;

(iii) The distinction between branded and unbranded biris in relation to the levy of excise duty should be abolished and all biris, whether branded or unbranded should be charged to a uniform rate of excise duty. The exemption from the levy of excise duty up to a quantity of 60 lakhs biris in a financial year presently available to unbranded biri manufacturers should be withdrawn;

(iv) Biris should be protected from competition by cheap cigarette rates by maximising excise