

scheme, it is the Governor who shall notify on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers of the said State. And if the Scheduled Tribe Members of Parliament, who represent those areas, feel differently, I would request them to take up the matter with the respective State Government and ensure that State Governments take action.

[*Translation*]

Tea Estates

*819 SHRI VILASRAO NAGNATHRAO GUNDEWAR: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of tea-estates in the country, State-wise;

(b) the number of sick tea estates among them;

(c) whether the Government propose to nationalise the sick tea-estates to make these viable;

(d) if so, when; and

(e) if not, the other steps proposed to be taken by the Government to make these tea-estates viable?

[*English*]

THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): (a) to (e). A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT

(a) As per the last compiled figures of 1988, the state-wise number of tea estates registered with Tea Board are as follows:-

<i>State</i>	<i>No. of registered tea estates</i>
Assam	848
West Bengal	337
Tripura	58
Bihar	4
Uttar Pradesh	31
Himachal Pradesh	1385
Manipur	2
Sikkim	1
Arunachal Pradesh	5
Nagaland	1
Orissa	1
Tamil Nadu	6802

<i>State</i>	<i>No. of registered tea estates</i>
Kerala	4087
Karnataka	16
Total	13578

(b) According to the status paper prepared by the Tea Board during 1989-90, there were 145 weak and closed units in the country.

(c) There is no proposal to nationalise the sick tea estates.

(d) Does not arise.

(e) Revival of the sick Tea Estates is primarily the responsibility of the respective owners. The Government is operating a number of developmental schemes through the Tea Board for improving productivity. Benefits under these can also be availed of by the owners of the Sick Tea Estates. Government have also asked Tea Board to motivate private owners of such Tea Estates to prepare rehabilitation packages and secure loans for revival of their gardens.

[*Translation*]

SHRI VILASRAO NAGNATHRAO GUNDEWAR: Mr. Speaker, Sir I would like to know from the hon. Minister the policy of the Government with regard to 40,000 labourers rendered unemployed and are on the verge of starvation as a result of suspension of production in tea gardens due to ULFA movement in Assam; and the measures Govt. propose to take to restart the production in tea estates?

[*English*]

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM: Sir, this question concerns the sick tea-estates. I assume the hon. Member's supplementary relates to sick tea-estates. As far as sick tea-

estates are concerned, Assam has got 61 weak or closed tea-estates. In 1989, a Status Paper was prepared for identifying the reasons for sickness. Based on the reasons of sickness, the Tea Board has been directed to ask each one of these tea-estates to work out rehabilitation packages. The Tea Board is willing to help them, rehabilitate themselves. If the present owners are not in a position to rehabilitate their tea-estates taking advantage of any of these programmes, the best course would be to dispose of their estates because there are a large number of estate owners and tea companies who are willing to take on additional land for developing tea-estates. If any particular tea-estate wants to avail of these rehabilitation programmes that we have launched, I am willing to ask the Tea Board to look at it closely and help them rehabilitate themselves.

[*Translation*]

SHRI VILASRAO NAGRATHRAO GUNDEWAR: Mr. Speaker, Sir, out of these tea estates; there are some sick tea estates and the number of sick tea estates is increasing due to ULFA movement. What steps are being taken by the Govt. in this regard?

[*English*]

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM: Sir, it is not correct to say that they are in large numbers. Out of 13578 Tea-estates which are registered, 145 have been declared to be sick. These are private tea-estates. It is really for the private owners to take steps to avail of rehabilitation packages. We are willing to help them, rehabilitate themselves. But, they

must come forward and take advantage of the programmes.

SHRI NANI BHATTACHARYA: Sir, the Minister has given the number of tea gardens as 13578. Where from did he obtain this figure? Within this figure there are a quite a large number of tea plantations comprising an area varying from 1 hectare to 5-6 hectares. So, they cannot be called tea gardens. There has been a mushroom growth in the plantations recently because of the expanding international market and price that the industry fetches. Even then it cannot be called tea gardens. They have no factory, nothing of the sort. Part b of my question is whether the Government is prepared to rehabilitate these sick and weak gardens by taking over the management through organisations like Tea Trading Corporation and something like that, and encourage co-operative of the tea trading workers with full support to the workers' efforts in various respects.

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM: Sir, I am grateful to the hon. Member for raising this question. As regards part (a) of the question, the figure of 13,578 which I gave is based upon the provision of the Tea Act which requires registration of every tea estate by the Tea Board. This number is of the tea estates registered with the Tea Board and I like to believe that it is a correct figure.

Many of these tea estates do not have factories because they require a large amount of investment. But the practice is for tea estates to share a common tea factory and many tea estates which have a factory, make available their capacity to neighbouring tea estates on lease basis. I do not think that they become sick only because they do not have the factories. The reasons that are identified, based on the study done in 1989, are:

1. Management deficiency;
2. Financial stringency
3. Lack of technical know-how

4. Disturbed labour-management relations
5. Floods and soil erosion
6. Ownership disputes
7. Continued lack of development activities.

After identifying these factors, we have worked out a rehabilitation programme. We have written to each one of these estates to come and take advantage of the programmes. We are willing to help each estate, by way of rehabilitation programmes, to meet the particular problems of each estate. Cooperatisation is one solution. But I may also tell the hon. Members that ten weak gardens have already been taken over by the cooperative societies in Tripura. If more tea gardens want to take advantage of the rehabilitation programme and form cooperatives, I am willing to help them form these cooperatives.

SHRI NANI BHATTACHARYA: Actually, Sir, the Minister should clarify certain things. This is a very important question. Tea industry is one amongst the few top most foreign exchange earning industries. Therefore, it is a very important industry. You know, Sir, that they have got the market, both internal and external. There has been a mushroom growth of small and petty tea gardens with five hectares, six hectares. They cannot be called tea gardens, even not according to the statement of the Tea Board. In most cases, I know the South India's position. I know the position of the recent mushroom growth of tea gardens which is taking place in Tarai area of Darjeeling district, including West Dinajpur. They cannot be called tea gardens. They are only single man's private ownership, not even joint stock companies. So, I wanted to know that to save the industry, what is the Government contemplating. This was the latter part of my question which the hon. Minister has not answered. But so far as the figure is concerned, he will have to ask the Tea Board to

revise the list which he has obtained from the Tea Board.

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM: Sir, since the hon. Member presses his point vehemently and I have great respect for the hon. Member, I will ask the Tea Board to verify the number once again.

SHRI P. C. CHACKO: Sr, there are more than four thousand tea estates in Kerala, second only to Tamil Nadu. Out of these four thousand and odd tea estates, more than one thousand tea estates are either closed or are on the verge of closure. That is not reflected in the status paper prepared by the Tea Board on the basis of which the hon. Minister has answered the question here. I may mention that especially after the price hike of the fertilisers, it has become uneconomical. Will the Government take up the matter with the nationalised banks and other financial institutions to give top priority treatment for the revival proposal of the tea estate? A very low priority is accorded to the revival proposal of tea estates. Also, will the Government consider to direct the Tea Board to introduce re-plantation scheme on the same basis as that of Rubber Board for the re-plantation of the old tea estates?

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM: Sir, the hon. Member is presenting a rather alarming picture in Kerala. According to our figures, there are only 11 tea estates which are registered as weak or sick. The total number of tea estates in Kerala is 4,087. They are very small estates. I attended the meeting of United Planters' Association of South India three days ago. I met a large number of growers from Kerala and their mood is upbeat. This year the south Indian tea production is expected to be 8 per cent higher than last year. I do not share the pessimism of the hon. Member. If there is any particular problem I am willing to discuss with him. If any particular estate is requiring rehabilitation, I am willing to look into that. But the mood in the south Indian tea industry is very upbeat and their production is very high.

SHRI KABINDRA PURKAYASTH: Sir,

the tea industry is the biggest foreign exchange earning industry in Assam. Unfortunately this industry is becoming weaker day by day for different reasons. This is evident in the whole of Assam and in particular in the Barak valley. The Assam Tea Corporation has taken over the management of several tea gardens. Unfortunately the A.T.C. managed tea gardens are going down, day by day. One tea garden - Pathini Tea Estate - which is situated just on the Bangladesh border was taken over by the Assam Tea Corporation a few years back. Now the condition of this tea garden is such that it is going to be closed down. There are other tea gardens in Barak valley and other parts of the State which are going to be closed down. May I know from the hon. Minister as to what measures the Government is contemplating to take to help those tea gardens which are weak. Even those gardens which are under the Assam Tea Corporation are also gradually deteriorating. What is the Government proposing to do in such a situation to help the industry?

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM: Sir, according to my figures, the Assam Tea Corporation owns 14 tea estates and is managing one tea estate. If some of these are sick, then it is for the Assam Tea Corporation and the Assam Government to look into the reasons for sickness and rehabilitate them. Speaking on behalf of the Government of India and the Tea Board, we are willing to help every tea estate which is sick and which needs a rehabilitation package. We have worked out a rehabilitation package and I am willing to help anyone including the Assam Tea Corporation. but this question must really be addressed to the Government of Assam to take advantage of the rehabilitation programme and spend some money to improve the management and also bring the Assam Tea Corporation to book if there is any problem.

Export of Iron ore to Japan

*820. **SHRI SHRAVAN KUMAR PATEL:** Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state: