

Composite Sonar and Tactical Weapon Control System

2320. SHRI CHANDRA BHUSHAN SINGH : Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Composite Sonar tactical Weapon Control System developed and deployed on a submarine is lying idle for the last many years;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the said system was to be deployed in the year 1993; and

(d) if so, the reasons for not deploying the same so far?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI N.V.N. SOMU) : (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) The system was required to be developed and installed on board as submarine and its user trials were to be completed by November, 1993. However, due to foreign exchange crunch and restrictions imposed in 1991 on import of some critical components, the date of completion of the above tasks has been extended by the Government to December, 1997.

(d) Does not arise.

[Translation]

Assistance for Pilgrimage

2321. SHRI SOHAN BEER : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government provide any grant or financial assistance to the pilgrims undertaking travel to the religious places abroad;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the norms prescribed for providing such financial assistance by the Government; and

(d) the financial assistance provided to the Pilgrims who visited religious places, Nankana (Pakistan) and Manasarovar (China) during the last three years, year-wise?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL) : (a) to (d) No State assistance is directly given to the pilgrims.

2. For Haj pilgrims who perform Haj under the auspices of the Central Haj Committee, Government fixes a Haj pilgrim fare which is generally lower than the fare calculated on the basis of actual expenditure. The difference is borne by the Government as subsidy on account of Haj transportation arrangements and paid directly to the Air Charter. In addition, Government depute administrative and medical contingents (doctors and para-medics) to Saudi Arabia and also supply medicines and attendant medical facilities such as

ambulances, camp dispensaries etc. to attend to the needs of the Haj pilgrims. It has to be appreciated that annual Haj is a pilgrimage of unprecedented magnitude in which million of pilgrims from the Muslim world congregate at one venue on given dates and, therefore, require special attention. No such facility is extended for Umrah, a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina round the year.

3. In case of Sikh/Sehejdhari and Hindu Jathas from India to Pakistan, Government extends all required assistance, obtains approval of the Government of Pakistan for the visit of each Jatha; coordinates with various State Governments/Ministries/Authorities and forwards the lists of intending pilgrims to the Pakistan High Commission, New Delhi for visas; arranges with the Ministry of Railways special train services for the pilgrims both for onward/return journey; expedites release of foreign exchange from Reserve Bank of India as a special case in view of the fact that permission for Jathas is given at short notice and visas are stamped on the pilgrims' passports just one or two days prior to the departure of the Jathas; attaches a Liaison Officer from the High Commission of India in Islamabad to render assistance to the visiting pilgrims when they contact for any kind of help, etc.

4. For Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, Government decided in 1996, to peg the amount payable to Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN) by pilgrims at the rate of Rs. 5000/- per pilgrim. The total cost charged by KMVN was Rs. 8250/- per pilgrim. The difference was paid as subsidy by Government to KMVN. Otherwise, Government have been providing facilities to pilgrims which include medical assistance, security and escort cover through ITBP and UP State Police, communication links between Delhi and places en route on the Indian side and with China and a Liaison Officer at Government cost with each batch of pilgrims.

Joint Ship Service between India and Russia

2322. SHRI RAJKESHAR SINGH : Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state :

(a) whether any agreement has been signed between India and Russia to start a joint ship service;

(b) if so, the salient features of the agreement; and

(c) the date from which this agreement will be made effective?

THE MINISTER OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI T.G. VENKATRAMAN) : (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The agreement on the operation of a Joint Liner Service between ports of Novorossisk, Russia and the ports of India was signed between the Shipping Corporation of India and NOVOSHIP of Russia on 11th February, 1997. The salient features are :

(i) The Joint Liner Service would be operated between the ports of Russia and India with