

famine relief operations. No such agreement exists between the Governments of India and the United States and the claim is, therefore, without basis.

(b) and (c) There is no law providing for the registration of conversions from one religion to another. No authentic record of such conversions, is, therefore, available. However, it appears that about 321 persons had been converted to Christianity in the Palamau district between October, 1966 to June, 1967, by taking advantage of the distress conditions in that area.

(d) and (e) Article 25 of the Constitution confers on all persons the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion. It is, therefore, open to any person to change his religion according to the dictates of his conscience. Those that have been converted have full freedom to return to their original faith, and the question of Government taking any steps in this regard does not arise. However, the State Government have issued instruction to local authorities to accelerate the pace of relief work in the affected areas.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF ASIAN HIGHWAY

441. SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE:  
SHRI SHARDA NAND :  
SHRI N. S. SHARMA :  
SHRI JAGANNATH RAO JOSHI :  
SHRI SHRI CHAND GOEL :

Will the Minister of TRANSPORT AND SHIPPING be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that goods and other traffic between India and the West is costing more in terms of money and time due to closure of the Suez Canal;

(b) if so, the steps taken to safe-guard India's interests;

(c) whether it is also a fact that the Suez being closed, an emergent need has arisen to develop the Asian Highway which connects Europe with East Asia through India; and

(d) if so, the steps taken to develop India's portion of that route to meet the increased foreign traffic ?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND SHIPPING (SHRI BHAKT DARSHAN):  
(a) Yes, Sir.

(b) An Indian delegation was deputed to the U.K. and U.S.A. to negotiate with various Shipping Conferences for reducing the quantum of surcharge levied by them consequent on the closure of Suez, Canal and the diversion of ships *via* Cape of Good Hope. The delegation has been successful in persuading the Conferences to reduce the surcharge from 25% to 15% in the case of U.S.A. and from 17 1/2% to 15% in the case of U.K./Western Europe.

(c) and (d). No, Sir. But the portion of the Asian Highway within India connecting Europe with the East Asia is already a first class all-weather road and improvements of sections which are now below national Highway standards will be taken care of in our normal national plans. The road is good enough to handle the traffic offering.

#### आजाद हिन्द फौज के लिये स्मारक

442. श्री बसवन्त : क्या शिक्षा मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि :

(क) क्या आजाद हिन्द फौज की स्मृति में राष्ट्रीय स्मारक का निर्माण करने के लिये कोई सुझाव दिया गया है;

(ख) क्या इस प्रयोजन के लिए कोई अनुदान देने का भारत सरकार का विचार है; और

(ग) प्रस्तावित स्मारक कहां पर स्थापित होगा तथा उसकी मुख्य बातें क्या हैं ?

शिक्षा मंत्रालय में राज्य मंत्री (श्री शेर सिंह) : (क) से (ग) भारतीय राष्ट्रीय सेना की यादगार में मणिपुर में मोईरंग में स्मारक के निर्माण के संबंध में मणिपुर सरकार का प्रस्ताव तथा इस प्रयोजन के लिए वित्तीय सहायता की उसकी प्रार्थना भारत सरकार के विचाराधीन है ।