

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA) : (a) to (f) According to information made available by the State Government of Orissa, two steel plants are proposed to be set up at Gopalpur, Orissa by M/s. Tata Iron and Steel Company Ltd. (TISCO) and M/s. Larsen & Toubro Ltd., respectively. Both the steel plants are proposed in the private sector and their expected installed capacities would be 2.5 million tpa and 2.6 million tpa respectively, in the first phase. Pre-project activities comprising inter-alia land acquisition, preparation of detailed cost estimates etc. are in progress. The likely dates of commissioning, as intimated by the companies, of the two steel plants mentioned above are March, 2000 and 2001 respectively.

Mochi Caste

5484. DR. VALLABH BHAI KATHERIA : Will the Minister of WELFARE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Mochi has been included in the Scheduled Caste category by the Government;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the Government intend to exclude the said caste from Scheduled Caste List; and

(d) if so, the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF WELFARE (SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA) : (a) and (b) 'Mochi' or 'Muchi' are specified as Scheduled Castes in relation to the States/UTs of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, West Bengal, Delhi and Mizoram.

(c) and (d) Representations/recommendations have been received, inter-alia, for deletion of 'Muchi' from the list of Scheduled Castes of Arunachal Pradesh and for reimposing area restrictions on the specification of 'Mochi' as a Scheduled Caste within the State of Gujarat. These are under the consideration of the Government.

Gaggal Airport

5485. SHRI SAT MAHAJAN : Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state :

(a) whether Gaggal (Kangra) Airport in Himachal Pradesh has been closed for air operations;

(b) if so, the details alongwith reasons therefor;

(c) whether the Indian and foreign tourists visiting HP are facing a lot of difficulties due to the closure of this air service; and

(d) if so, the time by which the airport is likely to be made fully operational ?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI C.M. IBRAHIM) : (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) Gaggal airport is operational.

National Mineral Development Corporation

5486. SHRI CHAMAN LAL GUPTA : Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state :

(a) whether the National Mineral Development Corporation had taken up the task for exploration of Magnesite in Panthal area of Udhampur district in Jammu and Kashmir during 1987;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the amount spent on the said project;

(d) whether the work on the said project has been stopped;

(e) if so, the reasons therefor;

(f) whether the Corporation intends to resume the work;

(g) if so, the time by which it is likely to be taken up; and

(h) the profit/loss of the project, till date ?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The exploration work was initially carried out by State Geology Department. Later, NMDC continued with exploration work. The exploration established a reserve of 2.5 million tonnes of Low Silica High Quality Magnesite.

(c) The total expenditure incurred on the Panthal Magnesite Project upto 31.3.1996 is Rs. 502 lakhs.

(d) Yes, Sir.

(e) The Panthal Magnesite Project was proposed to be taken up by the J&K Mineral Development Corporation Limited (J&KMDC), in which NMDC holds 74% of equity, the remaining 26% held by J&K Minerals Ltd., a State Government Undertaking. The viability of the Project was adversely affected due to fall in international price of DBM of similar quality due to reduction in import duty. Further, financial institutions were not willing to support the project by way of grant of long term loan capital. The Board of Directors of J&KMDC, after getting the consent of J&K Government, have recommended the closure of the project and winding up of the Joint Venture Company in view of