

articles, which are supplemented by more than one delivery in a large number of urban Post Offices, having regard to the volume of articles and the time of their receipt.

In the matter of all mail transmission, the Department's policy is to gradually introduce automated systems in the large nodal Centres for speedy and effective mail processing. The first step in this direction has been taken with the setting up of the automated mail processing Centres at Mumbai and Chennai respectively.

The department is also pursuing the policy of optimising the benefits of the Post Office as an outlet of social distribution system by performing a variety of agency functions like small savings schemes of the Government, payment of pension for Railway Pensioners and Coal Miners, as also operation of the Postal Life Insurance Organisation.

The Department's policy of modernising the Postal service lays emphasis on counter services where application of computer based technology is aimed at achieving greater customer satisfaction through more efficient and responsive counter service and enhancing employee motivation through improved work-environment. Provision of new value-added services for the business/professional segment of customers is also in focus for optimising the upgraded retailing capacity of modernised Postal counters. Computer based technologies are also being introduced in other areas of activity like financial services, PLI, inventory control and Speed Post Service.

The Department's policy of modernisation through induction of new technology is being achieved on the basis of an extensive training programme aimed at upgrading the skills of its employees.

The Department is also seeking to segment its areas of activities catering for business and commercial sector and those for meeting universal service obligation with a view to improving quality of service and generation of revenue.

[Translation]

Compensation to Victims of Air Crashes

*317. SHRIMATI BHAVNA BEN DEVRAJ BHAI
CHIKHALIA :
DR. C. SILVERA :

Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state :

(a) the number of claims relating to the compensation to the victims of air crashes during the period from January, 1995 to November, 1996 settled by the Government;

(b) the number and details of the claims pending settlement;

(c) the time from which these are pending;

(d) the reasons for delay in disposal of these claims

(e) the steps proposed to be taken for expeditious settlement of pending claims; and

(f) the details of the specific steps taken by the Government to provide financial assistance to the families of the deceased in the recent mid-air collision on November 12, 1996?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI C.M. IBRAHIM) : (a) to (f). A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

(a) to (f). As per the Carriage by Air Act, 1972 the concerned carrier airlines has to settle claims of compensation of air crash victims. However, as regards recent accident of 12th November, 1996, the Government has decided to set up a cell to render legal assistance to the next of kin of victims of the accident with a view to ensure smooth and speedy settlement of compensation claims.

[English]

Increase in Production Cost of Steel

*318. SHRI UTTAMSINGH PAWAR : Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state :

(a) whether the cost of steel production has increased during the last six months;

(b) if so, the extent to which it has increased;

(c) the factors responsible therefor;

(d) whether SAIL, TISCO and other steel plants have been adversely affected on account of increase in power tariff, petroleum prices and 10% cut in customs duty on steel items;

(e) if so, the details thereof;

(f) the remedial measures taken or proposed to be taken to enable the steel industry to face the global competition;

(g) whether a number of mini-steel plants have also been closed due to high cost input;

(h) if so, the details thereof; and

(i) the remedial measures proposed to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA) : (a) to (f). The cost of production of steel primarily depends upon prices of inputs such as iron ore, coal, steel scrap and energy, costs of freight and labour and financial charges. Some elements of the cost of steel production like coal, power tariff, petroleum products, railway freight, etc. have become costlier since 01/4/96.

In the case of SAIL, the cost of production (before depreciation & interest) per tonne of crude steel has increased by about 10% due to increase in the ones