

- (c) the present status of the proposal; and
 (d) the time by which Kolhapur is likely to be connected with Konkan railway ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS, MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (SHRI RAM NAIK) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) A demand has been made for connecting Kolhapur with Ratnagiri.

(c) and (d) A survey for a new BG line from Kolhapur to Ratnagiri on Konkan Railway via Talwade (115 Kms) has been taken up. Further consideration of the project will be possible once the results of the survey become available.

[Translation]

Punctuality of Trains

245. SHRI RAMESHWAR PATIDAR : Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state :

- (a) whether the several passenger trains in the country are not running as per their schedule;
 (b) if so, the reasons therefor;
 (c) whether insufficient supply of coal is also responsible for such a situation; and
 (d) the remedial measures taken by the Government in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS, MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (SHRI RAM NAIK) : (a) and (b) No, Sir. However, the running of trains gets affected at times due to reasons such as accidents, agitations/bandhs, alarm-chain-pulling, equipment failures, miscreant activities, bad weather etc.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) Adequate quantity of coal is available on Indian Railways for steam traction

[English]

Cut in Strength of Armed Forces

246. SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA :

SHRI SUSHIL KUMAR SHINDE :

SHRIMATI JAYANTI PATNAIK :

Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to

state:

(a) whether the Government have decided to cut the strength of Army by about 50,000 soldiers by 1999;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor; and

(c) the steps taken to ensure adequate and effective defence preparedness ?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES) : (a) and (b) The Army has formulated a plan for effecting under-posting of 50,000 personnel till 31.3.1999. This will be done in a phased manner covering all types of units and formations. The financial savings generated would help modernise the Army in some measure.

(c) The exercise has been planned in a manner that there will no adverse effect on the defence preparedness of the country.

[Translation]

Production of Steel

247. SHRI RAMDAS ATHAWALE :

SHRI K.P. NAIDU :

Will the Minister of STEEL AND MINES be pleased to state :

- (a) the details of production of steel in the country during the last two years;
 (b) the quantity of steel imported during the last two years and so far in the current financial year indicating names of the countries from which it has been imported;
 (c) the field in which the imported steel is being used; and
 (d) the measures being taken to produce such steel in the country which is being imported at present ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF STEEL AND MINES (SHRI RAMESH BAIS) : (a) The details of production of finished steel (carbon) during the last two years is as under :-

	(In lakh tonnes)	
	1996-97	1997-98
Finished Steel	227.20	225.67 (Provisional)

(b) The quantity of finished steel (carbon) imported during the last two years and in the present financial year is as under :

	(In lakh tonnes)		
	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99 April '98
	15.62	17.50 (Prov.)	10.40 (Prov.)

The Countries from where steel is imported by India include Germany, Japan, France, Belgium, U.K. U.S.A. Iran, Korea, CIS countries etc.

(c) Sectors for which the imported steel is being used include cold Rolling Units, Auto/Cycle, Industry, Container Industry-Galvanising units, Engineering industry, Electrical industry, Re-rolling industry, Heavy industry etc.

(d) As per the existing policy, import of steel is freely allowed. It is neither cost effective nor economical for any country to produce all grades/specifications and qualities of steel specially where the quantities required are comparatively small. The producers of steel and constantly orienting their production to meet the market needs. Modernisation and expansion of steel plants of SAIL has been taken up towards this objective. Since 1991, Government has also adopted various policy measures to encourage creation of additional steel production capacities in the private sector. With the setting up of steel plants in the private sector, a major portion of the demand for steel which is presently imported is likely to be met by indigenous production.

Vacant Posts in Armed Forces

248. SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT 'BACHDA' : Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state :

(a) the number of posts lying vacant in the various cadres of the defence services;

(b) whether any action plan has been chalked out in regard to filling up of these posts; and

(c) if so, the outline thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES) : (a) to (c) The present vacancy position in respect of three services is given below :

	Officers	Personnel below Officers Rank (PBOR)
Army	13,324	38,000
Navy	1,060	3,498
Air Force	695	6,195

2. There is a deficiency of about 38,000 in the cadre of Personnel Below Officer Rank (PBOR) in the Army. However, approximately 71,000 recruits are currently under training, and hence this deficiency is national. Similarly in the case of Air Force, about 2,214 vacancies of airmen are planned to be filled up in the current financial year.

3. In the case of Army, where the magnitude of vacancy is large, the Government have launched an Image Projection Campaign during 1997-98 with the assistance of a professional advertising agency. In case of Navy and Air Force, the Government are making all out efforts to encour-

age induction of young people in Navy and Air Force by giving grater publicity in newspapers and media in order to get the best.

4. Various measures have been initiated to make up the shortage in the officer cadre in the Army, such as, University Entry Scheme, exemption from appearing in Combined Defence Service Examination for NCC 'C' certificate holders for induction as Short Service Commission Officer (SSCO), induction of women as officers, promotion of service JCOs/ORs into the newly created Special Commissioned Officer (SCO) cadre.

5. Implementation of the Fifth Pay Commission's recommendations in respect of defence services has resulted in improved pay scales, allowances and concessions to armed forces personnel. It is expected that the cumulative effect of all the measures will result in higher intake, making up vacancies to a considerable extent in the near future.

Electrification of Barasat-Basirhat Section of Sealdah

249. SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE : Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government have taken any steps for electrification of Barasat-Basirhat section of Sealdah Division; and

(b) if not, the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS, MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (SHRI RAM NAIK) : (a) and (b) Barasat-Basirhat section is a part of Barasat-Hasnabad electrification project, for which a cost-cum-feasibility survey report has been prepared. Final decision to electrify this section will be taken on appraisal of the survey report.

Expansion of NALCO

250. SHRI TATHAGATA SATPATHY : Will the Minister of STEEL AND MINES be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government have a proposal for the expansion of the Alumina Plant of the National Aluminium Company (NALCO) at Anugul in Orissa;

(b) if so, the details of the expansion posed;

(c) whether the smelter and captive power plants of the company are proposed to be expanded;

(d) if so, the fund earmarked therefor; and

(e) the steps taken in the expansion of the plant ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF STEEL AND MINES (SHRI RAMESH BAIS) : (a) and (b) Government have approved expansion of the capacity of NALCO's bauxite mines from 2.4 million tonnes per year