

with which talks were held in order to strengthen financial position of the Government of India in the last ten months alongwith the other details thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI YASHWANT SINHA) : (a) In order to strengthen its financial position, the Government of India held talks with various countries during the last ten months at various levels. These include discussions with France, Japan and European Community. Brief details of these discussions are as follows:

- (i) The Indo-French Bilateral Talks for finalising the Indo-French Financial Protocol for 1998 were held in Paris, France on 16.11.98-17.11.98 wherein projects commitments worth FF 68.8 million for financing under the protocol were finalised. Eventually, the Indo-French Financial Protocol for the said amount was signed on 23.11.98.
- (ii) There have been various official level dialogues between the Indian side and Japanese side since January 1999 in an effort to get cleared the six additional loan tranches for ongoing projects appraised for 1998-99.
- (iii) A meeting of the Indo-European Sub-Commission was held in January, 1999, in which it was agreed that priority should be accorded to sectoral programmes with environment as new focal area in addition to primary education and health.

Export of Floriculture

2541. SHRI PRADEEP KUMAR YADAV :
SHRI DAROGA PRASAD SAROJ :

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether attention of the Government has been drawn towards the study conducted by the Export-Import Bank of India with regard to the present position of the floriculture and its export potential; and

(b) if so, the steps proposed to be taken by the Government to remove the main obstacles coming in the way of promoting floriculture as mentioned in the report ?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Government has been taking various measures to boost exports of floricultural products. Some of the steps taken to overcome the difficulties faced in the exports of floricultural products include the following :-

- (i) Provision of soft loans for setting up of grading/processing centres, auction platforms, quality testing equipment;
- (ii) Providing financial assistance by APEDA, NHB, etc. to exporters/growers/Cooperative Societies for development of infrastructural facilities such as purchase of specialised transport units (reefer

containers), establishment of precooling/cold storage facilities, etc;

- (iii) Grant of financial assistance for improved packaging and strengthening of quality control;
- (iv) Arranging promotional campaigns such as buyer-seller meets and participation in important international fairs, flower shows and exhibitions;
- (v) Setting up of walk-in-type cold storages and integrated cargo handling and cold storage facilities at various International Airports for handling export of perishable items such as floriculture and horticulture products: walk-in-type cold storage facilities have been set up at Guwahati and Calcutta Airports. Integrated cold storage and cargo handling facilities have been set up at the Indira Gandhi International Airport at New Delhi and at Bangalore Airtort. Similar facilities are being established at Chennai, Hyderabad and Thiruvananthapuram Airport.
- (vi) providing technical advisory services and other support services to, trade and industry including training to farmers for export production, quality control, packaging, transport, etc.
- (vii) Grant of air freight subsidy on exports of floriculture products.
- (viii) Provision of assistance for undertaking feasibility studies, surveys, etc. UNDP assisted feasibility study for development, promotion and post harvest handling of export oriented floriculture products from the North Eastern Region was undertaken in 1995. The report has been circulated to the North Eastern States Organisations in order to disseminate the recommendations to the growers/exporters.
- (ix) Provision of financial assistance under the Central Sector Plan Scheme on Development of Commercial Floriculture for establishment of model floriculture centres and area expansion. The model floriculture centres are envisaged to serve as focal units for devevelopment of floriculture and for introduction, multiplication and distribution of quality planting material, provision of training and demonstration on production technology and post-harvest management.

[English]

WTO Meet

2542. SHRI MADHAV RAO SCINDIA :
SHRI SUSHIL KUMAR SHINDE :

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government has decided to moot for a joint position by G-15 countries at the coming World Trading Organisation (WTO) in regard to various issues on the agenda;

(b) if so, the precise proposal has been mooted or proposed to be mooted by India and the main objects thereof; and

(c) the response of the other G-15 countries to this proposal ?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE) : (a) to (c) In the IXth G-15 Summit related meetings held at Montego Bay, Jamaica in February, 1999, India highlighted the need for coordinating and consolidating the G-15 position regarding multilateral trade issues in the context of the Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation to be held later this year.

G-15 countries have already initiated action for a better understanding of Special and Differential Treatment provisions in various Uruguay Round Agreements through an Inter-governmental Symposium on the subject held at New Delhi in December 1998. In the IXth G-15 Summit India suggested that the G-15 needed to further the common understanding on specifics and analyse the experience of different countries to determine whether implementation of these agreements had provided the promised benefits to developing country members of WTO. India proposed that G-15 countries should pool their expertise in order to match the better awareness and bargaining power of developed countries on trade policy issues in the multilateral trade negotiations. The proposal of India to host a meeting of G-15 countries in New Delhi in preparation for the Third WTO Ministerial conference has been welcomed by the G-15 Countries.

[Translation]

Status of NRIs

2543. SHRI ANAND RATNA MAURYA :
DR. ASHOK PATEL :
DR. RAMKRISHAN KUSMARIA :

Will the Minister of INDUSTRY be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Non-Resident Indians have requested the Government to accord them the same status and facilities as is being accorded to the foreign and domestic investors;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the reaction of the Government thereto ?

THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY (SHRI SIKANDER BAKHT) : (a) to (c) There have been requests from Non

Resident Indians (NRI) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) for according them better facilities for investment. The NRIs and PIOs are enjoying better status and facilities compared to foreign investors. Government have extended following concessions for NRIs and OCBs (Overseas Corporate Bodies), predominantly owned by NRIs (i) NRI/OCB can invest upto 100% in industries/items included in high priority industries included in Annexure-III of the Manual on Industrial Policy and Procedures, (ii) NRI/OCB investment is permitted in the real estate and housing sectors upto 100% (iii) NRI/OCB investment in domestic airlines sector is permitted upto 100% (iv) NRI/OCB are permitted to invest upto 40% in the banking sector, and (v) NRIs can invest beyond 24% in Small Scale Industries in the first instance provided they do not have a stake in any other industrial undertaking.

[English]

Retirement Age in PSUs

2544. DR ULHAS VASUDEO PATIL : Will the Minister of INDUSTRY be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government propose to reduce retiring age from 60 to 58 in Public Sector Undertakings;

(b) if so, details thereof; and

(c) the details of review of voluntary Retirement Scheme introduced in PSUs during the last three years and the results achieved ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY (SHRI SUKHBIR SINGH BADAL) : (a) No, Sir

(b) Does not arise.

(c) The model voluntary retirement scheme framed in 1988 is still in vogue. No general review of VRS has been made so far. However, specific need based V.R. Scheme approvals are being obtained by the PSUs from the Government.

[Translation]

Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Raj Bhasha Vibhag

2545. SHRI JAGDAMBI PRASAD YADAV : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) Whether the Government propose to constitute a Committee comprising of all the departments under his Ministry for giving guidelines for celebrations of the Golden Jubilee Year of Rajbhasha ;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether he also propose to publish special issues of periodicals and magazines being published in the