

(Rs. in crores)		
	No. of Projects	Amount Sanctioned
Rural Roads	119	70.54
Rural Bridges	126	51.32

(c) and (d) NABARD has reported that RIDF loans are released on reimbursement basis, as and when the claims are received from the State Government on expenditure incurred by it. As per phasing indicated at the time of sanction, the funds are to be released over a period of three years as indicated below :

(Rs. in crores)	
Year	Amount
1996-97	10.50
1997-98	90.30
1998-99	21.06

NABARD has further reported that the State Government is yet to draw the amount during the current year.

Excise Duty Benefit to Consumers

4408. SHRI HARIN PATHAK : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether any assessment has been made by the Government to ensure that the benefit of reduction in excise and customs duty is extended to the consumers by the manufacturers;

(b) if so, the details thereof during 1994-95 and 1995-96;

(c) whether lack of response on the part of manufacturers in passing such benefits to consumers have been noticed during the above period;

(d) if so, the details thereof and the action taken against such manufacturers; and

(e) the steps taken by the Government to protect the interest of consumers in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI M.P. VEERENDRA KUMAR) : (a) to (e) The prices of commodities are generally determined by market forces and depend on a multiplicity of factors, of which duty of excise or customs is only one. The Government have not made any detailed study of the extent to which the reduction in excise and customs duties offered in the budgets has been passed on to the consumers.

There is no legal mechanism to ensure reduction in price to the extent of reduction in duty of excise or customs, where there is no price control. However, to protect the interest of consumers, Ministry of Civil Supplies, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution has taken the following actions :-

- (i) the industry associations were persuaded to pass on the benefits of duty concessions voluntarily to the consumers.
- (ii) letters were addressed to the Chief Ministers of the State/UTs to ensure that the benefits of duty concessions were passed on to the consumers.

Biological Wealth

4409. DR. PRABIN CHANDRA SARMA : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the attention of the Government has been drawn to the news item captioned "Large-scale biopiracy going on in NE" appearing in the 'Assam Tribune', dated February 25, 1997;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the orchids alongwith other biological wealth of the North-East out of which European Floriculture companies are earning huge income in comparison to the Indian companies;

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

(e) the steps taken/being taken to curb biopiracy ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH) : (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. In the news item it was stated that the wealth of India's forests and fields, its rich biodiversity, is being plundered by foreign companies and their agents.

(c) and (d) Government has no evidence of this. However, exports of all items of plants included in Appendix I and Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), wild orchid, and certain other plants, plant portions and their derivatives are prohibited.

(e) A national legislation on biodiversity is under preparation which includes regulating access to and transfer of genetic material of the country.

WTO Meeting in Geneva

4410. DR. ASIM BALA : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state the details of the issues

discussed and the outcome of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) panel meeting held in Geneva recently ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH) : It is presumed that the question pertains to the consultations resumed by the Committee on Balance of Payments Restrictions of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) with India at Geneva on 20.21 January 1997.

During these consultations, the Committee took note of the positive developments in India's economic situation since 1995. The Committee welcomed the Indian authorities' continued commitment to economic reform and liberalisation and noted India's progressive removal of quantitative restrictions notified under Article XVIII : B of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994. The Committee agreed to resume the consultations in the week beginning 2 June 1997. The purpose of the consultations would be to consider a plan, which the Committee invited India to present to eliminate the measures notified under Article XVIII : B and to conclude the consultations consistently with all relevant balance of payments provisions. It was noted by the Committee that in drawing up its plan, India will give due consideration to the interests of WTO Members in a balanced manner.

[Translation]

Loans for Co-operative Spinning Mills

4411. SHRI RAJENDRA AGNIHOTRI : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) the number of co-operative spinning mills in the country which are proposed to be provided financial assistance through Central Financial Institutions in the form of long-term loans; and

(b) the time likely to be taken by the financial institutions for sanctioning long-term loans to co-operative spinning mills ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI M.P. VEERENDRA KUMAR) : (a) and (b) The Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) has reported that in view of the large incidence of defaults by co-operative spinning mills to financial institutions (FIs), FIs have taken a decision that application for financial assistance for new co-operative spinning mills could be considered only after dues in respect of existing co-operative spinning mills are cleared by the units or respective State Governments who have guaranteed the loans.

IDBI has further reported that except Maharashtra, no other State has approached FIs for assistance to set up co-operative spinning mills. The Government of Maharashtra had advised the IDBI that 50 co-operative spinning mills would be set up in the State of Maharashtra during Eighth plan period. Of these, 14 have so far approached IDBI and 20 have approached Industrial Finance Corporation of India Ltd. (IFCI) for assistance. No assistance has been sanctioned by FIs so far, as it was felt by them that there was no scope for such a large capacity. In view of greater emphasis on exports, FIs have been giving preference to export oriented units promoted by persons with experience in the line and envisaging installation of most modern equipment to ensure production of yarn of international standard. The working of the existing co-operative mills has been generally unsatisfactory and they have large overdues of FIs. IDBI has advised the Government of Maharashtra to clear the overdues of existing co-operative spinning mills and strengthen their organisational set up.

[English]

Export and production of Cashew

4412. SHRI K.P. SINGH DEO
DR. KRUPASINDHU BHOI :

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) the production and export of cashew during each of the last three years;

(b) whether the cashew growers and exporters have been demanding more incentive to increase the production of cashew;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether the Government have received any request to extend the (OGL) facility to the cashew exporters;

(e) if so, the reaction of the Government in this regard; and

(f) the steps taken to increase the production and to promote the export of cashew during 1997-98 ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH) : (a) The production and export of cashew during each of the last three years have been as under :-