

(c) to (f) Cotton is purchased by the NTC on credit terms. Therefore, certain outstanding dues remain to be paid at any given point of time. While the Government of Maharashtra have requested for early payment of the cotton dues, due to acute shortage of working capital and losses suffered by the NTC, the payment of cotton dues to the Federation has fallen into arrears. NTC is expected to clear the outstanding dues on availability of funds after the rehabilitation package is put into operation as per BIFR approval. The cases of 8 out of 9 subsidiaries of NTC are presently under reference to the BIFR.

VRS in STC

2506. SHRI RAMCHANDRA VEERAPPA : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of employees opted for the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) in State Trading Corporation since 1995;

(b) whether all the benefits have been provided to those employees;

(c) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor; and

(d) the time by which all the benefits are likely to be provided to all Voluntary Retired persons of STC?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMKRISHNA HEGDE) : (a) to (d) Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) was not in existence in STC in 1995 & 1996. In STC, Voluntary Retirement Scheme opened in 1937. In all 96 employees comprising 67 Managers and 29 staff opted for VRS and they have been paid the admissible benefits as per the scheme.

[Translation]

Export of Basmati Rice

2507. SHRI DATTA MEGHE : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the export of basmati rice from India has affected due to acquiring patent of the 'basmati rice' by America; and

(b) if so, the steps taken by the Government to safeguard the interests of the Indian basmati rice exporters?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMKRISHNA HEGDE) : (a) Patents are granted by respective Governments under their Patent laws. A patent is a statutory grant in respect of an invention, which confers certain monopoly rights on the grantee for a specific period. Patent rights are restricted to the geographical area of the country where they are granted. Though rice originating from India will not be strictly affected, the patentee can

take infringement action against Indian exporters in USA claiming that the rice is similar to the quality of basmati rice line & grains.

(b) Whenever information is received about patents being taken on certain products which are of commercial interest to India and which in our view do not satisfy the criteria of patentability, steps are taken to assess whether the grant of patent can be challenged. When sufficient material is gathered, steps are taken for filing a petition for re-examination and ultimate revocation of patent in that country.

Some of the steps taken to protect the interest of rice exporters include, inter-alia challenging the various Trademarks registrations filed by International companies in Greece, U.K., conducting publicity campaigns, sending delegations abroad, participating in International trade fairs, inviting potential buyers and providing financial assistance to exporters for improving quality, packaging, brand promotion of products and for conducting market surveys.

Promotion of Tourism in Hilly Areas

2508. SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT (BACHDA) : Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state

(a) whether Government have launched the Cafeteria-Rest House Scheme to promote tourism in the country, particularly near the highways leading to hilly areas;

(b) if so, the places in Uttaranchal area of Uttar Pradesh for which this scheme is likely to be implemented; and

(c) the criteria adopted to implement these schemes and the likely contribution of local people of Uttaranchal therein alongwith other details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRI OMAK APANG) : (a) and (b) The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India provides financial assistance for the construction of wayside amenities such as restaurants, public conveniences, toilet and drinking water facilities etc on the basis of specific proposals received from the State/UT Governments. However, Government has not launched any scheme titled "Cafeteria-Rest Houses scheme". During the year 1996-97, the Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned Rs. 20.00 lakhs for construction of Reception Centre at Rishikesh under the wayside amenities scheme for Uttaranchal area.

(c) The projects are implemented by the State Government. Creation of these facilities will lead to greater demand for local products and thus lead to better employment opportunities for the local population.