

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI ANANTH KUMAR) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The details are being finalised.

Connecting of 'Shirdi' Pilgrimage Centre by Air Services

1953. SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL : Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any scheme for connecting 'Shirdi' Pilgrimage Centre by Air Services in order to boost tourism in the country; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI ANANTH KUMAR) : (a) and (b) There is no civil airstrip / airport available at Shirdi. However, the needs of the air traffic are being met by Aurangabad Airport.

Hindustan Copper Ltd.

1954. SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA : Will the Minister of STEEL AND MINES be pleased to state :

(a) whether Hindustan Copper Limited has been incurring losses during the last three years;

(b) if so, the details thereof, year-wise; and

(c) the steps taken by the Government to make the unit profitable?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF STEEL AND MINES (SHRI RAMESH BAIS) : (a) and (b) The financial performance of Hindustan Copper Ltd. during the last three years is as under :

Year	Profit(+)/Loss(-) (Rs. in crores)
1995-96	(+)075.84
1996-97	(-)130.62
1997-98	(-)169.72 (Prov.*)

*Accounting year 1997-98 has been extended by six months i.e. upto September, 1998.

(c) As a part of the turnaround strategy, the following are some of the important steps being taken/proposed to be taken by the Company for improving its financial viability:

- (i) Capital Restructuring of the Company.
- (ii) Technological upgradation of Smelter & Refinery at Khetri Copper Complex in Rajasthan from 31,000 TPA to 45,000 TPA.

(iii) Gradual closure of uneconomic mines and unviable operations* with consequential separation of employees under Voluntary Retirement scheme with the funds from National Renewal Fund, Non-Plan loan etc.

(iv) The Company has also taken and initiated a number of innovative measures to effect cost reduction in the existing expenditure on its operations and also in personnel related areas.

U.N. Aid for Poverty Alleviation

1955. SHRIMATI LAKSHMI PANABAKA : Will the Minister of RURAL AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state :

(a) whether Andhra Pradesh Government have received some U.N. aid for the development of poverty alleviation projects in Mehboobnagar, Kurnool and Anantapur districts;

(b) if so, the total amount UNDP has been invested for these projects during the last three years; and

(c) to what extent this has reduced the poverty in the state?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF RURAL AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI BABAGOUDA PATIL) : (a) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is supporting a Poverty Alleviation Project in three districts of Mahaboobnagar, Kurnool and Anantapur since 1996. The basic objective of the project is to demonstrate sustainable and replicable initiatives in social mobilisation for poverty alleviation.

(b) An amount of Rs. 47.68 millions has been invested by UNDP in the three districts.

(c) The poverty reduction in the project area on account of the ongoing UNDP assisted Poverty Alleviation Project has not yet been estimated.

[Translation]

Smoking In Trains

1956. DR. CHINTA MOHAN :
DR. SUSHIL INDORA :

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government have taken any action so far to check the smoking in trains;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) 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) to (c) Smoking is prohibited in all Air-conditioned coaches except in First AC coaches where one four-berther in each coach is earmarked separately as a smoking compartment on an experimental basis. Notices have, however, been displayed on all Sleeper Class/unreserved coaches, advising the travelling public not to smoke if objected to by fellow passengers.

Marketing for Agriculture Products

1957. SHRI A. VENKATESH NAIK :

SHRI ASHOK NAMDEORAO MOHOL :

Will the Minister of RURAL AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state :

(a) the measures taken by the Government to improve the market network of agriculture produce;

(b) the progress made in the marketing network during the last two years;

(c) whether the P.H.D. Chamber of Commerce has given certain suggestions for the success of marketing network;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) The reaction of the Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF RURAL AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI BABAGOUDA PATIL) : (a) Agricultural marketing being a State subject, measures to improve the marketing network of agricultural produce have to be taken by the respective State Governments. At Government of India level, Directorate of Marketing and Inspection renders technical guidance and advice to the State/UTs on various aspects of agricultural marketing. It is proposed to take up 9th Plan schemes for implementation during the 9th Five Year Plan (1997-2002) to improve the agricultural marketing network in the country.

At the State/UT level, the activities of Agricultural Marketing are being looked after by the Directorate of Agricultural Marketing and the State Agricultural Marketing Boards through Agricultural Produce Marketing Committees as per provisions of their respective State Agricultural Produce Marketing Regulation Acts. 26 States/UTs have enacted their own Agricultural Produce Marketing Regulation Acts till date. Six States/UTs are yet to enact their own acts. Under these Acts, the States/UTs have regulated the agricultural produce markets as principal and sub-market yards. 21 States/Union Territories have established State Agricultural Marketing Boards in their respective

States for development of agricultural marketing. The number of regulated markets in the country as on 31.3.1998 is 7062.

(b) Due to continuous persuasion with the States/UTs, the Government has been able to achieve the following progress during last two years in the field of agricultural marketing :

(i) Government of Mizoram has enacted "The Mizoram State Agricultural Produce Marketing (Regulation) Act, 1996 (Act No. 11 of 1996)".

(ii) Government of Jammu & Kashmir has already passed legislation on regulation of markets in their Legislative Assembly and is in the process of the issue of its notification.

(iii) Number of regulated markets in the country has increased from 6968 as on 31.3.1996 to 7062 as on 31.3.1998.

(c) to (e) The relevant information is being collected from P.H.D. Chamber of Commerce and will be laid on the Table of the House.

[English]

Interception of Thai Vessel in Indian Waters

1958. SHRI K.S. RAO : Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether Indian armed forces in the recent past intercepted a Thai Vessel near Narcandam Island and seized 50 kilograms of heroin alongwith large shipment of arms;

(b) whether Drug Enforcement Agency of United States has approached the Indian Authorities for getting more details on drug trafficking along this route; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES) : (a) In May 1998, in a joint operation of the Coast Guard and the Indian Navy, two Thai Trawlers were intercepted off Narcandam Island. 26 members of the crew of the trawlers who had jumped into the sea were apprehended. The interrogations of apprehended crew revealed that they had dumped the entire consignment of arms and ammunitions into the sea. The trawlers were not carrying any narcotic drugs.

(b) and (c) The Drug Enforcement Agency of the United States had sought relevant information pertaining to the specific incident mentioned in part (a) above. The Government of India have an agreement with Government of United States of America on reducing demand, preventing illicit use of and trafficking and for matters relating to licit trade in opiates etc.