

[English]

### **Friendship Societies in SAARC Countries**

70. SHRI MOHANBHAI SANJIBHAI DELKAR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are contemplating promoting of Friendship Societies linking the people of the 'SAARC' countries; and

(b) if so, the steps taken by Government so far in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VIDYACHARAN SHUKLA): (a) and (b). Government attach great importance to promoting people to people contacts as a means of strengthening regional cooperation in South Asia; and, to this end, have taken steps to create awareness and public opinion. Government would thus welcome initiatives at peoples level for promoting Friendship Societies.

### **Survey Report on Western Ghats of Kerala**

71. SHRI PALAI K.M., MATHEW: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Union Government have received the survey report of tourism potential in Western Ghats including Idukki district of Kerala;

(b) if so, the salient feature of the report;

(c) whether the Government have also received any proposal to develop tourist in the Idukki and mountain districts of Kerala; and

(d) if so, the action taken by the Government in this regard so far?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRIMATI USHA SINHA): (a) and (b). The full report on Western Ghats has not been finalised. However, a special report on Idukki district of Kerala has been finalised and forwarded to the State Government. The recommendations in the report involve preparation of land use plans, provision of tourist facilities in the Silent Valley, creation of road and accommodation facilities, etc. The feasibility and priorities of such schemes have to be assessed by the State Government.

(c) and (d). Several schemes were assisted by the Central Government for the development of mountain districts of Kerala during 7th Plan period. These include way-side facilities and accommodation at Wynad, boats for Thekkady, forest lodge at Parambikulam, minibus for Wynad Dam etc. However, no fresh proposal has been received from the Government of Kerala for the development of Idukki and mountain districts during the year.

### **Production of Betel Leaves**

72. SHRI SUDHIR GIRI: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the total value of betel leaves produced in the country during the last three years, year-wise;

(b) whether the Government propose to provide minimum support price to the betel leaf-growers;

(c) if not, the reasons therefor; and

(d) the measures taken by the Government so far towards the welfare of the betel leaf-growers?