

proved by the Government was to allot time on the channels and make it available to people who produce programmes. They can buy the time on the channels. There is no question of privatisation of a channel or anything at the moment.

SHRI SYED SHAHABUDDIN: The point at issue was whether you should select the parties on a first-come-first-serve-basis or on some other basis. That was the point at issue.

MR. SPEAKER: That exactly is the matter which is before the court.

[*Translation*]

Copper Mining

*165. SHRI SHAILENDRA MAHTO: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) the percentage of copper content in copper ore excavated from mines in India;

(b) whether due to inefficient extraction methods and low percentage of metal in the ores, the cost of extraction of copper is three times higher than the world standards;

(c) if so, the steps being taken by the Government to make copper extraction more cost-effective;

(d) whether the Government propose to provide subsidy for the mining of copper; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF MINES (SHRI. BALARM SINGH YADAV): (a) to (e). A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT

The average percentage of copper content in copper ores mines in India is around 1% as against around 3 % in the major copper-producing countries in the world. Besides, the shape and size of the ore bodies in the country generally do not allow large scale mechanisation which is essential for bringing down the cost of production. Although the operating costs of mining and million of ores by Hindustan Copper Limited (HCL) are competitive, the total cost of metal-in concentrates produced by HCL is higher than that in other major copper producing countries mainly due to low grade ore, low scale of operation and low availability of by-products.

HCL has formulated a revamping plan consisting of expansion of the smelting capacity at Khetri from 31,000 tonnes to 100,000 tonnes per annum of refined copper with imported high grade feed stock copper concentrates, nationalisation of workforce, capital restructuring of the company, phasing out of uneconomic mines and development of promising ones. The revamping plan, when implemented, would make copper production by HCL cost effective.

SHRI SHAILENDRA MAHTO: The hon. Minister in his reply has stated that Hindustan Copper Limited has formulated a new scheme under which the smelting capacity of refined copper at Khetri is proposed to be increased from 31,000 tonnes to 100,000 tonnes per annum with imported high grade feed stock copper concentrates. In this context I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether the Central Government have prepared a plan for the expansion and modernisation of Hindustan Copper Limited and Indian Copper Complex located in Ghateshila in Bihar? If so, the funds allocated

to each of them for development during the last three years and the future plan therefor?

SHRI BALRAM SINGH YADAV: There is no proposal for the expansion or modernisation of the Indian Copper Complex at Ghatshila. The primary reason behind it is that the financial condition of the company is not sound. This question may be taken into consideration only after their financial condition is improved.

SHRI SHAILENDRA MAHTO: About 15,000 labourers are employed in Indian Copper Complex and Hindustan Copper Limited and about one and a half lakh people are dependent on them. If the Government does not take any action for the expansion and modernisation of these units, it will have an adverse affect on the people depending on them. Whether Government propose to take any alternative step for the welfare of labourers?

SHRI BALRAM SINGH YADAV: Sir, so far as the question of labourers and dependent on them the population of one lakh is concerned, the Government is not going to close down the Indian Copper Complex. However, the point to be noted is that the total production of this unit is 16,500 tonnes whereas the total production of the other unit is 31,000 tonnes in spite of the fact that the other unit has been set up very recently. Therefore the expansion of that unit in the near future is essential. The estimated cost of it is likely to be meagre because its installed capacity is 31,000 tonnes. Since Indian Copper Complex is not in sound financial condition, its expansion or modernisation cannot be done.

SHRI SURAJ MANDAL: The hon. Minister has stated that the Government propose to close down the mines running in loss. I would like to know from him the

details of mines which running in loss and are proposed to be closed down. Whether it is a fact that Hindustan Copper Limited is likely to suffer loss due to the fact that copper is being imported from the foreign countries.

This unit was earning profit till 1992. In such prevailing situations whether alongwith permitting to import of copper from other countries Government also propose to provide financial aid to Hindustan Copper Limited continuously for 2-3 years with a view to expand this unit and do the Government propose to retrench the labourers.

SHRI BALRAM SINGH YADAV: Sir, the matter of curtailing custom duty on the imported copper is a policy matter, which is implemented in each and every department of the Central Government and Public Undertaking therefore I cannot say anything in this regard. However, I want to make it clear that relaxation in custom duty on the imported concentrated copper has resulted profitability to company. At the same time the customs duty has again been increased from 45 per cent to 50 per cent in the present Budget with this 5 percent increase the company certainly earns profit.

SHRI KAMLA MISHRA MADHUKAR: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has stated that reduction in customs duty has resulted in profit to Hindustan Copper Limited. I would like to know clearly as to whether the labourers of this unit have submitted a memorandum which will help not only in finding out a solution to their problems but would also offer suggestions for the effective functioning of the company. If so, the reaction of the Government thereto?

SHRI BALRAM SINGH YADAV: Sir, at this moment I do not remember of any

memorandum that has been given to me. If any such memorandum is given I would certainly consider the matter.

[English]

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA : There are reserves of copper in the neighbouring areas of Ghatshila in the district of Purulia, West Bengal, but the exploration work is not taken up. May I know from the Minister whether the exploration work will be taken up in that area so that the copper reserves can be exploited?

[Translation]

SHRI BALRAM SINGH YADAV: Sir, so far as exploration is concerned, I would present the factual position. I would also try to act upon the suggestions given by the Hon. Members.

SHRI SIMON MARADNI: Mr. Speaker, Sir, no funds have been granted for development of copper in the Seventh Five Year Plan. In such a situation whether the Government would allocate funds for this purpose under the Eighth Five Year Plan, at the same time whether the Government propose to dig up new copper mines in Chhota Nagpur, Santhal Pargana and Jharkhand areas?

SHRI BALRAM SINGH YADAV: Sir under the Eighth Five Year Plan, no special Budgetary provision has been made for the development of copper. However, Hindustan Copper Limited have offered at their own to expand their activities. Since we are aware of the fact that only one third of the total requirement of copper is excavated in the country, we must increase the production within country to save foreign exchange. In view of the situation prevalent the company propose to develop the Copper Complex in

Khetri with imported Copper concentrate under the next Five Year Plan, and to increase the present capacity of copper from 31,000 metric tonnes to about one lakh metric tonnes this is the plan of the company.

SHRI SUBRATO MUKHERJEE: Mr. Speaker, Sir, Copper is found in abundant in Bihar. Alike copper, mica is the another metal which is extracted in abundance from the mines of Bihar. It was being supplied not only to the different parts of the country but also exported to all over the world. But the mines of mica have been closed down since long. I would like the hon. Minister to tell kindly as to what will be the future of these mines.

SHRI BALRAM SINGH YADAV: Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were a large number of mica mines in Bihar. Mica mining had been done for the last about 100 years in Bihar. However, with the passage of time, the mining became poorer and viability came down. Another reason for the closure of these mines was that the mica substitute has been prepared with another technology, which is quite cheaper as compared to it. This is also one of the reasons that the demand of this metal has decreased, thus leading to closure of the mines.

WRITTEN ANSWERS QUESTIONS

Mica Mines

*164 SHRI KHELAN RAM JANGDE: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) the total number of the mica mines in Bihar and the neighbouring States;

(b) whether a large number of mica