

iron from indigenous raw materials.

- (ii) Sponge iron industry was delicensed in March, 1985 subject to certain locational restrictions for MRTP companies.
- (iii) A Linkage Committee was set up in 1986 for providing linkages of non coking coal and railway transport.
- (iv) In order to encourage the Sponge Iron Industry, Govt. had in the budget for 1994-95, reduced custom duty on iron ore pellets from 15% to 10% and on non coking coal from 85% to 35%. Custom duty on iron ore pellets was further reduced to 5% from 26.4.94.

Nuclear War

2341. SHRI SANAT KUMAR MANDAL : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether attention of the Government has been invited to the news item captioned "Pak may use foreign-supplied planes" appearing in the Hindustan Times, New Delhi, dated October 17, 1995;

(b) if so, whether the government have studied the latest "risk report" featuring country-sepecific reports on defence matters; and

(c) if so, the reaction of the Government there-so ?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) Government is aware of Pakistan's clandestine weapons oriented nuclear programme. The security situation of India is constantly under review, particularly in the light of developments in the neighbourhood and Government will take all necessary measures designed to cope with any threat that may be posed to the security of the nation.

Indo-French Protocol

2342 SHRIMATI BHAVNA CHIKHLIA :
SHRI SATYA DEO SINGH :
SHRI PANKAJ CHOWDHARY :
SHRI RAMPAL SINGH :
SHRIMATI DIPIKA H. TOPIWALA :
SHRI RAM SINGH KASHWAN :

Will the Minister of MINES be please to state:

(a) whether a protocol has recently been signed with France on mineral exploration and development;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether France has agreed to provide funds for projects identified in the protocol;

(d) if so, the location of these projects; and

(e) the time by which the work relating to the projects will commence ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF MINES (SHRI GIRIDHAR GAMANG) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (e) The 9th Meeting of the Indo-French Working Group on Mineral Exploration and Development was held in New Delhi on 14-15 November, 1995. The Meeting reviewed the progress of the on-going projects and finalised two projects for possible funding under the Indo-French Financial Protocol, 1995, Namely, (1) Setting up of a Geo-Scientific Data Centre at the Geological Survey of India at GSI Headquarters and regional offices; and (2) Technical Assistance for detailed exploration of Platinum group of metals in Baula-Nausahi prospects, Orissa.

The meeting also identified three new projects viz. (1) exploration and Survey of the Seabed with in the Exclusive Economic Zone of India and Indian Ocean; (2) Aero-geophysical Surveys for Minerals, Oil/Hydrocarbons, Groundwater, Saline and Wasteland development and geoscience database enhancement; and (3) Development of application techniques in relation to Environmental Management of Mines and Waste Recoveries. Detailed project proposals will be formulated and thereafter it will be posed for financing through loans at concessional rates from the Government of France under the Indo-French Financial Protocol. Work relating to these projects will commence only after finalisation of proposals.

Poverty Alleviation Programme

2343. SHRI RAJENDRA AGNIHOTRI : Will the Minister of RURAL AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Prime Minister has inaugurated a new poverty alleviation programme; and

(b) if so, the main features of the newly launched programme ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RURAL AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT (DEPARTMENT OF RURAL EMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION) AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRI VILAS MUTTEMWAR) : (a) and (b) Hon'ble Prime Minister has recently announced a number of welfare programmes for the benefit of the rural poor and weaker sections. One of the these programmes which falls under the purview of the Ministry relates to National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP).

The National Social Assistance Programme includes for the time being, three benefits as its components, namely :

(i) National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS)

(ii) National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)

(iii) National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS)

The National Social Assistance Programme is a centrally sponsored programme to extend 100% assis-