

(b) if so, whether the private sector companies which propose to take over Sukinda chrome-ore mines have been pressing Government to hand over the mines to them; and

(c) if so, the reaction of the Government thereto ?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINES (SHRI NAVEEN PATNAIK) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) As per provisions of the Mines and Minerals (Regulation and Development) Act, 1957 mining lease can be granted to an Indian national or a Company as defined in sub-section (1) of Section 3 of Companies Act, 1956 by the concerned State Government. However, for a mineral listed in the First Schedule of the aforesaid Act, prior approval of the Central Government is required before grant of the mining lease by the concerned State Government. In accordance with these provisions, some Companies have been requesting the State Government of Orissa to grant them mining lease for Chrome Ore in Sukinda Valley.

2. The State Govt. of Orissa had sent a proposal dated 24th June, 1997 to the Ministry of Mines seeking approval for the grant of mining lease for chrome ore in Sukinda Valley of Orissa over 50% of the balance area of 855.476 hectares which had become available for grant after the second renewal of the mining lease of M/s Tata Iron and Steel Co. Ltd. (TISCO) for a reduced area, in favour of four parties, i.e. M/s Indian Metal and Ferro Alloys (IMFA)/Indian Charge Chrome Ltd. (ICCL), M/s Ispat Alloys, M/s Ferro Alloys Corporation Limited (FACOR) and M/s Jindal Strips. The proposal was for grant of only 50% of the area of 855.476 ha. whereas the Central Government's Order dated 17th August, 1995 had requested the State Govt. to send the proposal for grant of mining lease in favour of the aforesaid four parties for the total area of 855.476 hectares.

3. While the aforesaid proposal of the State Govt. dated 24th June, 1997 was under examination, Shri M.C. Mahapatra, the then Joint Secretary in this Ministry who was handling the matter, died on 27th September, 1997, allegedly as a result of jumping from the office building of Shastri Bhawan. The police took up the investigations of the circumstances relating to the death of Shri Mahapatra. Initially, the matter was being investigated by the Delhi Police and subsequently by the Crime Branch of the Delhi Police. Later on, the investigations were entrusted to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The entire original records in respect of the proposal for grant of mining lease of Sukinda Chrome Ore mines have been taken over by the CBI and any further action in the matter regarding consideration of the aforesaid proposal for grant of mining lease can be taken up only after return of the original records by the CBI who are still investigating the matter.

4. Subsequently, another proposal dated 30th March, 1998 was received from the State Govt. of Orissa

seeking the views of the Central Govt. on their proposal to undertake mining operations of Chrome Ore over an area of 190.80 hectares (the same area which was earlier recommended by the State Govt. for grant of mining lease in favour of M/s IMFA/ICCL) in Sukinda Valley under section 4(3) of the Mines and Minerals (Regulation and Development) Act, 1957 (MVR & D Act) and to engage M/s IMFA/ICCL as an agent of the State Govt. to undertake mining operations in the aforesaid area under Rule 75(2) of the Mineral Concession Rules, 1960. Since the proposal of the State Govt. was not found to be consistent with the provisions of the MVR & D Act, particularly Section 4(3) of the Act *ibid*, which allows only the State Govt. to undertake mining and does not recognise mining operations by the State Govt. through an agent. The aforesaid proposal of the State Govt. was returned to them on 23rd April, 1998 conveying Central Government's views to the effect that the proposal is not consistent with the provisions of the MVR & D Act.

5. Subsequently the State Govt. of Orissa vide Notification dated 17.6.98, has notified under Rule 75(1) of Mineral Concession Rules, 1960 that the State Government proposed to undertake mining operations for chrome ore over an area of 119.08 ha. in village Kalipani, District Jajpur in Sukinda Valley. The State Govt. of Orissa vide its order dated 17.6.98 has also granted working permission to M/s ICCL to undertake mining operations of chrome ore over the above mentioned area as an agent of the State Govt. under the provisions of sub-rule (2) of Rule 75 of the Mineral Concession Rules, 1960 for a period of 2 years or approval of lease in their favour by Central Government whichever is earlier.

6. M/s. FACOR has filed a writ petition before the Hon'ble High Court of Orissa, challenging the above mentioned Order of the State Govt. dated 17.6.98 regarding grant of working permission to M/s. ICCL to undertake mining operations as an agent of the State Govt. and thus the matter is subjudice.

Wasteland Development Task Force

*327. SHRIMATI RANI CHITRALEKHA BHONSLE : Will the Minister of RURAL AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government have constituted any Wasteland Development Task Force (WDTF) for regeneration of wastelands in the country through afforestation; and

(b) if so, the details thereof, State-wise ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF RURAL AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI BABAGOUDA PATIL) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Department was set up Wasteland Development Task Force (WDTF) on 12.9.1994 with the objective to provide a disciplined force for regeneration of waste-

lands through afforestation including :

- in-situ soil and moisture conservation
- plantation
- maintenance of plantation
- protection

The force consists of 300 ex-servicemen under the command of Territorial Army and the Core Group of 15 Army/Territorial Army personnel. The Force has been deployed specifically for the development of the ravines of Chambal in the State of Madhya Pradesh with a target of development of 1170 hectares area with the financial outlay of about 3.81 crores. No such Wastelands Development Task Force has been constituted in any other State/Union Territory.

Reserved Fund of JRY for SC/ST

*328. SHRI ARJUN SETHI : Will the Minister of RURAL AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether the schemes of Community Irrigation Projects and Water Harvesting Structures have been implemented by some of the States in lieu of Million Wells scheme and 22.5 per cent of funds from Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) reserved for the direct benefits of SCs/STs in individual beneficiary schemes;

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

(c) whether the Government are aware that the Central guidelines on rights over the possession of land in the name of SC/ST beneficiaries are being violated in revenue districts of Balasore and Bhadrak of Orissa; and

(d) if so, the remedial steps proposed to be taken to set the matter right ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF RURAL AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI BABAGOUDA PATIL) : (a) and (b) The funds under the Million Wells Scheme (MWS) which is primarily intended for open irrigation wells can also be utilised for the other schemes of minor irrigation like irrigation tanks, water harvesting structures and also for the development of lands belonging to small and marginal farmers, if construction of wells is not feasible due to geological factors. At least two-thirds of the funds utilised under the scheme in any year are to be spent on poor small and marginal farmers belonging to SCs and STs. Similarly under Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY), 22.5% of the funds earmarked at all three levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) i.e. Zilla Parishad /DRDA, Intermediate Panchayat and Village Panchayat must be spent on individual beneficiary schemes for SCs and STs. These guidelines have generally been followed and no major deviation has been reported. The State-wise information, however, is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

(c) and (d) Information is being collected from State Government of Orissa and will be laid on the Table of the House.

[Translation]

Air Link to Buddha Pilgrimage Centres

*329. SHRI HARI KEWAL PRASAD : Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state :

(a) whether any scheme for connecting Buddha Pilgrimage Centres by air services in order to boost tourism in the country is under consideration of the Government;

(b) if so, the details thereof ;

(c) whether there is also a scheme for connecting Saarnath, Kushinagar and Lumbini in Uttar Pradesh by air services; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor ?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI ANANTH KUMAR) : (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) and (d) No, Sir. However, the needs of the pilgrims visiting Saarnath, Kushinagar and Lumbini (Nepal) are being met by Varanasi Airport which is in close proximity to these places and connected with Mumbai, Delhi, Agra, Khajuraho, Kathmandu and Lucknow.

[English]

Sanitation Programme

*330. SHRI MADHAV RAO PATIL :
SHRI ASHOK NAMDEORAO MOHOL :

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

(a) whether any centrally sponsored rural sanitation programme for construction of individual latrine is being undertaken in the country;

(b) if so, the per unit cost prescribed in the scheme alongwith the Central share to be made available to State Governments;

(c) whether due to increase in the cost of building material the State Governments are facing difficulty in the construction of such latrines at the rate of prescribed limit;

(d) if so, whether the State Governments particularly Maharashtra Government have written to the Union Government to raise the prescribed per unit cost limit and also to raise the Central share;