

which can cater to more than two and a quarter thousand of passenger with all basic and modern facilities.

SHRI N. JANARDHANA REDDY: Sir, by introducing air taxis in Andhra Pradesh, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has completely ruined the air traffic there. For example, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams have given Rs. 7 crore for improvement of the airport and air terminal.

12.00 hrs.

After assuming offices, the hon. Speaker has visited Tirupati. I do not know what he has promised to Lord Venkateshwara. Those who neglected Tirupati have not survived so far. Alliance Airlines are flying only two days a week. Will the hon. Minister look into the matter to improve traffic, irrespective of the losses? Lord Venkateshwara is there to take care of the Ministry of Civil Aviation. I want a specific answer from the hon. Minister?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister may send a written reply.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

[English]

Production Cost of Steel

*223. **SHRI VIJAY SINGH SOY:** Will the Minister of STEEL AND MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Alloy Steel Plants of Steel Authority of India are fighting a survival battle owing to high production-cost;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the action taken/proposed to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINES (SHRI NAVEEN PATNAIK) (a) and (b): Performance of Alloy/Special Steel Plants of SAIL is affected mainly due to lower sales realisation emerging out of competition, slow-down in demand and continuous increase in input prices.

(c) SAIL is taking steps on a continuous basis, to improve the performance of these plants, which include reduction in cost by improving the techno-economic parameters, demands oriented production, improving quality of products and increasing sales through aggressive and customer oriented marketing etc.

Increase in Domestic Air Fare

*226. **SHRI HARIN PATHAK:** Will the MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government are considering to increase domestic air fare;

(b) if so, the main reasons therefor and the criteria being followed in this regard;

(c) the accumulated loss of the Indian Airlines till date; and

(d) the steps that are being taken by the Government to make up the losses?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI ANANTH KUMAR): (a) and (b): Domestic air fares are not being regulated by the Government.

(c) the accumulated loss of Indian Airlines since the year 1989-90 to 1996-97 is Rs. 1045.60 crores.

(d) Indian airlines has taken/proposes to take the following steps to make up the losses:—

(i) Restructuring of routes; (ii) Creation of profit centres; (iii) Increase in international operations; (iv) Change in training pattern of pilots; (v) Creation of Alliance Air; (vi) Improvement in customer services; (vii) Improvement in corporate image by disseminating information about Company's strengths; (viii) Aggressive marketing strategies to improve market share; (ix) Strict control on recruitment and on capital expenditure; (x) Turn-around strategies suggested by the Kelkar Committee.

[Translation]

Inadequate Facilities Provided by Air India

*227. **SHRI SATNAM SINGH KAINTH:** Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that air India has been running at loss continuously during the last three years;

(b) if so, the facts thereof;

(c) whether it is also a fact that Air India does not provide the facilities which are provided in International flights by other Airlines;

(d) whether it has resulted in under-utilisations of the capacity;

(e) if so, the facts thereof; and

(f) the remedial steps being taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI ANANTH KUMAR): (a) to (f): The details of losses incurred by Air India in the last three years are as under:—

Year	Loss (Rs. In crores)
1995-96	271.84
1996-97	296.94
1997-98 (Provisional)	280.43

Facilities provided differ from airline to airline. Air India, however, endeavours to provide quality services on its flights. Passenger amenities provided by Air India include the following:—

- (i) Improved audio and video system.
- (ii) Personal television provided in First Class and Executive Class of B747-400 and Executive Class of A310.
- (iii) Inflight telephone system provided on B747-400 aircraft.
- (iv) Inflight facsimile system provided on B747-400 aircraft.

The seat factors for all international airlines depend on the seasonality and the prevalent competition. However, to improve its seat factors, Air India is continuously providing new service concepts on its flights such as:—

- (i) Tele Check-in for First and Executive Class passengers.
- (ii) Multi Check-in at Mumbai and Indira Gandhi International Airport.
- (iii) Interactive computer flight information system.
- (iv) Upgrading of aircraft interior.

[English]

Panchayat Elections

*228. SHRIMATI RANEE NARAH:
SHRI ANIL BASU:

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

- (a) whether the elections to Panchayati Raj bodies are held regularly in all the States;
- (b) if not, the States where elections are not held regularly;
- (c) whether some States have not given necessary financial and administrative Powers to Panchayati Raj Bodies;
- (d) if no, the names of such States together with reasons thereof;
- (e) whether the Government propose to take steps to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions throughout the country, and
- (f) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF RURAL AREAS AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI BABAGOUDA PATIL): (a) to (f): Article 243-E of this Constitution specifies that all Panchayats unless sooner dissolved under any law for the time being in force, shall continue for 5 years and that elections to constitute Panchayats shall be completed before the expiration of its duration of 5 years or before the expiration of a period of 6 months from the date of its dissolution. According to information available with the date of its dissolution. According to information available with the Government elections are being held as laid down in Article 243-E of the Constitution in all States, except in Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Pondicherry, Zilla Parisads of Goa and Assam.

2. Some States have not yet given necessary financial powers to Panchayati Raj Bodies for want of reports of the State Finance Commissions (SFC). SFCs of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamilnadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal have submitted their reports to the respective State Government. The States of Assam, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura and west Bengal have accepted most of the recommendations of the SFCs. Gujarat, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu have received Interim Reports of the SFC on which States/UTs have yet to take action. SFCs of Bihar, Goa and Sikkim have yet to submit their reports. Acceptance of the recommendations of the SFCs will considerably strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

3. Article 243-G of the Constitution enables the State Governments to endow the Panchayats with necessary powers, functions and responsibilities so as to enable them to function as institutions of self-government. A