

(c) Production of sponge iron in the country during 1997-98 (Provisional) was 5.31 million tonnes. A State-wise break up is as follows :

State	Production (in million tonnes)
Andhra Pradesh	.083
Bihar	.145
Gujarat	1.701
Karnataka	.055
Madhya Pradesh	.940
Maharashtra	2.161
Orissa	.218
Tamil Nadu	.009
Total :	5.312

#### Uneconomic International Routes of IA and AI

1354. SHRI MANIKRAO HODLYA GAVIT : Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) the international routes identified by Indian Airlines and Air India as uneconomical; and

(b) the reasons for not allowing private airlines to operate on those uneconomical international routes?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI ANANTH KUMAR) : (a) Indian Airlines has been incurring losses on the Varanasi/Kathmandu route.

Air India has been incurring losses on its operations to USA, Canada, UK, Europe, East Africa, Hong Kong, Japan, Israel, Singapore and South Korea.

(b) Under the current policy, Government does not designate private airlines for operation on international sectors.

#### Mineral Wealth of Jammu and Kashmir

1355. SHRI CHAMAN LAL GUPTA : Will the Minister of STEEL AND MINES be pleased to state:

(a) the efforts made by the Government to explore and utilise mineral wealth of Jammu and Kashmir during the last three years;

(b) whether the Government are satisfied with the efforts so far made; and

(c) if not, the further planning of the Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF STEEL AND MINES (SHRI RAMESH BAIS) : (a) Geological Survey of India (GSI) has conducted mineral investigations

for platinoid Group of Minerals, Gold and Lithium in Kathua, Udhampur and Leh districts of Jammu & Kashmir during the last three years as per the following details:-

(i) Low Lithium content of little economic significance has been analysed in the rocks of Salal area, Udhampur district.

(ii) Content of gold and platinoids in rock of Shurok-Sumda area of Leh district is very low and not encouraging.

(b) Yes, Sir. Government is satisfied with the efforts for exploration of mineral wealth in Jammu & Kashmir. However, exploitation is not possible in view of low metal content.

(c) Question does not arise.

#### Purchase of Electrical Items by M.E.S.

1356. DR. BIZAY SONKAR SHASTRI : Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether rampant corruption in the purchase of electrical items by MES has ever been noticed;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the system adopted by the MES in such purchases and the number of complaints of irregularities and corruption received during each of the last three years; and

(d) the action, the Government propose to take to streamline the system in the purchase of electrical items by MES?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES) : (a) No, Sir.

(b) Question does not arise.

(c) and (d) Purchases of items by MES are generally made on DGS&D rate - contracts and only in case of emergent requirements, purchases from local markets are authorised for which competitive tenders/quotations are invited. Existing system of purchases followed by MES is functioning smoothly.

#### West Land Helicopters

1357. SHRI MOHAN RAWALE : Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) the cost at which the Westland Helicopters were purchased alongwith their life span; and

(b) the reasons for the purchase of these helicopters?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI ANANTH KUMAR) : (a) The cost of 21 Westland helicopters acquired by the then Helicopters Corporation of India Limited (now