

pected to increase their presence considerably in mid-western Nepal, a region which used to send the largest number of Gorkha recruits to the Indian Army; and

(b) if so, the reaction of Government to that?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI BIPINPAL DAS): (a) and (b). On the 2nd February 1975 it was announced in Kathmandu that China is to assist Nepal in the construction of the Pokhara-Surkhet road project in mid-western Nepal. The Government naturally keeps under review the impact of all developments on matters of interest to India.

श्री राम प्रकाश: क्या मंत्री महोदय बतायेंगे कि इस वक्त ये गोरखा जवान जो हमारी सेना में भर्ती होते हैं उनकी तादाद कितनी है और पिछले तीन सालों में उनकी कितनी भर्ती हुई है ?

SHRI BIPINPAL DAS: That information can be given only by the Minister of Defence.

SHRI BISHWANATH ROY: I want to know whether it is a fact that the Chinese living in that part of Nepal generally indulge in smuggling of small Chinese articles into India and that has not yet been checked on our part.

SHRI BIPINPAL DAS: That is a matter for the Government of Nepal. I have no information.

SHRI J. MATHA GOWDER: The Chinese Vice-Minister stated yesterday that if India wishes to start negotiations China would act favourably. What is their action of the Government of India to this question.

AN HON. MEMBER: It is not relevant.

Sponge Iron-Based Mini-Steel Plants

*146. SHRI VASANT SATHE: Will the Minister of STEEL AND MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Dr. V. A. Altekar of the National Metallurgical Laboratory, Jamshedpur, suggested setting up of sponge iron-based mini-steel plants each with a production capacity of 30,000 to 50,000 tonnes a year in the States of Bihar, Orissa, and West Bengal;

(b) if so, the reaction of Government thereto;

(c) the main suggestions contained in Dr. Alterkar's paper presented in the symposium on the Mineral-Based Industries in the Eastern Region held at Bhubaneshwar in the last week of December, 1974; and

(d) the reaction of Government to the suggestions made by Dr. Altekar and action taken thereon?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF STEEL AND MINES (SHRI SUKHDEV PRASAD): (a) to (d). A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) to (d). The main point brought out by Dr. Altekar, Director, National Metallurgical Laboratory, Jamshedpur, in his paper presented at the symposium on "Mineral Based Industries in the Eastern Region" held in the last week of December, 1974 at Bhubaneshwar, was that there is scope for the setting up of sponge iron plants in the Eastern Region using non-coking coal as reductant. This has been recommended on the basis of results obtained by testing samples of raw materials from this region in the pilot plant at NML, Jamshedpur.

NML have prepared feasibility report for sponge iron projects of 30,000 tonne capacity per annum based on the technology developed by them. It

is proposed to encourage the setting up of capacity for production of sponge iron based on the technology developed by NML at the pilot plant stage.

SHRI VASANT SATHE In the statement I am glad that Government has paid compliments to our scientists who have evolved a method of using non-coking coal with iron ore to produce sponge iron in the country which can be directly used for steel. In view of the fact that we have been having a fascination for foreign technology and that this technology has been developed which can mean a good saving of coking coal and iron ore which are being only exported and exploited. I would like to know from Government as to what is preventing them from setting up plants based on this technology in the public sector.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN CHARGE, MINISTRY OF IRON AND STEEL (SHRI CHANDRAJIT YADAV) Sir, as the hon. Member himself has said, the Government is giving due consideration and has also appreciated the work done by the NML. We will be too glad to have the alternative method to produce this steel in this country. The coking coal which becomes a very important ingredient in the conventional method is not available in a big quantity in our country. Therefore, any other method which will be an alternative method for producing the steel will be most welcome. For example, the method for producing the sponge iron has been successfully tested. We will be too glad to take advantage of this as we have large reserves of non-coking coal. But, this technology is still under an experiment. All over the world certain efforts had been made. In Brazil, for example, one plant is being run while some other plants are undergoing a lot of difficulty. We want to encourage our scientists and we do not want to create any difficulty. Rather, our Government is making available all possible help. We have decided that the NML should be encouraged with a

pilot plant with a capacity of 100 tonnes per day. It will require about Rs. 3 crores. We are making all possible efforts to provide money for a pilot plant. If this pilot plant succeeds, Government will be too glad to go ahead with the production. We have issued six licences to different State Corporations for producing sponge iron. But unfortunately, no State Government has taken any effective steps except of course some steps which are being taken in Gujarat where the production of sponge iron is being attempted. For the production of sponge iron, the most important thing that is required is the natural gas and not non-coking coal. Andhra Pradesh Government is also taking certain steps in this regard and we are helping Andhra Pradesh Government by providing all possible technical know-how and other facilities.

SHRI VASANT SATHE Sir, I am really thankful to the hon. Minister for taking such a sympathetic attitude towards this Project which is of national interest. This project is of great importance to the eastern region, particularly for the States of Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal where a network of small mini steel plants for the sponge plant will also be of great employment potential.

In the light of this, would you start the proposed pilot plant when you yourselves are saving in your statement that this process has already been tested? You say in your statement that this has been recommended on the basis of the net results obtained by testing the samples of raw materials from this region in a pilot plant which is already there in Jamshedpur. Why then are you waiting for another pilot plant? Why don't you go in for the small mini plant based on this process?

SHRI CHANDRAJIT YADAV I have already replied that there is no hesitation. Rather, we would welcome it. It is not that the potentialities

will be there only in the eastern region. That may be so all over the country and, therefore, we will have no hesitation and we have already issued licences to six State Industrial Development Corporations. The Director of N.M.L. Dr. Altekar himself feels that he wants to perfect this process. He further wants that there should be a pilot plant. We have agreed in principle that we shall have a pilot plant with a capacity of 100 tonnes a day. If the results obtained from this are favourable, we will be too glad to help the State Government in the matter of production of this sponge iron.

SHRI N. K. P. SALVE: The hon. Minister himself is showing his professional expertise in this steel technology. My simple question to him is this whether or not in Bailadila the iron dust is accumulating which is going waste. How will you stop this? The dust is accumulating in the hillock itself. The iron dust is one-third of the iron-ore. That is being accumulated in very substantially large quantity. Therefore, may I know from the hon. Minister whether, since he is thinking of the sponge iron mini steel plant, he would also think of setting up such a plant in Bailadila areas so that we can utilise this invaluable iron dust which is sometimes going waste

SHRI CHANDRAJIT YADAV: It is a fact that in Bailadila area a very huge quantity of fine iron dust is lying which is causing concern to us. This matter is being looked into. The sponge iron-based mini-steel plant is no solution for that. The real solution is that we should have pelletisation plant there. We are seriously thinking of setting up a pelletisation plant there.

Incidence of blindness among children

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*147. **SHRI P. GANGADEB:**

SHRI P. M. MEHTA:

Will the Minister of **HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING** be pleased to state:

(a) whether children in the country are going blind;

(b) if so, whether Government have ascertained the causes thereof;

(c) whether by giving massive dose of vitamin A children could be saved from blindness; and

(d) if so, the steps taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING (DR. KARAN SINGH) (a) to (d). A statement is laid on the Table of the Sabha.

Statement

During 1972-73 the Indian Council of Medical Research made collaborative Study on the incidence of blindness in the country. The study was carried out at seven places, namely, Ahmedabad, Cuttack, Indore, Madurai, New Delhi, Srinagar and Varanasi. The data collected is being analysed. However, the primary figures indicate that the rate of blindness in the age group of 8-14 years is around 1 per 1000. The major causes of blindness among children are (i) eye infection like trachoma, conjunctivitis etc. (ii) infectious diseases like smallpox, etc., (iii) deficiency of Vitamin A in the diet, (iv) congenital and other factors. Vitamin A deficiency is widely prevalent in the country, especially amongst the pre-school children. Recent studies have shown that oral administration of large doses of Vitamin A every six months can protect children from developing Keratomalacia. A scheme of prophylaxis against blindness in children caused by Vitamin A deficiency