

(c) Export promotion measures are continuously being taken by the Government through changes in policies and procedures for providing an export friendly environment, involvement of States in export promotion and consultation with trade and industry. A number of steps have been taken to promote exports which include lowering of interest rates on export credit, reduction in transaction cost through decentralisation and simplification of procedures and various other measures as enumerated in the Exim Policy. Steps have also been taken to promote exports through multilateral and bilateral initiatives, identification of thrust sectors and focus regions. The Government is according high priority to exports and all necessary steps are being taken to put exports on high growth trajectory.

Increase in Trade Deficit

2329. DR. B.B. DUTTA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the increase in country's trade deficit during April-August, 1998;

(b) the reasons for widening gap between exports and imports? and

(c) the details of measures taken by Government to increase exports?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) As per the provisional data received from the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence & Statistics (DGCI & S), the trade deficit during April–August 1998-99 has increased to US\$ 3871.5 million from US\$ 2550.2 million during the same period last year.

(b) The widening of gap has been due both to a slowdown in export growth as well as an increase in imports especially that of gold and silver.

Post-Harvest Mango Care

2330. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether attention of the Government has been drawn to the news-items which appeared in the Economic Times, dated the 10th August, 1998 captioned "Low post-harvest care denies Indian mangoes shelf space on foreign markets";

(b) if so, what is the reaction of Government to the observations made therein and facts of the matter;

(c) the details of action taken/proposed to improve and up grade post-harvest care for mangoes to ensure substantial export; and

(d) the details of action plan formulated for the current year and 9th Plan for upgradation of post-harvest facilities for export of fruits?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d) The Government is aware of the inadequate post-harvest management practices in the horticulture sector which also has an impact on the exports. Some of the steps taken to improve the post-harvest management in horticultural sector and to enhance exports inter-alia, include:—

(i) Providing assistance for raising small and large nurseries for production of good quality planting material, upgradation of technical knowhow of farmers through demonstrations, trainings and publicity, rejuvenation of old orchards, area expansion, supply of minikits for vegetables, improving productivity and training of farmers under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme on Integrated Development of Tropical, Temperate and Arid Zone fruits;

(ii) Provision of soft loans for setting up of grading/processing centres, transport vehicles, precooling units,

auction platform, ripening/curing chambers and quality testing equipment, etc;

- (iii) Providing financial assistance to exporters / growers / Cooperative Societies for development of infrastructural facilities such as purchase of specialised transport units, establishment of pre cooling/cold storage facilities, integrated post-harvest handling systems (pack houses);
- (iv) Grant of financial assistance for improved packaging, and strengthening of quality control including installation of latest ISO 9000 HACCP equipments at export units;
- (v) Grant of air freight subsidy for export of selected fresh vegetables and fresh fruits.
- (vi) Establishment of vapour heat treatment facilities for improving the acceptability of the product especially mangoes in overseas markets. Research efforts are on for the use of modern technologies such as Controlled/Modified Atmosphere technologies in transportation for increasing the shelf-life of perishable products;
- (vii) Setting up of integrated cargo handling and cold storage facilities at various international Airports for handling export of perishable items such as fresh fruits and vegetables;
- (viii) Providing technical advisory services and other support services to trade and industry including training of farmers in pre and post harvest management practices, dissemination of post harvest manuals for export production, quality control packaging, transport, etc.

Industrial Estate for Food Processing

2331. SHRI K.M. SAIFULLAH: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the agricultural and processed food products export development authority (APEDA) proposed to set up an industrial estate for food processing units in Kuppam in Chittoor, district, Andhra Pradesh for boosting exports of horticulture products;

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

(c) the grants proposed to be given in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority has a scheme for extending financial assistance for setting up of special infrastructural facilities and for conducting feasibility studies relating to export promotion of agro products. Under the above scheme assistance can be provided to the State Government on receipt of a proposal for the same.

Trade with Myanmar and China

2332. SHRI DRUPAD BORGOHAIN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to use the Steelwell Road which connects Ledo (Assam) with Myanmar and China via Arunachal for commercial purpose;

(b) whether Government have any plan to improve it; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) to (c) India and Myanmar signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in March 1997 under which the two countries agreed to cooperate with each other for the upgradation/construction of border roads in Myanmar, along the Indo-Myanmar border, in the interest of promoting economic cooperation between the two countries. Under the provisions of this MoU, the two countries have