

(c) and (d) Government have been pressing the owners and Governments of flag states of hijacked vessels to secure the release of the Indian nationals on board the hijacked vessels quickly. Diplomatic channels are used to mount pressure on them. The following preventive steps have been taken to protect the Indian flag vessels—

- (1) Movement of Indian flag vessels is closely monitored in known piracy infested areas through regular contact between the Directorate General Communication Centre and the vessels' Ship Security Alert System.
- (2) Indian Navy has deployed warship to patrol the Maritime Security Patrol Area in the Gulf of Aden. Indian ships along with foreign ships with Indian nationals have been informed of the same so that they can take advantage of the warship's presence while transiting through Gulf of Aden.
- (3) India's position is that greater coordination is needed under the umbrella of the United Nations so that countries and organizations contributing warships such as North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Operation Atlanta of the European Union and warships of individual nations, including India, could coordinate efforts aimed at enhancing the security of these sea lanes. Further, the international community, having recognized this problem brought this issue up in the Security Council of the United Nations which adopted four resolutions in 2008. India has contacted several countries to support this approach.

NH projects

1189. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

- (a) the present number of National Highway (NH) Projects in India indicating their position, State-wise and investment-wise;
- (b) the work in progress, maintenance and pending projects yet to be completed; and
- (c) the new road projects undertaken by Government during the last four years, State-wise and year-wise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI K.H. MUNIYAPPA): (a) to (c) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Bridge over Brahmaputra

1190. SHRI MUKUT MITHI: Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that the Prime Minister during his recent visit to Assam had announced the construction of fifth bridge over Brahmaputra at Saikhowa to connect Sadiya Sub-division of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh;

(b) the total cost of the bridge project and when it is likely to be completed; and

(c) the present status of progress of construction of above mentioned bridge?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI K.H. MUNIYAPPA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Government has not yet given approval for implementation of the project and it is too early to indicate the cost of the bridge and the likely date of completion.

(c) Does not arise.

Rates of freight charges

†1191. SHRI RAJ MOHINDER SINGH MAJITHA:

SHRI RAM JETHMALANI:

Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that rates of freight charges in international markets have decreased at the end of September, 2008 and in the beginning of October, 2008;

(b) if so, the reduction in freight charges that has taken place, item-wise; and

(c) the reasons for decrease in these freight charges?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU):

(a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Ship freight on international waterways has been continuously declining from past four months. This is especially so for the dry bulk sector where the drop in freight/charter rates which was apparent from August, 2008 took a steep fall in September, October and November, 2008.

As far as liner sector is concerned, the decrease is ranging between 50-70% from Indian sub-continent to Far East sector, Middle East sector and Europe sector. Similarly, the freight is also declining on the return legs ranging from 35-50%.

The dry bulk sector has been the most affected during the period in question. The Baltic Dry Index (BDI) serves as an indicator of the dry bulk market and its steep fall reflects the freight situation in the dry bulk market. The monthly average of BDI for July, 2008 to November, 2008 is as follows:

| Month | July, 2008 | August, 2008 | September, 2008 | October, 2008 | November, 2008 |
|--|---------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Monthly Average BDI | 8934 | 7407 | 4975 | 1808 | 824 |
| Percentage change from previous month | 12.80% | 17.09% | 32.83% | 63.66% | 54.42% |

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.