

Pollution in Sutlej basin

3234. SHRIMATI VIPLOVE THAKUR: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the fact that Sutlej basin has been converted into a dumping ground due to 1000 MW Karcham Wangtoo hydropower project;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the indiscriminate blasting and unchecked air pollution has severely affected the livelihood of the people in the adjoining villages of Kilba, Runang, Urni, Yula, Meeru, Chagoan, Tapri, Sapni and Kanai; and

(d) if so, the action taken/being taken by Government to save environment of the region and the details of steps Government has taken against the said hydropower project company?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) For the disposal of the excavated material, forty seven sties have been earmarked in the project area. Most of the dumping sites, though located along the river, are at a safe distance. Adequate protection measures are provided in advance before dumping the excavated material.

(c) As reported by this Ministry's Regional Office at Chandigarh, there is no indiscriminate blasting nor is the air pollution is unchecked. Blasting is done in controlled manner using explosives which are duly approved and licensed by Chief Controller of Explosives and the District Administration. It does not appear to be correct that air pollution has severely affected the livelihood of the people in the adjoining villages of Kilba, Runang, Urni, Yula, Meeru, Chagon, Tapi, Sapni and Kanai.

(d) Karcham Wangtoo Hydroelectric project in Himachal Pradesh was accorded Environmental Clearance (EC) on 09.11.2005. In the EC letter a condition had been stipulated that restoration of construction area including dumping site of excavated materials should be ensured by leveling, filling up of burrow pits, landscaping etc. and that the area should be property treated with suitable plantation. These conditions are being implemented by the project proponent.

Decrease in Red Pandas

3235. MS. SUSHILA TIRIYA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is a considerable decrease in the population of Red Pandas;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether it is also a fact that a very large amount meant for conservation has not been utilized; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) and (b) Fluctuations in the population of wild animals is a natural phenomenon and various reasons like predation, diseases, competition, man-animal conflict, heat stroke, etc. are attributed to it. However, there are no reports available with the Ministry showing decrease in the population of Red Pandas.

(c) and (d) Central Government provides financial and technical assistance to the State/UT Governments under various Centrally Sponsored Schemes, viz., 'Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats', 'Project Tiger' and 'Project Elephant' for activities aimed at the protection and conservation of wildlife including Red Pandas and their habitats. Funds are released to State/UT Governments only after the receipt of utilisation certificates for the fund released during the previous financial years. There are no such instances noticed, where large amount meant for conservation including for Red Pandas, have not been utilised.

Impact of G.M. food on health

3236. SHRIMATI MOHSINA KIDWAI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware that Green peace, in a recent report, has highlighted the dangers of genetically modified food produced in India;

(b) if so, the safety mechanisms adopted by India in this regard;

(c) whether Government is aware that trees and traditional ayurvedic medicinal herbs are being subjected to genetic engineering; and

(d) if so, the details of the genetically modified food and its impact on health and environment?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) The Ministry has received representations from several NGOs alleging the ill-effects of genetically modified food on environment and human health.

(b) India's biotechnology regulatory system is governed by the "Rules for the Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms/Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells, 1989" under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. These Rules cover the areas of research as well as activities involving manufacture, use, import, export, storage and large scale applications of Genetically Modified (GM) organisms and products. These Rules are supplemented by the biosafety guidelines for evaluating environmental and health safety aspects of GM food crops. The biosafety guidelines are updated regularly and follow international norms prescribed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, CODEX Alimentarius Commission and International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC). All GM crops are extensively tested for their biosafety prior to commercial release.