

A number of initiatives have been taken by the Government to increase flow of credit to the agricultural sector, including in the State of Jharkhand. Target for flow of agricultural credit has increased from Rs. 3,25,000 crore in 2009-10 to Rs. 5,75,000 crore in 2012-13. The Government has been implementing Interest Subvention Scheme for short-term crop loans upto Rs. 3 lakh at interest rate of 7% per annum alongwith additional subvention of 3% for farmers who repay their loans on time.

Ban on gold import

†1609. SHRI DHARMENDRA PRADHAN: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that gold import has played a major role in approx.71 billion dollars current account deficit of the country;
- (b) if so, whether Government intends to ban gold import completely for some time in view of growing current account deficit;
- (c) if so, the details thereof; and
- (d) the likely reduction envisaged in the current account deficit by banning gold import?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) In 2011-12, gold import was US\$ 56.5 billion and current account deficit was US\$ 78.2 billion. During the HI (April-September 2012) of 2012-13, gold import was US\$ 20.3 billion, while the CAD was US\$ 39.0 billion.

(b) to (d) In order to lower the import of gold, the Government had raised the import duty from 2 per cent to 4 per cent on gold and platinum in the Budget 2012-13, which has been further enhanced to 6 per cent in January 2013. The Government has proposed to provide a link between the Gold ETF (Exchange Traded Fund) and the Gold Deposit Scheme with the objective to unfreeze or release a part of the gold physically held by mutual funds under Gold ETFs to enable them to deposit the gold with banks under the Gold Deposit Scheme. This would bring the gold lying in stock into circulation and will partly meet the requirements of the gems and jewellery trade. It is hoped that these measures would lead to moderation in the quantity of gold imported into the country, and also help in narrowing the trade and current account deficit in the medium term.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

There has been moderation of gold import to US\$ 20.3 billion during first half of 2012-13 as compared to US\$ 29.0 billion during the corresponding period of 2011-12.

Revision of guidelines for foreign visit by ministers and bureaucrats

1610. SHRI SANJAY RAUT: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has modified guidelines for foreign visit by our leaders and IAS officers;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the expenditure incurred on such visits including by the Prime Minister and his Ministers; and

(c) the details of stringent steps Government is taking to observe austerity measures?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) The Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance has not modified any guidelines regulating foreign visits of Ministers and Government officials including IAS officers.

(b) In view of (a) above, the Question does not arise.

(c) The Ministry of Finance has been issuing instructions on expenditure management from time to time with a view to ensure availability of adequate resources for meeting objectives of critical development and priority schemes. The economy measures are intended to promote fiscal discipline. These instructions *inter-alia* provide that foreign travel is restricted to most necessary and unavoidable official engagements, with officers of the appropriate level deputed and the size and duration of the foreign visit is kept at the minimum required.

High retail price of petroleum products

1611. SHRI TAPAN KUMAR SEN: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the retail price of petroleum products in our country is among the highest in the world;

(b) whether it is a fact that this exorbitant retail price is the result of taxation policy of Government towards petroleum sector;