

Hon'ble Supreme Court, *vide* order dated 16.11.2016, directed Union of India to constitute a nodal Agency, as an interim arrangement, to regulate and remove online advertisements relating to preconception and prenatal determination of sex or sex selection, prohibited under PC&PNDT Act, 1994, on internet. Accordingly nodal agency has been constituted.

Financial risk due to virtual currencies

2960. DR. K. V. P. RAMACHANDRA RAO: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government shares the reported comment of RBI that virtual currencies pose a financial risk; and

(b) if so, how will it address the problem while pushing for a cashless economy?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI ARJUN RAM MEGHWAL): (a) and (b) Reserve Bank of India, *vide*, its Press Release dated February 01, 2017 has advised that it has not given any license/authorization to any entity/company to operate such schemes or deal with Bitcoin or any virtual currency. As such, any user, holder, investor, trader, etc. dealing with Virtual Currencies will be doing so at their own risk.

Reserve Bank of India had issued cautionary advice to the users, holders and traders of Virtual Currencies (VCs) including Bitcoins about the potential financial, operational, legal, customer protection and security related risks that they are exposing themselves to, *vide*, its press release dated December 24, 2013.

The creation, trading or usage of VCs including Bitcoins, as a medium of payment is not authorized by any Central bank or monetary authority. No regulatory approval, registration or authorisation is stated to have been obtained by the entities concerned for carrying on such activities.

The absence of counter parties in usage of VCs including Bitcoins, for illicit and illegal activities in anonymous/pseudonymous systems could subject the users to unintentional breaches of anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) laws.

Check on opium cultivation

2961. DR. K. V. P. RAMACHANDRA RAO: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to reports that opium is being cultivated on a large scale in the agency belt of North Coastal Andhra Pradesh; and

- (b) if so, whether Government has any plans to check such cultivation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SANTOSH KUMAR GANGWAR): (a) There has been no reporting of any case of opium cultivation in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh so far.

- (b) Does not arise.

**Exchange of old currency notes by passport holders of
Andhra Pradesh and Telangana**

2962. SHRI V. VIJAYASAI REDDY: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Chennai branch of RBI has been accepting old currency notes of ₹ 500/- and ₹ 1000/- denomination from passport holders from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana since January 1, 2017;

(b) how many passport holders with addresses in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have deposited or exchanged old notes up to February 28, 2017;

(c) the steps proposed to create more desks and counters to accept such deposits efficiently at Chennai RBI; and

(d) whether handicapped people from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana can use the postal system to exchange such notes, if not, reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI ARJUN RAM MEGHWAL): (a) Chennai is one of the five offices authorized to accept Specified Bank Notes (SBNs) tendered during the grace period as defined under Specified Bank Notes (Cessation of Liabilities) Ordinance 2016 since replaced by the Specified Bank Notes (Cessation of Liabilities) Act, 2017.

- (b) As per available information the numbers are as per the following:—

Telangana : 301;

Andhra Pradesh : 509

(c) and (d) To provide quick service to the huge number of applicants visiting the office for exchange of SBNs in Chennai, a team of seven officers has been posted to verify the documents and three counters opened for accepting the SBNs from those whose documents are in order. As per the extant rules the tenderer has to come in person for depositing SBNs. However, arrangements are made for providing out of turn service to the physically challenged and senior citizens.