

between India and Bhutan. It is an ongoing programme under which 336MW Chukha Hydroelectricity Project and 60MW Kurichu Project have been commissioned in 1988 and 2002 respectively. Currently 1020MW Tala Project is under implementation and is expected to be commissioned in the first quarter of 2006. The Projects are financed on a 60:40 grant: loan basis. The Detailed Project Report of 800+MW Punatsangchu Project is also being undertaken currently.

2. While these Projects generate substantial revenues for Royal Government of Bhutan, most of the electricity from the Projects is transmitted to energy deficient States in India at a mutually agreed tariff.

3. There are also long-term benefits that are intangible. As a consequence of our support to Bhutan's development programmes, the overall relations between India and Bhutan have matured over the years to become a model for mutually beneficial cooperation in the region, providing immense benefit to the peoples of both countries. The bilateral relationship between India and Bhutan is multifaceted and diverse, encompassing political, security, economic, cultural and social fields. The concerted efforts by the two countries continue to draw upon the complementarities and comparative advantages of the two economies, placing bilateral relations on firm footing.

Indians in Iraq after US invasion

†2460. SHRI UDAY PRATAP SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) the number of Indians who went to Iraq after US invasion there; and
- (b) the measures taken by Government to protect Indians in Iraq?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) It is estimated that 6000 Indians went to Iraq since the US invasion.

(b) Government have taken following measures to protect Indians in Iraq:—

- (i) The Government have reiterated its instructions to the Missions in the Gulf to extend all possible assistance to the Indian nationals in Iraq desiring to return to India.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

[26 August, 2004]

RAJYA SABHA

- (ii) The Indian Mission in Baghdad has been instructed to visit work sites of Indian citizens to the extent possible to enquire after their safety and well-being and to take appropriate steps. The Indian Embassy in Baghdad has sent its officials to some of the places in Iraq where the Indians are located to enquire their well-being and to provide assistance and guidance in case they decide to leave Iraq.
- (iii) The Indian Mission has been in contact with employers of Indian workers to enquire after their safety and well-being and to allow return to India of the workers desiring to leave Iraq.
- (iv) The Government have requested the Governments of Jordan and Kuwait to issue transit visas to Indians returning from Iraq to India.

Housing scheme for beedi workers in Orissa

2461. SHRI PYARIMOHAN MOHAPATRA: Will the Minister of LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT be pleased to state:

(a) the number of beedi workers in the State of Orissa and the number for which funds have been sanctioned under the relevant housing scheme; and

(b) whether it is a fact that the progress under the scheme has been slow in Orissa, and if so, the reasons therefor and the remedial measures proposed to be taken alongwith the time-frame in regard thereto?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI SIS RAM OLA): (a) and (b) There are around 1,85,889 identified beedi workers in the State and 10,715 houses have been sanctioned to the beedi workers out of the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund (BWFF), during the last five years, under the Integrated Housing Scheme. An expenditure of Rs. 13.75 crore (approximately) has actually been incurred by way of disbursement of subsidy during this period. The progress has been quite satisfactory. The financial assistance available to beedi workers for construction of the house has recently been raised from Rs. 20,000/- to Rs. 40,000/- per worker, or 50% of actual cost of construction, whichever is less *w.e.f.* 1st July, 2004.