

(b) if so, whether this decision will tantamount to promoting monopolistic interests in non-ferrous metal industry since Sterlite had earlier bagged the BALCO disinvestment bid; and

(c) whether in the (HZL) disinvestment package, Government had stipulated a minimum Rs. 50.00 crore earnest money, precluding other prospective bidders?

THE MINISTER OF DISINVESTMENT (SHRI ARUN SHOURIE): (a) Yes, Sir. Government has disinvested 26 per cent stake in Hindustan Zinc Ltd. in favour of Sterlite Opportunities and Ventures Ltd. (SOVL)

(b) No Sir. There are other major players in aluminium sector like NALCO and HINDALCO. In Zinc, there is Binani Zinc Industries Ltd. Both aluminium and Zinc are OGL items. In case of abuse of dominance, Government will have adequate powers to take necessary remedial measures through reduction of import duty and through other legal means available with it, to ensure competition and protect the interests of consumers.

(c) While receiving the financial bids, the Government stipulated submission of an irrevocable bank guarantee for an amount of Rs. 50 crore to secure the performance of its obligations upon the selection of the successful bidder and to secure the compliance with the provisions of the Takeover Code of SEBI by the Strategic Partner. Such bank guarantees are taken in all cases of disinvestment, and they are uniformly applicable to all bidders.

Blind People in the country

*493. SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI:
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:

Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether there are about 12 million blind people in the country who constitute 25 per cent of the World's population;

(b) if so, whether the report, based on data collected from schools and colleges in over 40 cities across the country has pointed out that majority of eye disorders found in the country were due to refractive error and cataract, which are correctible;

(c) the other main reasons for the same;

(d) whether the World Health Organisation has also found the report true; and

(e) the efforts being made by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (DR. C.P. THAKUR): (a) to (e) Globally, there are nearly 45 million blind persons out of which 6.73 million (15%) blind persons are in India as estimated by WHO in accordance with the definition of WHO.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and WHO are not aware of any study conducted in schools and colleges of 40 cities of the country. However recent studies conducted in an urban population of New Delhi and rural population of Mehboobnagar district (Andhra Pradesh) indicated that refractive errors were the main cause of visual impairment in 81 per cent and 53 per cent of visually impaired children, respectively. As far as children are concerned, incidence of cataract is rare. Amblyopia (6—15 per cent), Retinal Diseases (5—8 per cent) and Corneal Blindness (1—6 per cent) are some of the other causes of visual impairment in children.

In order to bring down the prevalence of blindness, the following steps are being taken under National Programme for Control of Blindness in the country:—

1. School eye screening programme to detect and correct refractive errors in children;
2. Treatment of corneal blindness through transplantation of donated corneas;
3. Vitamin A prophylaxis in children to prevent nutritional blindness;
4. Developing human resources and institutional capacity for eye care through training and supply of equipments and consumables;
5. National eye donation fortnight from 25th August to 8th September every year to promote eye donation;
6. Public awareness on prevention and treatment of blinding disorders and for promoting eye donations.