

(c) The following steps are being taken to improve the functioning of rural communications including village public telephones and to provide them with the group dialling and STD services.

(i) Over-head alignment is being replaced by underground Cables wherever it is viable and feasible.

(ii) Transmission media is being strengthened by making more use of Radio/Satellite media etc. to provide better communication facilities in rural/hilly areas.

(iii) Power supply is being augmented by providing higher capacity batteries and Engine Generators at rural exchanges.

(iv) All the Village Public Telephones are tested as per schedule from the concerned exchanges for taking corrective action.

The performance of Village Public Telephones is also being monitored at the Headquarters regularly.

(v) Action is being taken to replace the unserviceable MARR equipment.

(d) It is decided to verify the field report regarding the functioning of Village Public Telephones by an Independent Agency to be selected by the Department.

Improvement in Postal Services

6410. SHRI HANSRAJ AHIR:

SHRI ANNASAHIB M.K. PATIL:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government have formulated an action plan for modernisation of postal services and initiate steps to meet the needs of consumers and improve the efficiency, productivity and quality of services rendered at post offices;

(b) if so, details thereof including quality of postal stationery;

(c) whether the quality of ink and rubber/metal stamps used for issuing NSCs, KVPs/IVPs is very poor and very often name of the P.O. and date of issue is not clear; and

(d) if so, the steps taken/proposed to be taken by the Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Programmes of modernisation of postal services implemented through respective Annual Plans of the Department are aimed at meeting the needs of consumers and improving the efficiency, productivity and quality of services rendered at post offices. As in the 8th Plan period, Annual Plan 1997-98 contains programmes for modernisation of postal services as indicated below:-

1. Introduction of computer based mutli purpose counter machines.

2. Automatisation of mail processing in large nodal centres.

3. Use of Very Small Aperture Terminals (VSATs) for speedy transmission of money orders and provision of other value added services.

4. Use of computers for Savings Bank, Postal life Insurance and Speed Post Operations.

5. Modernisation of counter services and front office activities in selected important post offices.

6. Provision of upgraded operational equipment in more important offices to modernise the work process.

Improvement in quality of postal stationery has been initiated keeping in view the requirement of the new technology being used for mail processing. Designs of inland letter cards, post cards and envelopes have been modified to make them suitable for automated mail processing system.

(c) and (d) No, Sir. The quality of ink and the stamp seals is not poor. There are standing instructions for regular applications of ink and replacement of defective seals to ensure legible impressions of date and name of post office on NSCs, KVPs/IVPs.

[English]

Foreign Investment

6411. SHRI MANGAT RAM SHARMA: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government have a proposal to invite Foreign Investors for Investment, for development of tourist places in different States of the country; and

(b) if so, the details thereof;

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF TOURISM (SHRI SRIKANTA JENA): (a) and (b) The Government of India has declared Tourism as a high priority industry for foreign investment. Consequently there is a Foreign Investment Promotion Board and a Project Approval Board set up by the Government in order to clear proposals of foreign investment on a priority basis on specific guidelines. The foreign investment upto 51% and NRI investment upto 100% alongwith foreign collaboration in respect of technical consultancy services, franchising, management fee are under the automatic approvals which is cleared by RBI itself (subject to specific percentages).

Microwave Towers in Gujarat

6412. SHRI CHANDRESH PATEL: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the names of the places where Microwave Towers have been installed and existed at present in the