

[English]

Restructuring Measures for Toy Trains

6407. SHRI NARAYAN ATHAWALAY: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether attention of the Government have been drawn to the news item captioned 'Restructuring measures for toy trains on a bumpy track' appearing in the Asian Age dated March 11, 1997;

(b) if so, the reaction of the Government to the observations made therein and facts in the matter; and

(c) the details of action taken/proposed to be taken by the Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The Railways are aware of the unremunerativeness in the running of trains in the Hill Sections mentioned in the News Item. In order to reduce the losses in running the train services, the following steps have been taken:-

(a) Withdrawal of inflation in distance for charge for passengers fares for travel within the section;

(b) Special steps to boost tourist traffic by tapping the potential for the same.

The implementation of the steps is a continuous process and are carried out without any let up.

[Translation]

Development of Tourism

6408. SHRI RADHA MOHAN SINGH:

SHRI DEVI BUX SINGH:

Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) the details of proposals sent by the State Governments of Gujarat, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh during 1996-97 to develop the identified places of tourist interests in the States;

(b) the details of proposals cleared/rejected/pending by the Union Government;

(c) whether the amount allocated by the Union Government to above States for development of tourism during the last three years have been utilised by the State Government;

(d) if so the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER FOR PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF TOURISM (SHRI SRIKANTA JENA): (a) and (b) Central Department of Tourism prioritised the

projects/schemes for financial assistance for tourism development in consultation with the State/U.T. Governments, which is an ongoing process. The projects/schemes are sanctioned based on the merits, availability of funds and inter-se priorities. During the year 1996-97, total number of projects/schemes were sanctioned by Central Department of Tourism are as follows:-

	No. of Projects Sanctioned
Gujarat	11
Bihar	4
Uttar Pradesh	17

(c) to (e) During the last three years, Central Department of Tourism has sanctioned Rs. 111.38 lakhs for 16 projects/schemes to Gujarat, Rs. 526.86 lakhs for 32 projects/schemes to Uttar Pradesh and Rs. 268.96 lakhs for 15 projects/schemes to Bihar. The utilisation of funds sanctioned by Central Department of Tourism is the responsibility of the State/U.T. Governments. Funds are released in instalments after receiving utilisation certificates from the State Governments.

Out of Order Rural Telephone in Uttar Pradesh

6409. SHRI RAMMURTY SINGH VERMA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether most of the telephones installed under rural communications system in Uttar Pradesh are lying out of order;

(b) the reasons therefor;

(c) the steps proposed to be taken by the Government to improve such means of communications; and

(d) whether the matter is likely to be got examined through an expert committee?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA): (a) Sir, most of the telephone exchanges installed under rural communications system in Uttar Pradesh have already been converted into digital electronic exchanges and connections from these exchanges are working satisfactorily. However, there are some problems in maintenance of long distance connections including Village Public Telephones, due to various reasons.

(b) The reasons for interruptions and breakdowns are as follows:-

(i) Remote and inaccessible locations and unsatisfactory transport facilities.

(ii) Theft of overhead lines and wires.

(iii) Unstable power supply.

(iv) Damage due to lightening.

(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