

ment have drawn the attention of the German Presidency that any reference to Kashmir as a "regional dispute" can only serve to encourage Pakistan to seek internationalisation of the Kashmir issue which would not be in line with the stated consensus position of the European Union which supports a genuine bilateral dialogue between India and Pakistan to resolve all matters between the two countries.

Telephone Services in Rural Areas

3847. SHRI A. ASOKARAJ: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the steps taken or proposed to be taken by the Government to make telephone services available at cheaper rates in the rural areas of the country;

(b) whether there is any proposal to reduce the annual rent and call charges for rural based telephones;

(c) the number of villages to be covered under this scheme in Tamil Nadu; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SUKH RAM): (a) The rental in rural areas is already low compared to urban areas and is highly subsidised. Besides, the rural areas which are mainly served by Flat Rate Exchanges, do not have separate charges for Subscriber Dialed Calls. Charges for trunk calls made from Long Distance Public Telephones — which cater to rural areas — are also only 50% of the normal charges.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) and (d). The charges at (a) above

are applicable through-out the country.

[*Translation*]

Privatisation of Goods Transport

3848. SHRI TEJ SINGHRAO BHONSLE: Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any proposal to allow the private companies for goods transportation on Inter-State inland waterways;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the steps taken or proposed to be taken by the Government to promote Inter-State inland waterways; and

(d) the amount earmarked for the development of the Inter-State inland waterways during the 8th Plan period?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (SHRI JAGDISH TYTLER): (a) and (b). The Inland Waterways Authority of India is responsible for development of National Waterways which may pass through one State or more than one State. Private companies are already transporting goods in these National Waterways viz. Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly System (an Inter-State National Waterway), the river Brahmaputra (within the State of Assam), and the West Coast Canal (within the State of Kerala).

(c) The only Inter-State National Waterway is under development for navigation from Haldia to Allahabad. Instructions have been issued to the IWA to maintain 2 m. depth in National Waterways No. 1 and 2. Developmental works are under way in National Waterway No. 3 (The West Coast Canal), which was declared as such only