

*[English]***Import of Steel**

*569. SHRI MURALIDHAR JENA : Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state :

(a) the total quantity and value of import of iron and steel in the country during the last three years;

(b) the countries from which imports have been made;

(c) the specifications of the steel being imported in the country;

(d) whether steps are being taken to produce steel of such specifications within the country; and

(e) if so, the details thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA) : (a) The total quantity and value of saleable steel and pig iron imported during the last three years was as under :—

(Quantity in lakh tonnes/Value in Rs. Crores)

| | 1993-94 | | 1994-95 | | 1995-96 (Prov.) | |
|----------------|----------|-------|----------|-------|-----------------|-------|
| | Quantity | Value | Quantity | Value | Quantity | Value |
| Saleable Steel | 11.53 | 1603 | 19.33 | 2536 | 18.64 | 3175 |
| Pig Iron | 0.21 | 9.58 | 0.01 | 1.07 | 0.08 | 6.19 |

(b) Imports are from various countries like Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, CIS, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Iran, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Mexico, Poland, Romania, Singapore, Slovak Republic, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania, Turkey, U.K., USA and Venezuela.

(c) Steel imports mainly comprise of Hot Rolled Coils/ Skelp/Strips, Cold Rolled Coils/Sheets, Plates, Tin Plates, Electrical sheets, different forms of semi-finished steel, etc.

(d) and (e) The producers of steel are constantly orienting their production to meet the market needs. Modernisation and expansion of steel plants of SAIL have been taken up towards this objective. Since 1991, Government has also adopted various policy measures to encourage creation of additional steel production capacities in the Private Sector. As a result, 7 projects with an annual capacity of 3.91 million tonnes of saleable steel have already been commissioned in the private sector upto 01.8.96.

With the setting up of steel plants in the private sector mainly to produce flat products, a major portion of the demand for hot rolled coils/cold rolled coils which are presently imported will be met by indigenous production.

*[Translation]***Telephone Services in Rural Areas of U.P.**

*570. SHRI AMAR PAL SINGH :
SHRI PANKAJ CHOWDHARY :

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government are aware that there are inadequate telephone services in the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) the number of villages provided with telephone services in the State during each of the last three years; and

(d) the number of new telephone connections proposed to be provided during the current financial year?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) It is mainly due to non-supply of equipment and its matched accessories by the supplier.

(c) The number of villages provided with telephone services in Uttar Pradesh during the last three years, are as under :

| S.No. | Year | Number of VPTs commissioned in UP |
|-------|---------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. | 1993-94 | 3524 |
| 2. | 1994-95 | 5088 |
| 3. | 1995-96 | 3692 |

(d) The number of new village public telephone connections proposed to be provided during the current financial year, is 15000.

*[English]***Losses in Postal Department**

*571. SHRI PRADIP BHATTACHARYA : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government are aware of the fact that the Department of Posts have been suffering losses worth crores of rupees every year;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the Government propose to bring suitable changes in the tariff structure and in their functioning; and

(d) if so, the details thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA) : (a) to (d) The deficit for Department of Post during the last three years is as under :—

| Year | Rs. (Crores) |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 1995-96 (Revised Estimates) | 424.62 |
| 1994-95 | 351.81 |
| 1993-94 | 207.09 |

Postal Operations are largely manpower oriented and approximately 82% of the Total Expenditure of the Department of Post is on salary and wages of the employees. Moreover, the tariff fixed for most of the services, as also agency fee for agency functions, are mostly far less than the cost of operation of these services and this results in low realisation of revenue from these services. It is also relevant to mention that the Department's policy of extending postal facilities in the rural area through opening of new Post Offices includes a substantial element of subsidy.

Steady rise in the cost of manpower and other inputs for Postal Services and non-revision or insufficient revision of rates of many of the services for a number of years contribute to the deficit of the Department.

Revision of Postal Tariff is a part of the Annual Budgetary Exercise, which is done keeping in view the cost of operation and other relevant factors. Efforts are also continuously made by the Government to restrict the department's expenditure through various measures for economy including optimal use of resources and simplification of procedures.

In the Budget speech in Parliament in July, 1996, the Hon'ble Finance Minister has proposed an increase in the rates of printed Post Card from 60 paise to Re. 1/-, registration fee from Rs. 6/- to Rs. 8/-, and introduction of a new service, called Competition Post Card with the tariff of Rs. 2/- each. The Competition Post Card is to be used for responding to any competition organised on or through television, radio, newspaper, magazine or any other media. The additional revenue realisation on account of the proposed revision of tariff is expected to be Rs. 76.00 Crores in a full financial year.

[Translation]

Linkage of Buddhist Tourist places by Air Services

*572. KUMARI UMA BHARATI : Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state :

(a) whether India and Nepal have decided to formulate a scheme to link their Buddhist tourist places by air services; and

(b) if so, the details thereof ?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI C.M. IBRAHIM) : (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

[English]

Shortage of Essential Commodities

*573. SHRI ANAND RATNA MAURYA : Will the Minister of FOOD be pleased to state :

(a) whether there has been an acute shortage of essential commodities in the rural and backward areas of various States during the last one year or so;

(b) if so, the details of the essential commodities supplied to each State, item-wise; and

(c) the per quintal subsidy given by the Government on foodgrains in the backward and tribal areas of the country, commodity-wise ?

THE MINISTER OF FOOD AND MINISTER OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV) :

(a) No, Sir, Presently, 1775 blocks in the country have been covered under the Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS). The offtake of foodgrains in the RPDS areas went up from 3.9 million tonnes in 1994-95 to 4.3 million tonnes in 1995-96.

(b) I. Wheat and Rice

Only sporadic shortages of wheat and rice in a few isolated pockets for short period were reported due to lack of adequate infrastructure, dislocation due to natural calamities, problems of law and order and movement constraints. Such occasional shortages were tackled by resorting to intra-state and inter-depot movement on priority basis. A statement-I showing statewise offtake of wheat and rice for Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS) during 1995-96 is enclosed.

II. Sugar

With a record production of 163.11 lakh tonnes (upto 15.8.1996) during 1995-96 sugar season, the overall availability of sugar in the market has improved. The levy sugar quota to all States/UTs p.m. works out to about 3.69 lakh tonnes. In addition, the Government also releases about 1 lakh tonnes of sugar p.a. as festival quota to various States/UTs in the month of their choice. The festival quota has been doubled for the calendar year 1996, keeping in view the comfortable level of sugar production during the season 1995-96. A Statement-II showing the statewise monthly quota of levy sugar is enclosed.

III. Edible Oil

No report of any shortage of edible oil has been received from anywhere during the last one year. A