

and place their consolidated demand on the Joint Plant Committee. The materials received by them are sub-distributed to the individual units. Since there is no direct indenting on JPC by small scale units now, the question of deposit of any earnest money by them does not arise.

Proposed Meet of Economic Experts of India and Burma

8339. SHRI R. N. BARMAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a proposal of a meeting of economic experts of India and Burma in the near future;

(b) if so, whether a Central Minister will also be included in this meet; and

(c) the steps likely to be proposed in this meeting to increase the Indo-Burma trade which had shown a declining trend during the past 12 months?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SURENDRA PAL SINGH): (a) to (c). During Foreign Minister's visit to Burma on April 5 to 9, 1973, it was agreed that it would be desirable that the two countries should exchange delegations of experts in various fields, including the economic field, and that the work of reviewing and coordinating these activities might be entrusted to a Minister on each side. Under the above arrangements, it is proposed to review the present trade exchanges with a view to diversifying and increasing the volume of trade between the two countries.

12:05 hrs.

CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

REPORTED STRIKE BY STATION MASTERS ON THE WESTERN RAILWAY

SHRI ARJUN SETHI (Bhadrak): Sir, I call the attention of the Minister of Railways to the following matter of urgent

public importance and I request that he may make a statement thereon:—

Reported strike by Railway Station Masters and Assistant Station Masters in the Western Railway.

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI L. N. MISHRA): Sir, on 17th April, 1973, Station Masters and Assistant Station Masters started reporting sick on Palampur-Ghandhidham section of the Ajmer Division of the Western Railway. This gradually spread to the other sections of that Division and also to the Divisions of Jaipur, Kota and Ratlam. The *modus-operandi* of the staff has been to report sick or to be absent from duty. It was found that, in many cases, when the staff went off duty, they were resorting to disconnections of control circuits as a result of which communications were cut off resulting in slow movement of traffic.

As many as 80 railway stations were closed in all, as all the concerned staff at the stations had absented themselves. Of these, 14 stations still remain closed in the Ratlam Division. The position now is normal in Kota Division and normal in Ajmer and Jaipur Divisions. In Ratlam Division, where staff started absenting in sympathy with those in Ajmer Division, absenteeism is continuing, and 114 Station Masters/Assistant Station Masters are absent. They are understood to be instigating similar action by loco running staff, who are directly connected with the running of trains. 63 loco running staff and 7 guards have also joined the movement.

Before commencing to be absent, the concerned staff of the Ajmer Division had advanced three demands of which two are considered to be without any substance and the third one is for cancellation of punishments already imposed on 6 employees. The Railway Administration is examining the individual cases on merits according to the Discipline and Appeal procedure.

As the hon. Members know, Ratlam Division is a key main line Broad Gauge route from Delhi to Bombay. The large-