

- (b) if so, the details thereof; and
 (c) the reaction of the people thereto?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA): (a) to (c) Multimedia service was launched in Lucknow and Kanpur on 15.01.97. In addition Multimedia Communication Centres (MCCs) were also set up at both the stations.

Since then a few multimedia connections have been provided.

And MCCs have been used to demonstrate the working of multimedia service to public.

Alleged Scandal at Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati

6319. SHRI AJMEERA CHANDULAL: Will the Minister of INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING be pleased to state:

- (a) whether any alleged malpractices and foul play in Rs. two crore scandal involving officials of Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati have been reported;
 (b) if so, the details thereof; and
 (c) the action taken or proposed to be taken against the guilty officials?

THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY): (a) to (c) During a Press Conference called by some artists including film directors and producers, certain newspapers carried some allegations of malpractices against Doordarshan officials in regard to allotment of Doordarshan Commissioned Programmes to commemorate 50th anniversary of India's independence.

The process of selection of producers for allotment of commissioned programmes at Guwahati Kendra has been challenged in Guwahati High Court where the matter is currently sub-judice.

Wet Lease Agreement with 'Caribjet'

6320. SHRI G.A. CHARAN REDDY: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Air India terminated the wet lease agreement with Caribjet in September, 1996 and lodged a claim of 24 million US dollars with the latter;
 (b) if so, the reasons for terminating the agreement;
 (c) whether his Ministry was also informed of the decision;
 (d) whether Air India has received the claim; and
 (e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI C.M. IBRAHIM) : (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Air India terminated the wet lease agreement with Caribjet on grounds of technical

lapses and non-fulfilment of various DGCA norms. Air India has lodged a claim of 85 million US dollars.

- (c) Yes, Sir.
 (d) No, Sir.
 (e) Does not arise.

Mining Operations in Western Ghats

6321. SHRI S. BANGARAPPA: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government had a proposal to allow multinationals and Indian companies to conduct mining operations in the Western Ghat areas;
 (b) if so, the reasons therefor;
 (c) whether Sagar, Soraba and Shimoga taluks would be adversely affected if the mining operations are allowed by the Government in Western Ghats; and
 (d) if so, the details in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA): (a) to (d) As per the information available, the State Government of Karnataka has received applications for prospecting/mining leases for gold etc. from foreign and domestic companies, including public sector undertakings. The State Government has constituted a Committee under the Chairmanship of Secretary to Govt., Commerce and Industries Department for evolving policy guidelines in this regard. The State Government has not so far granted permission to any of these companies for prospecting/mining activities in Western Ghat region of Karnataka, as per information available. The national Mineral Policy, 1993 envisages induction of foreign technology and foreign participation in exploration and mining for high value and scarce minerals. The grant of mineral concessions can be made only as per provisions of the Mines and Minerals (Regulation and Development) Act, 1957 and subject to necessary forest and environmental clearances under the relevant statutory provisions of the Forests (Conservation) Act, 1980 and the relevant environmental laws.

Tax Payment by Private Airlines

6322. DR. HARI SINGH: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the owners of private air lines companies are not paying the tax to the Government charged from the passengers;
 (b) if so, the losses suffered by the Government on account of it;
 (c) whether as a result thereof a ban was imposed recently on some flights operated by these airlines/companies; and
 (d) if so, the steps taken by the Government to recover the tax charged from the passengers in time from