

(c) the action Government propose to take to protect the interest of SC/ST employees in his Ministry?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SALEEM IQBAL SHERVANI):

(a) No Sir, an SC/ST Cell is operating in the Ministry.

(b) Question does not arise. The interests of employees belonging to the SC/ST are protected as per the extent rules and guidelines on the subject.

(c) All measures are taken to protect and safeguard the interests of employees belonging to the SC/ST categories through various channels including the Liaison Officer and the Staff Grievance Officer. The employees belonging to SC/ST categories have free access to raise their grievances at the highest level in the Ministry and it is ensured that suitable action is taken to redress their grievances.

US Assistance to Pakistan

2320. SHRI RAGHUNANDAN LAL BHATIA : Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state :

(a) whether United States has decided to amend the US Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to relax the existing restrictions on US military and economic assistance to Pakistan;

(b) if so, its impact on India's security; and

(c) the reaction of Indian Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SALEEM IQBAL SHERVANI):

(a) The US Senate has passed an amendment to the US Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 lifting some restrictions on US military and economic assistance to Pakistan which had been in place on account of Pakistan's externally assisted nuclear weapons programme. The amendment, if enacted into law after due process, would allow programmes relating to military training of Pakistani defence service officers and the extension of overseas Private Investment Credit (OPIC) and EXIM Bank guarantees to US corporations engaged in projects in Pakistan.

(b) and (c) Government have expressed concern at this development as an encouragement to Pakistan's nuclear and missile programmes. The amendment has been passed in the wake of reports of Pakistan having tested a medium-range missile and establishing a missile facility with Chinese assistance. These developments have serious implications for India's security. Government have noted that these same provisions were contained in the 1995 Brown Amendment but had not been implemented

at that time because of supply of ring magnets by China to Pakistan's nuclear enrichment facility. Government have conveyed India's concern at these developments to the US authorities. Government remain committed to take appropriate steps to safeguard India's security.

Cooperation in Nuclear Technology

2321. SHRI PRITHVIRAJ D. CHAVAN : Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission has signed a nuclear technology cooperation agreement with the Governments of Malaysia and Philippines recently;

(b) if so, whether the agreement has any security implications for India; and

(c) if so, the steps taken/proposed to be taken by the Government to remedy the situation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA) : (a) Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission signed a Memorandum of Understanding on 8th March, 1997 with the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute on cooperation in the field of peaceful uses of atomic energy. As per available information, there is no agreement between Pakistan and Malaysia on cooperation in nuclear technology.

(b) and (c) Government are carefully and continuously assessing all issues relating to Pakistan's nuclear programme and its implications for the national security. Government are committed to taking all necessary steps to safeguard national interest and security, in accordance with our own threat perceptions.

[Translation]

Assistance for Development of Hill Areas

2322. SHRI BUDHSEN PATEL : Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Central assistance is made available to some States for the development of hilly areas and if so the Criteria adopted for the same;

(b) whether the Technical Committee of the working group constituted by the Planning Commission during Seventh Plan had identified some areas of Madhya Pradesh as hilly areas;

(c) if so, whether the Union Government have made provision for additional Central assistance for the development of hilly areas of Madhya Pradesh during the Ninth Plan; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (SHRIMATI RATNAMALA D. SAVANOR) : (a) Yes Sir, Special Central Assistance (SCA) under Hill Area Development Programme (HADP) is provided to designated hill areas, i.e., hill areas of Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam and designated talukas of the Western Ghats. The total SCA available under HADP is allocated between HADP and Western Ghats Development Programme (WGDP) in the ratio of 86.61: 13.39. Inter se distribution of SCA for HADP is done on the basis of population and area of the region, assigning equal weightage to these factors; for WGDP, population is assigned a weightage of 25% and area 75%.

(b) to (d): Yes Sir; However, owing to paucity of funds, it has been decided not to extend HADP to any new hill areas, including the hill areas of Madhya Pradesh during the Ninth Five year Plan.

[English]

Non-Payment of Wages by Sick PSUs

2323. SHRI RANJIB BISWAL : Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government are aware of the delay in the payment of dues like Provident Fund, ESI etc. to the workers of several sick Public Sector Undertaking (PSUs);

(b) whether sick PSUs owe to the workers above Rs. 100 crore;

(c) if so, the reasons for the non-payment of these statutory dues to the workers; and

(d) the steps taken to ensure early payment of pending dues?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR (SHRI M. P. VEERENDRA KUMAR) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d): An amount of Rs. 209.12 crore is outstanding against the Sick Public Sector Undertakings on account of the ESI and EPF dues. The reason for default is attributable to poor financial health of such PSUs. Efforts for recovery of the dues outstanding against the defaulting PUSs are constantly being made.

Shortage of Software Engineers

2324. SHRI K.P. SINGH DEO: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a shortage of Software Engineers in the country;

(b) if so, the present position with regard to their demand and availability; and

(c) the steps taken to provide necessary training and education in the said field in order to remove the shortage of Software Engineers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES AND PENSION AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRI S.R. BALASUBRAMONIYAN) : (a) to (c) : The demand for Software Engineers is increasing progressively. At present there are a number of educational institutions in the formal and non - formal sector which are catering to this growing demand. Government is taking a number of initiatives for increasing computer manpower output, particularly from the premier institutions, by strengthening of the existing institutions, Training of Teachers, Development and Dissemination of quality course material as also initiating steps for setting up new institutions. In order to ensure quality output from the non-formal sector (private/public), Department of Electronics through its Society namely, Department of Electronics Accreditation of Computer Courses (DOEACC) is implementing a scheme on Accreditation of Computer Courses under which institutions meeting certain well defined criteria are given accreditation for running 'O' (Foundation) 'A' (Advanced Diploma) 'B' (MCA) and 'C' Post Graduate) level courses.

National AIDS Control Programme

2325. SHRI G.A. CHARAN REDDY : Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state :

(a) whether Andhra Pradesh was included in the National AIDS Control Programme launched at a cost of Rs. 220.60 crores for 1992-97 which came to an end in March this year;

(b) if so, whether the State Government of Andhra Pradesh has urged the Union Government to continue the said AIDS programme in the State in view of sharp rise in the spread of AIDS disease; and

(c) if so, the decision taken by the Union Government thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY) : (a) The National AIDS Control Programme was launched in all the States/UTs in the country including