

- (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

the operators of private airlines/companies?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SH. C.M. IBRAHIM): (a) Some of the private airlines have defaulted in payment of Inland Air Travel Tax (I.A.T.T.) dues owed to the Government.

(b) Total outstanding dues pending recovery from private airlines as on 13.5.1997 is as under:

I.A.T.T. dues	-	1851.34 Lakhs
Interest	-	921.10 Lakhs
Penalty	-	1500.08 Lakhs

(c) and (d) Seven aircraft were detained in the past for recovery of I.A.T.T. dues. Out of these, five aircraft were released by the Customs Department after payment of the outstanding dues by the operators. One of the aircraft which was detained in November, 1996 was released on the basis of an interim order of the Delhi High Court, on deposit of security fixed by the Court. Action is taken as per law against the airlines defaulting in payment of I.A.T.T.

[*Translation*]

Expansion of Airport Near Abu Road

6323. SHRI PARASRAM MEGHWAL: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether any scheme for expansion of airport near Abu Road is under consideration of the Government to connect Mount Abu, an important tourist place of Rajasthan, with air service;

(b) is so, the time by which the work is likely to start on this project; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI C.M. IBRAHIM): (a) to (c) The airstrip near Abu Road belongs to the State Government of Rajasthan. Airports Authority of India has no plans to upgrade this airstrip.

[*English*]

Post Office Manned by Private People

6324. SHRI BHIMRAO VISHNUJI BADADE: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether post-offices in rural areas are run by private people;

(b) if so, the number of post offices in the Kopergaon parliamentary constituency which are run by private people;

(c) the monthly amount of salary given to such people;

(d) whether there is any scheme to run such post offices on full-fledge basis; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA): (a) No. Sir. No post office is run by private people. They are either manned by Departmental employees of Extra-departmental employees who are appointed by the Department.

(b) to (e) Does not arise in view of (a) above.

Accounting Rates on Telecommunications

6325. SHRI CHANDRA BHUSHAN SINGH:

SHRI RAM SAGAR:

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV:

DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:

SHRI G.A. CHARAN REDDY:

SHRI R. SAMBASIVA RAO:

DR. KRUPASINDHU BHOI:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) has asked the Government to drastically reduce International accounting rates on telecommunication;

(b) if so, the reaction of the Government in the matter;

(c) whether India's stand has been made clear before W.T.O.; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and the steps taken by the Government in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA): (a) Federal Communication Commission has proposed certain bench marks of Settlement Rates to be complied within four to five years.

(b) The Govt. have responded to Federal Communication Commission's Notice of Proposed Rule Making as follows:

(i) Under the provision of ITU, the principles of accounting rates are decided in multilateral forum and the accounting rates are negotiated bilaterally within their frame work. FCC does not have jurisdiction to impose changes in International accounting rates unilaterally.

(ii) The high outgoing traffic from US is the result of marketing strategies adopted by US carriers.

(iii) The methodology of setting the Bench Marks does not take into account the ground realities prevailing in India and is inappropriate.

Since the cost of termination of calls is higher in developing countries as compared to developed countries,