

	1	2
25. Goa	69	Nil
26. Delhi	148	Nil
<b>B. Union Territories:</b>		
1. Andaman & Nicobar Islands	26	—
2. Chandigarh	8	—
3. Dadra & Nagar Haveli Daman & Diu	12	—
4. Lakshadweep	10	—
5. Pondicherry	19	—

#### Inland Water Transport System

2970. PROF. AJIT KUMAR MEHTA : Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:

- whether there is any policy of the Government for development of Inland Water Transport System in the country;
- whether the Government have any plan for developing the inland Water Transport System in Bihar; and
- if so, the details thereof and the amount earmarked for this purpose during the current year?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (DR. DEBENDRA PRADHAN): (a) Formulation of the IWT Policy is under consideration.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) National Waterway No. 1 (the Ganga) flows through Bihar and its stretch between Buxer and upstream Farakka for an approx. length of 575 Kms. falls in Bihar. This stretch alongwith other parts of the NW-1 is being developed for shipping and navigation by undertaking works such as deepening of shallow portions of navigational channel by bandalling and dredging, erection and maintenance of channel marking, setting up and maintenance of floating terminals at Karagola, Munghyr, Bhagalpur and Patna etc. A scheme for construction of permanent RCC terminal at Patna is under implementation.

During current financial year, an amount of Rs. 15.85 crores is earmarked for development of NW-1, out of which approx. Rs. 9.00 crores is for the development works in Bihar.

#### Voting Rights to Family Members of Soldiers

2971. SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA : Will the Minister of LAW, JUSTICE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- whether the Chief of the Army Staff has urged the Government to allow proxy voting to the family members of soldiers during the elections;

(b) if so, whether Armed Forces Personnel areas not able to exercise their votes during the elections both of Parliament and Assembly;

(c) if so, whether the Government propose to amend the law and allow the Armed Forces with their families to exercise the vote through postal ballot; and

(d) if so, the time by which a decision is likely to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF LAW, JUSTICE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (DR. M. THAMBI DURAI): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Out of 4,32,518 persons registered as service voters, 3,23,985 exercised their franchise through postal ballot at the General Elections to the House of the People held in 1998. Armed Forces personnel are included under the category of 'service voters' but no separate figures regarding number of Armed Forces personnel who exercised their right of franchise in an election is maintained.

(c) Under the existing law, the members of Armed Forces are permitted to exercise their right of franchise through postal ballot but no decision has yet been taken to replace the present system of postal ballot with system of 'proxy voting' for members of Armed Forces.

(d) It is not possible to indicate the time by which a decision in the matter is likely to be taken.

#### Deforestation in Satpura Range

2972. DR. ULHAS VASUDEO PATIL : Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Satpura Range of forest along the Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh border has been deforested and the life of tribals and adivasis has become miserable;

(b) if so, whether Government has any specific programme for afforestation of Satpura Range;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) the other steps being taken by the Government to improve the conditions of Tribals and Adivasis?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BABU LAL MARANDI): (a) to (d) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

#### National Highways

2973. SHRI N. DENNIS: Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state the steps taken/proposed to be taken by the Government for keeping up the National Highways in traffic worthy condition?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (DR. DEBENDRA PRADHAN): Although traffic on National Highways is increasing constantly, yet the National Highways are kept in traffic worthy condition within available resources. The Government is also encouraging