

Brahmaputra National Waterway

*373. SHRI A.F. GOLAM OSMANI:

SHRI NRIPEN GOSWAMI:

Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Brahmaputra has been declared as National Waterway;

(b) whether the Government are aware that due to heavy siltation and pollution, the Brahmaputra has become non-navigable; and

(c) if so, the steps being taken to make it navigable?

THE MINISTER OF LAW, JUSTICE AND COMPANY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF SURFACE TRANSPORT (DR. M. THAMBI DURAI): (a) Yes, Sir. The river Brahmaputra from Dhubri to Sadiya (891 kms.) has been declared as National Waterway No. 2.

(b) Although siltation takes place in river Brahmaputra, the river is navigable between Dhubri and Dibrugarh with 2 meters minimum depth and 1 meter minimum depth between Dibrugarh and Sadiya.

(c) To improve the navigability in the river Brahmaputra during lean seasons when some shallow stretches appear, bandalling is done every year for maintaining minimum depth of 2 meters on National Waterway No. 2.

Entry of Meritorious Students in Basic Scientific Research

*374. SHRI BALASAHEB VIKHE PATIL: Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the entry of meritorious students in basic scientific research has declined during the last few years;

(b) if so, whether the Government have made any assessment about it and its effect on the quality of research in India; and

(c) the steps taken or proposed to be taken by the Government to remove this imbalance?

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AND MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (DR. MURLI MANOHAR JOSHI): (a) to (c) Views have been expressed at different forums that meritorious students are not opting for basic research because of better opportunities being offered by other sectors of economy. Though Government have not made any formal assessment in this regard, taking note of these views, a set of initiatives have been taken by the Government to encourage meritorious students to opt for scientific research as a career. Some such measures are:

Doubling the fellowship amount for the research fellows, introduction of Swarnajayanti Fellowships in basic research, providing opportunities to young scientists to undertake R&D projects in their chosen areas of research and also to get training in specific areas in R&D programmes at reputed

laboratories and institutions abroad, making available financial assistance for attending international conferences and also to provide the opportunities at graduate/post-graduate levels to have contacts with eminent scientists at reputed institutions within the country to get exposure to research activities in chosen fields.

Rubber Plantation on Degraded Forest Land

*375. SHRI SAMAR CHOUDHURY: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether rubber plantation is not permitted on degraded forest and even for taking up settlement project for the tribals who are dependent on shifting cultivation;

(b) if so, the rationale behind such a decision;

(c) whether the Government recognise that by not permitting economically sustainable settlement project for the tribals, shifting cultivation is continuing in the forest areas; and

(d) whether any proposals have been received for allowing such settlement project atleast on the degraded forest land so that the twin objectives of environment protection as well as tribal welfare could be achieved?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BABU LAL MARANDI): (a) to (d) A Statement is laid on the table of the House:

Statement

(a) Under the provision of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, planting of rubber, tea, coffee and other cash crops comes under the category of non-forest activity, Plantation of such cash crops including rubber can be carried out over degraded forest land only with the prior approval of Central Government under Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.

(b) The said provision aims at safeguarding conversion of bio-diversity rich natural forest to mono-culture cash crops.

(c) and (d) Recognising the importance of rehabilitation of shifting cultivation areas and issue of settlement of tribals engaged in this practice, the Ministry has exempted levying of compensatory afforestation in respect of such proposal received under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 from State of Tripura. A proposal for diversion of 9091.52 hectares of forest land for the purpose of resettling the tribal jhumias through raising rubber plantations in Tripura has been received out of which approval for 1500 hectares has been given on 23.12.1997 in the first phase.

Funds for the Improvement of National Highways

*376. SHRIMATI RANI CHITRALEKHA BHONSLE:

SHRI ASHOK NAMDEORAO MOHOL:

Will the Minister of SURFACE TRANSPORT be pleased to state:

(a) the funds allocated for the improvement of National Highways during 1997-98 and 1998-99 State wise;