

100 most backward/poorest districts identified by the Committee included 38 districts in Bihar, 19 districts in Madhya Pradesh, 17 districts in Uttar Pradesh, 10 districts in Maharashtra, 4 districts each in Orissa and West Bengal, 2 districts each in Rajasthan and Sikkim and 1 district each in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Dadra & Nagar Haveli. The Sarma Committee's Report has since been circulated to all the States/UTs for comments.

(b) The Ministry of Rural Development are implementing programmes pertaining, *inter alia*, to poverty alleviation, employment generation, infrastructure development, watershed schemes, social security and land reforms, with a view to improve the quality of life in the rural areas and assist people below the poverty line. These programmes are being closely monitored and are being evaluated from time to time. The programmes implemented for the development of backward areas have helped in improving the living conditions in these areas.

Setting up a Watershed Development Mission

5607. SHRI RAM KUMAR ANAND: Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any plan to set up a Watershed Development Mission to enhance work on watershed development all over the country;

(b) if so, the details of such plans;

(c) whether it is a fact that Government have not coordinated and well monitored plan to develop watersheds in the country;

(d) if so, the details thereof;

(e) whether Government have also been observing watershed development in different States; and

(f) if so, the major administrative weaknesses in watershed development?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI A. RAJA): (a) to (f) At present, there is no plan to set up a Watershed Development Mission. The work on watershed development in the rural areas is undertaken with area development approach on project basis through Zilla Parishads (ZPs)/District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) under the three main programmes namely Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP), Desert Development Programme (DDP) and Integrated Wastelands Development Programme (IWDP), as per the "Guidelines on

Watershed Development". These guidelines, framed on the basis of the recommendations of the high level committee headed by Prof. C.H. Hanumantha Rao provide for monitoring mechanism both at the State and District levels, sufficient enough to meet the requirements of implementation of the watershed projects.

Grants to State Governments to improve infrastructures

5608. SHRI SUKHDEV SINGH LIBRA:

SARDAR GURCHARAN SINGH TOHRA:

Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any proposal to give grant to the State Governments for improving their infrastructures like construction of roads/ bridges on link roads to facilitate farmers and to bring their produce to the market; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI SUNDER LAL PATWA): (a) and (b) Government are presently engaged in the process of formulating a National Rural Roads Programme (NRRP) for construction of roads in rural areas of the country.

Panchayat elections in States

5609. SHRI SOLIPETA RAMACHANDRA REDDY: Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) the States which failed to hold elections to Panchayats under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act; and

(b) the action taken against them to expedite the elections?

THE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT (SHRI SUNDER LAL PATWA): (a) and (b) The States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Bihar, the NCT of Delhi and the Union Territory of Pondicherry have yet to conduct Panchayat elections, after commencement of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992.

The Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Bill, 1997 is pending and Presidential Assent was withheld as the Bill did not provide for reservations for Scheduled Castes in Panchayats. The Constitution (86th Amendment) Bill, 1999 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha (in December, 1999) with a view to exempting Arunachal Pradesh from making provision for such reservation in Panchayats.