

[17 March, 2006]

RAJYA SABHA

Gauge conversion in north-eastern region

*347. SHRI MATILAL SARKAR: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

- (a) the names of the rail lines that are under conversion from metre gauge to broad gauge;
- (b) the names of metre gauge lines that are not under such conversion;
- (c) whether in the north-eastern region rail lines are mostly in metre-gauge and due to this reason the goods are subjected to frequent loading and unloading for transportation outside the region causing additional financial burden and this also consumes a lot of time; and
- (d) if so, the steps contemplated to overcome these problems?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI R. VELU): (a) to (d) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) The Gauge Conversion of following metre gauge rail lines in North Eastern Region have been taken up.

- (i) Lumding-Silchar-Jiribam and Badarpur-Baraigram-Kumarghat (409 Kms)
- (ii) Rangia-Murkongselek with linked fingers from Balipara to Bhalukpong and Rangapara North-Tezpur (510 Kms)
- (iii) Katakhal-Bhairabi (84 Kms)
- (iv) Senchoa-Silghat Town and Hailbargaon-Mairabari (106 Kms)
- (v) Fakiragram-Dhubri (56 Kms)

(b) The gauge conversion of following metre gauge rail lines in the North Eastern Region have not been taken up:

- (i) Karimganj-Mahishashan (11 Kms)
- (ii) Baraigram-Dullabcherra (29 Kms)
- (iii) Simalguri-Naginamora (15 Kms)
- (iv) Tirap-Lekhapani (6 Kms)

(c) Northeast Region has large network of metre gauge lines. The transshipment of goods is required wherever movement is involved over different gauges. The goods take some extra time in transit due to transshipment. However, the cost of transshipment is borne by the Railways.

(d) The gauge conversion projects have been taken up so as to facilitate smooth movement of passenger and goods traffic. The conversion of all the main routes in the North Eastern Region have already been taken up which on completion would avoid transshipment on those routes.

SHRI MATILAL SARKAR: Sir, my first supplementary is whether it is in the knowledge of the hon. Minister that metre gauge railway services face serious dislocations. Firstly, metre gauge railways are short of wagons. The wagons are not in good condition. New wagons are not manufactured and old wagons are in a broken condition in most of the cases. That is why the metre gauge railway services to Tripura are very often withdrawn. This causes great sufferings to the passengers and also affects the supply of essential commodities. So, my question is this. Is the hon. Minister going to expedite the gauge conversion, take steps to replace the wagons and regularise the metre gauge railway services?

SHRI R. VELU: Sir, the hon. Member is right in saying that the metre gauge services are disrupted. For your information, Sir, the North-Eastern Region is mainly covered by metre gauge sections all these years. Now, out of 2,258 kilometres of metre gauge, we have converted, so far, 890 kilometres into broad gauge. About 1,165 kilometres are in the process of conversion. We have to see to it that the metre gauge sections are kept in order. It is also well known that the incessant rains make it very difficult to operate trains in that area during certain periods of the year because of landslides, etc. His specific question is this. Why are the wagons, the coaches, so old? Why don't they be replaced? Sir, in India, today, we are gradually phasing out the metre gauge. In fact, we have now adopted the unigauge principle and gauge conversion is increasingly gaining importance. There are some projects like Kumarghat-Agartala and Jiribam-Imphal lines. They are new lines. They are declared as National Projects. Again, we are going to convert the Lumding-Silchar-Jiribam line into broad gauge. We have very recently cleared the gauge

conversion of Rangia-Murkongselek line. We have to necessarily find a Special Purpose Vehicle and our Ministry, the Ministry of Finance and the Planning Commission will have to plan for funds. In the case of North-Eastern Region, every Department is required to allocate 10 per cent of its Budget outlay for the development of North-East. We have ourselves allocated it. Accordingly, this year, an amount of Rs. 570 crores has been allocated from out Budget. Apart from that, we also get an amount of Rs. 392 crores from the National Projects. The total amount comes to Rs. 962 crores and it is available, today, for implementing the projects in that area. The size of the problem is enormous. In the North-East alone, today, the cost of all projects comes to Rs. 6,000 crores. We have to necessarily find resources. That is why many other projects are now classified as National Projects and given resources support by the Government, apart from our own support for these projects. We will see to it that the gauge is converted and also see to it that the maintenance of wagons and coaches is done fairly and reasonably well.

SHRI MATILAL SARKAR: Sir, the hon. Minister has said in his reply that five projects have been taken up for gauge conversion and four projects are still due. Almost all the projects belong to the North Eastern Region. The North Eastern Region has a genuine problem of transportation. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether all these projects will be taken up for gauge conversion during this year itself.

श्री सभापति : रेलवे बजट पर चर्चा हो गई, एप्रोप्रिएशन बिल पर चर्चा हो गई, आपने यह मामला उठाया ही नहीं।

श्रीमती सुषमा स्वराज : सभापति जी, आज भी पूर्वोत्तर राज्यों के बहुत से ऐसे इलाके हैं, जहां लोगों ने रेल देखी ही नहीं हैं। उनको यह पता नहीं है कि रेल कैसी होती है और रेल की सीटी कैसे बनती है। उनके इलाके से कभी रेल गुजरेगी, यह उनका सपना है, तो मैं मंत्री महोदय से यह जानना चाहती हूँ कि मीटरगेट को ब्रॉडगेज में करने का आंकड़ा तो आपने दिया है क्या पूर्वोत्तर राज्य में नई लाइन बिछाने का प्रस्ताव आपके पास है, अगर है तो कहाँ-कहाँ है?

SHRI R. VELU: Sir, I would like to tell the hon. Member that we will see to it that the entire area gets a whistle sound in the quickest possible time. I would like to mention that the new lines, Kumarghat-Agartala and Jiribam-Imphal have been sanctioned. We will see to it that they are completed under the national projects by special funding. Plus, the gauge conversion of Lumding-Silchar-Jiribam....

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ: Sir, I am talking only about the new rail lines.

SHRI R. VELU: I have already mentioned about Kumarghat-Agartala and Lunding-Silchar-Jiribam...

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ. Sir, if we include Sikkim, there are eight States.

SHRI R. VELU: Sir, I quite understand it. We are trying to provide it, at least, in some parts of the State. You are aware of the terrain. In fact, we cannot plan a railway line because of geographical reasons. However, we are trying to provide a rail link, at least, in some of the Sister States, as the hon. Member has mentioned.

SHRI LALHMING LIANA: Sir, the hon. Minister has stated in his reply that gauge conversion of as much as five railway lines has been taken up. What is the time-frame for completion of these five railway lines? I would also like to know whether the Government is also contemplating to connect all the State Capitals of the North Eastern Region with railway lines.

SHRI R. VELU: Sir, out of the five gauge conversion proposals, the Lunding-Silchar-Jiribam and Badarpur-Baraigram-Kumarghat project, which consists of 409 kilometres, is planned for completion by March, 2009. The Rangia-Murkongselek with lined fingers from Balipara to Bhalukpong and Rangapara North-Tezpur project, which consist of 510 kilometres, as I mentioned, the CCEA has cleared it. The Ministry of Railways, the Ministry of Finance and the Planning Commission will have to necessarily organise funds through SPV. We have not fixed any date so far. We have to organise funds through SPV and plan for the date of completion. The Katakhal-Bhairabi project, which consists of 84 kilometres, which is not a national project, is expected to be completed in March, 2010. The fourth project is Senchoa-Silghat Town and Haibargaon-Mairabari, which consists of 106 kilometres. It has two parts. The Senchoa-Silghat line, which consists of 62 kilometres, is fully funded by the Defence Department and will be completed during 2006-07. The Haibargaon-Mairabari line will be completed later. The fifth project is Fakiragram-Dhubri, which consists of 56 kilometres. We have planned it for completion in 2008.

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SHRI T.R. ZELIANG: Sir, I want to raise a supplementary pertaining to the line, Lumding-Silchar-Jiribham, which was "recently inaugurated by the hon. Prime Minister. Here, the other day, that is, on 3rd March, I raised a question on this issue. The answer given by the hon. Minister was that the new railway line, Dhansiri-Karong-Manipur, was included in the Supplementary Budget of 1997-98, and the requisite clearance was received in 1998. So, I wanted to know from the hon. Minister as to whether the new railway line, Silchar-Jiribam-Tupul-Imphal, recently inaugurated by the Prime Minister, is a new proposal, or, it is in lieu of the previous alignment approved by the Railway Ministry, for which the clearance was received. I am asking this because the length of the new railway line, Jiribam-Imphal, is longer by 300 kms. So, I want to know whether the previous alignment has been abandoned or it is alive.

SHRI R. VELU: Sir, I cannot say this right now, but I can answer saying that...

SHRI T.R. ZELIANG: You have already answered this on the 3rd March...

SHRI R. VELU: I cannot answer right now as to whether it is in lieu of the previous alignment. I have to find out...

SHRI T.R. ZELIANG: The answer was that it was because of a complaint lodged by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council. Now, why did they not consult the State Governments of Nagaland or of Manipur because right from Delhi to Guwahati to Imphal, it is a shorter route. We are not opposed to the new alignment. But the reply said that it was because of the complaint lodged by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council.

SHRI R. VELU: Sir, I will collect the details and furnish to the hon. Member.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes; please send the details to the hon. Member.

SHRIMATI SYEDA ANWARA TAIMUR: Sir, the Minister has said that the metre gauge conversion projects have been taken up so as to facilitate smooth movement of passengers and goods. The conversion of all the main routes in the North-Eastern Region has been taken up, but the progress is very slow. And, some of the projects have not yet started. I would like to know whether any target year has been fixed to complete these projects.

SHRI R. VELU: Sir, before I answer this supplementary, I just got the information that the Jiribham-Imphal line, that has been proposed, is in lieu of the old proposal.

Now I come to this supplementary. I have already answered the details of the proposals for conversion along with the set dates against each of them for completion. In fact, resource has been the constraint; I have mentioned that I require about Rs. 6,000 crores to complete all these conversion and new line works. In fact, this year, we have been able to get Rs. 972 crores, that is, around Rs. 1000 crores. Now, some of them have been targeted for 2009, and for some of them, the target year has been fixed as 2010. Beyond 2010. In fact, we are giving special attention...

MR. CHAIRMAN: In fact, the time here is very short...

SHRI R. VELU: So, Sir, we will see to it that the hon. Member's request for hastening the process of conversion work is adhered to.

SHRI DWIJENDRA NATH SHARMAH: Sir, communication is one of the major problems in the North-Eastern Region. Due to this, most of the State capitals there are not connected by the Railways. I would like to have a categorical reply from the hon. Minister as to when the State capitals of the North-Eastern Region will be connected by the Railways. This is number one. The second part...

MR. CHAIRMAN: You are allowed only number one.

SHRI DWIJENDRA NATH SHARMAH: There is a second part which is very important. The Minister has agreed just now about the peculiar climatic conditions of the North-Eastern Region because the rain starts there in the month of April and it continues till October. There is a continuous complaint of shortage of wagons to carry the materials, particularly, the construction materials, like cement, steel, etc. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to whether the wagons for carrying construction materials would be made available immediately for the North-Eastern Region.

SHRI R. VELU: Sir, the hon. Member knows that we are giving topmost priority for movement of PDS goods, namely, foodgrains, sugar, etc. and also fertilisers which are quite necessary for agriculture. So far as the movement of cement, steel, etc. is concerned, we are providing transportation as and when a special request is made to us.

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In fact, a week back, they approached us from that region to move some of the bamboo for paper mills, as also cement and steel, which we had done. As I have already mentioned, because of the climatic conditions there, we take every step to provide better transport facilities in the region.

*348. The questioner (Shri K. Rama Moho.i A. Rao) was absent. For answer *vide* page 36.]

*349. The questioner (Shri S.M. Laljan Basha) was absent. For answer *vide* page 37.]

MR. CHAIRMAN: Question No. 350.

Programme for checking infant and maternal mortality

*350. SHRI B.J. PANDA:

MS. PRAMILA BOHIDAR:†

Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Orissa Government proposes to launch a new programme with the assistance of World Bank to check the high infant and maternal mortality rate in the State;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the State Government also proposes to raise its sanitation standards and improve other health-care facilities; and

(d) if so, the details thereof indicating the action plan of the Centre to help this backward region to achieve these laudable goals?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (DR. ANBUMANI RAMADOSS): (a) to (d) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

Yes, it is a fact that Orissa Government proposes to formulate a project on reduction of child mortality with the assistance of World Bank to check the high infant and maternal mortality rate in the State.

†The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Ms. Pramila Bohidar.