

(b) whether the Banking Board Bureau is in the process of choosing a foster bank for BMB; and

(c) considering BMBs emotional significance to Government's efforts at gender empowerment, whether Government would explore other options to keep afloat BMB, as a custodian bank for parking funds on women-centric programmes like Nirbhaya, Bharatiya Mahila Kosh and Sukanya Samriddhi etc.?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI JAYANT SINHA): (a) to (c) As far as merger of banks are concerned, any initiative with respect to merger of public sector banks has to come from the Boards of the banks concerned, the extant legal framework, keeping in view the synergies and benefits of merger and their commercial judgment.

Government's/ Reserve Bank of India's role in the merger of banks would be that of a facilitator.

#### **Action taken to solve grievances of jewellers**

1812. SHRI BASAWARAJ PATIL: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) since how many days Jewellers are on strike and what are their demands;

(b) whether their demands are genuine; and

(c) if so, what action has been taken by Government and the details thereof and if not, reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI JAYANT SINHA): (a) and (b) After imposition of central excise duty at the rate of 1% (without input tax credit) or 12.5% (with input tax credit) on all articles of jewellery (except for silver jewellery, other than those studded with diamond, ruby, emerald or sapphire), the jewellers had gone on strike, with a demand to roll back excise duty.

(c) Government has prescribed a higher small scale industries excise duty exemption limit of ₹ 6 Crore per annum for this sector, if the aggregate value of clearances during the preceding financial year has not exceeded ₹ 12 crore. In case of jewellery manufactured on job work basis, the liability to take registration, pay duty and file return is on principal manufacturer and not on job worker. Clear instructions have also been issued regarding registration; no post-registration verification of premises; maintenance of records, etc., to facilitate compliance.

Additionally, Government has also constituted a sub-committee of the High Level Committee to interact with Trade & Industry on Tax Laws. Terms of reference of the Sub-Committee include the issues related to compliance procedure for the excise duty, including records to be maintained and any other administrative issues that may be relevant. In this context, a circular has also been issued by the Government,

- i. to further extend the time limit for taking registration of an establishment of a jeweller (which is going to expire on 30.04.2016) up to 01.07.2016; and
- ii. though, the liability for payment of central excise duty will be with effect from 1st March, 2016, the assessee jewellers may make the payment of excise duty for the months of March, 2016; April, 2016 and May, 2016 along with the payment of excise duty for the month of June, 2016.

**Provision of banking services for Gram Panchayats and villages**

1813. DR. KANWAR DEEP SINGH: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

- (a) how many Gram Panchayats and villages are there in the country and how many of them have banking services;
- (b) roadmap, if any, for providing remaining villages with such facilities; and
- (c) how are we going to effect DBT to household account?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI JAYANT SINHA): (a) to (c) As per information obtained from Ministry of Panchayati Raj, there are approx. 248255 Gram Panchayats in the country. The data of Gram Panchayats with banking facilities is not available with Reserve Bank of India (RBI). As per Census 2011, there are 5.94 lakh inhabited villages. RBI has informed that at the end of December 2015, there were 49538 branches of Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) in rural areas and 35289 branches in semi-urban areas.

Government has asked banks to extend banking services to the entire rural geography of the country based on the concept of Sub Service Area (SSA) with each SSA comprising of 1000-1500 households. Each SSA is to be provided banking services through bank branch or Bank Mitras. Out of 126691 SSAs so created, 125918 have been covered and 773 are left to be covered due to lack of telecom connectivity.

DBT is being made through the existing bank accounts as well as accounts opened under PMJDY.