

Cut in budget allocations for the Ministry

1560. SHRIMATI WANSUK SYIEM: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether, with a drastic cut in budget allocations, the Ministry is floundering over empowering Panchayats nation-wide, with crucial schemes, BRGF and RGPSA discontinued and more than 54,000 Gram Panchayats functioning without office premises;

(b) whether, with much efforts and pressure, RGPSA was revived partially under the new Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan with an allocation of ₹ 655 crore; and

(c) how Government proposes to bolster grassroot democracy in the country, with a weakened and fund-starved Ministry?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI PARSHOTTAM RUPALA): (a) to (c) No, Sir. The Hon'ble Finance Minister in his budget speech for year 2016-17 announced the launch of a new restructured scheme namely Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) to help Panchayati Raj Institutions to develop governance capabilities to deliver on sustainable development goals. Funds to the tune of ₹ 725 crore towards the above scheme have been made available. Availability of these funds for the restructured scheme of RGSA provides opportunity to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj for making renewed efforts for strengthening and empowering the Panchayati Raj Institutions including through use of technological interventions. Further, under the Fourteenth Finance Commission award, funds to the tune of ₹ 200292.20 crore for the period 2015-2020 are being devolved to Gram Panchayats for delivery of basic services which will improve the financial condition of Gram Panchayats and empower them to accelerate the development of civic infrastructure and delivery of basic services. The construction of Panchayat Ghars is primarily the responsibility of State Governments which can be constructed using resources under the State Sector Schemes and through pooling of funds available under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

Improved methodology for defining poverty line

1561. SHRI SANJAY RAUT: Will the Minister of PLANNING be pleased to state:

(a) whether any conclusion, with regard to improved methodology for defining the poverty line in the country has been reached;

- (b) if so, the details thereof indicating by when it would be announced;
- (c) if not, the reasons therefor; and
- (d) whether Government is considering to formulate permanent solution for fixing poverty line by applying cost inflation index to keep it realistic and if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING (RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) to (d) Pursuant to the decision taken in the first meeting of the Governing Council of NITI Aayog on 8th February, 2015, a Task Force on Elimination of Poverty in India was constituted by NITI Aayog *vide* order dated 16th March, 2015 under the Chairmanship of Dr. Arvind Panagariya, Vice Chairman, NITI Aayog. The report of the Task Force has been submitted to Hon'ble Prime Minister on 11th July, 2016. The Task Force in its report has, *inter alia*, recommended that an expert committee be set up to arrive at an informed decision on the level at which the poverty line should be set.

Electricity connection in electrified villages

†1562. SHRI P. L. PUNIA: Will the Minister of POWER be pleased to state:

- (a) the number of villages electrified and the number of villages yet to be electrified in the country till 2013-14; and
- (b) the total number of villages electrified in the year 2014-15 and 2015-16 and the total number of new connections provided in these villages?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF POWER (SHRI PIYUSH GOYAL): (a) Against the target of 1,11,998 un-electrified villages, cumulatively 1,08,280 un-electrified villages have been electrified in the country under rural electrification component as on 31.03.2014.

- (b) The number of villages electrified and number of BPL connections released are as under:-

Year	Number of villages electrified	Number of BPL households electrified
2014-15	1405	7,59,377
2015-16	7108	14,39,144

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.