

AUTONOMY TO THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA

***SHRI ARJUN CHARAN SETHI** : Will the Minister of INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING be pleased state :

(a) The follow-up steps taken in light of the Prasar Bharati Act to provide true autonomy to the electronic-media; and

(b) if not, the impediments thereto ?

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (KUMARI GIRIJA VYAS) : (a) and (b) Most of the activities essential to the formal establishment of the Corporation have not been completed. Besides, in the context of the need to introduce competition in the electronic media, the possibility of bringing out suitable amendments in the Act cannot be ruled out.

[*Translation*]

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : Sir, the replies to parts (a), (b) and (d) of my question are contradictory to each other. On the one hand, the Government says that it is committed to set-up "Prasar Bharati" and on the other it is indulging in 'ifs' and 'buts'. This clearly shows that the Government has no intention of setting it up and has a negative attitude towards it from the very beginning. In 1977, when the Janata Party came to power, the first thing it did was to appoint a committee under the chairmanship of Shri B. G. Verghese. . (Interruptions).

MR. SPEAKER : Ask your question.

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : I am coming to the question only. . . (Interruptions). . . I am giving the background since you are not aware of it. . . (Interruptions) in 1979 the first Prasar Bharati Bill was introduced in this House by Shri L. K. Advani. . . (Interruptions). . . and in August, 1990 this House unanimously passed this Bill incorporating the two amendments passed by the Rajya Sabha. The National Front Government had announced that

the Prasar Bharati would be accorded autonomy by 31st March, 1991. The Government, which was in power in the intervening period, was being run under their directions and it had said that. . . (Interruptions). . . I would like to know from the Government as to which are the essential activities mentioned in parts (a) and (b) of the reply that are yet to be completed, when will these activities be completed and when will the Prasar Bharati be set up ?

[*English*]

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA) : Sir, there is no ambiguity so far as the answer to the question is concerned. It is clear. The last line in the answer to Question No. 63 makes it clear that the Government is committed to set up Prasar Bharati.

Since it was approved by the Lok Sabha, the only action taken was that Dr. V. A. Pai Panadhikar was appointed nominee of the President of India under section 4(1)(c) on 30th October, 1990. Thereafter the Chandra Shekhar Government came in. There was a meeting of the Consultative Committee on 28th December, 1990. The then Prime Minister himself directed review of the entire matter. Since then, we do not find any step taken at the ministerial level. But various steps have been taken so far as the officers' level is concerned. A communication was addressed to the Chairman, Council of States and Chairman, Press Council, requesting them to commence the process of selection of Chairman. No formal reply was received.

But some oral communication took place when the Chairman asked for details of conditions. I found after assuming office that no conditions have been finalised by the Government and there is a long list of items on which action has not been initiated, which we have collected from the files. Twelve main items have not been touched. I do not want to take the time of the House and so, I will lay it on the Table of the

House. If the hon. Member wants any other information, I will give it.

[*Translation*]

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : Mr. Speaker, Sir, you may please ask the hon. Minister to give the requisite information. I just wanted to know the time by which these activities would be completed and the Prasar Bharati would be set up. It is a very simple question. (Interruptions)

[*English*]

SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA : Sir, the previous Action Plan envisaged a gestation period of six months, that is, 30th March 1991 was thought of. But since then, no steps have been taken. In fact, the House had expressed its confidence only day before yesterday. Sir, in our manifesto, by which we asked for the vote of the people, it is clearly stated that "The Congress will offer to public corporations, which conform to the parameters laid down by law broadcasting and telecasting rights. Such corporations will be allowed to function in competition with Prasar Bharati." That means Sir, existence of Prasar Bharati is a condition precedent to the offer to the public corporations. The deadline set up in our manifesto is 365 days from assuming office. The promise will be carried out in letter and spirit (Interruptions).

[*Translation*]

SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN : Mr. Speaker, Sir, within a year? Will the Government survive for one year? I have already stated that it can never be implemented at least by your Government.

My second question is regarding the news "A private channel on Doordarshan likely" providing a separate channel for private corporations. Will the hon. Minister come out with the complete details. Has the cabinet accorded its approval to the proposal? What are its objectives and its likely effect on the Doordarshan? Will not the Doordarshan become a tool in the hands of the multinationals.

[*English*]

SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA : So far as public corporations are concerned, Sir, various people have shown their interest. The modalities have not yet been finalised and after the modalities are finalised, it will be decided by the Ministry. As I stated already, I do not want to repeat. It has to be within the parameters laid down by law and of course, such law has to be placed before Parliament. Whether the public corporation will be public limited by floating shares or a private limited one or an individual organisation has not yet been decided. It is in a preliminary stage. Many people have shown their interest and are making enquiries. So, at present the guideline has not yet been formed. We are taking as many opinions as possible from people interested.

SHRI LOKNATH CHOUDHURY : Sir, I want to draw the attention of the Minister to the reply he has given. It is said 'Yes Sir, if necessary' and again he says that the details of the amendment cannot be spelt out at this stage. These are contradictory to each other. I think there is something in the mind of the Minister which he is trying to hide. So, will the Minister say whether he will correct the reply or not?

Secondly, I want to know as to why the Government feels that a competition will be there with the Prasar Bharati.

SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA : So far as the first part of the question is concerned, I have not been hiding anything particularly in this House, the Lok Sabha. The answer is clear; 'Yes Sir, if it is necessary'. We are keeping the options open. Quoting our Prime Minister, all options are open provided the programmes are good. Therefore, if it is necessary to amend, I have to come to this House for any such amendment. I cannot do it outside the House.

I have said that it is not possible to spell out the details because we are still making preliminary inquiries and looking into the matter. The matter was kept in cold storage for a long time and we have brought it out. But I cannot put it straightway in the oven because it must

first come to normal temperature and then the cooking starts.

Now I come to the second aspect raised by the hon. member. So far as competition is concerned, it is necessary for any creative art to have exposure from outside. That is our Indian culture and there is nothing new in what we are speaking now. Whenever there is competition, market forces will come into play and the artists will get openings and thus Indian culture survives and flourishes.

MR SPEAKER : Shri Arjun Charan Sethi

SHRI ARJUN CHARAN SETHI : The hon. Minister in his reply has stated that most of the activities essential to the formal establishment of the corporation have not been completed. What are the specific items that have not been completed ? How much time will they take to complete them ? The hon. Minister has stated that they have got the mandate from the House only the other day when the Vote of Confidence was taken up. When they have taken up privatisation and setting up of a corporation immediately, why have they not taken most of the other items that are supposed to be completed before the enactment of this law in the country ?

MR SPEAKER : The entire question has already been replied. Yet I ask the hon Minister to reply it.

SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA : Since the question has been asked, I will state the important provisions...

MR. SPEAKER : Yes, But please be brief.

SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA : In fact, Section 1(3) on notification and Section 3(1) on making the corporation and thereafter action under the entire provisions of the Act have not yet been completed. Unless this work is completed in every respect, we cannot issue the notification. Otherwise there will be a conflict. We are not making any difference between a public corporation coming up and

Prasar Bharati. Prasar Bharati has become an Act. What we have said is that we have floated the idea so that people all over India and elsewhere can come and join us and give their ideas and then parameters can be laid down. So far as the main action points to be taken up are concerned, I have stated that I would be laying them on the Table of the House.

SHRI LAL K. ADVANI : First of all, I would like to express my happiness over both the points raised by the Minister in his reply. Firstly, he has said that the Government is committed to the creation of Prasar Bharati which means transferring Akashvani and Doordarshan from the Government Department that they are today, into an autonomous corporation. This is one good thing. I regard this as a commitment made in this House. The second aspect is removing the monopoly of the electronic media even in respect of Prasar Bharati and saying that they propose to introduce competition in the electronic media. I welcome both these facets. But what has happened in the past is no longer very relevant. What is going to happen hereafter is more relevant. I would like to know whether the Government intends to implement the Prasar Bharati Act as it is, because it was a unanimous legislation of the House and then think of any other amendments that would be necessary. Or is the Government thinking in terms of contemplating and coming to a conclusion in respect of all the amendments which it wants to introduce in the first place and then only implementing the Prasar Bharati ?

This is something which is crucial because I feel that the Prasar Bharati Act which represents the unanimous will of the House, including the Congress Party which was in the Opposition at that time, and which was the result of the considerable discussion and debate, should be implemented as quickly as possible. What the past Government has not done is a past thing. This Government must first implement it and then we can even think in terms of making the necessary changes in the law, by bringing amendments, to introduce competition. Sir, it should be realised that the technological advances

that are being made in this field are so overtaking us that the kind of restraint that we are imposing will become irrelevant. It will be very late then to realise that when the world is able to see pictures through satellite from all over the world, we are trying to restrict people here. So, this aspect must be kept in mind.

I would like to know whether the Government promises the House to come forth in this Session itself with a fresh Bill.

SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA : Sir, all the important points made by the hon. Member have been taken note of. As regards the point whether it will be possible to bring a fresh Bill in this Session, I cannot assure this House about it. As I have already said, the last action taken in this regard was on 12th September, 1990. However, Shri Chandra Shekhar, as Prime Minister, did make some policy statement and I think being a Prime Minister he must have had certain facts. We have to take notice of that.

Hon Member has rightly said that the technological advances are taking place very rapidly. Whatever developments have taken place, between 12th September, 1990 and 17th July, 1991, have been taken into consideration. Prasar Bharati Act will be implemented but whether any amendment of the Act is necessary in view of the new development, that we are looking into. If we find that no amendment is necessary, then we shall come straightaway with it. If we find that some major amendment is necessary then it has to be discussed in the Consultative Committee. Of course, we will take the Opposition into confidence and discuss with them about it because it was a consensus Bill.

[Translation]

SHRI TEJ SINGHRAO BHONSLE : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am confident that the Government will definitely go ahead with the implementation of the Prasar Bharati Act. I would like to know whether the Government propose to make certain amendments in the present Act? Do the Government propose to telecast

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the proceedings of the House as is being done in Great Britain in respect of the House of Commons so that the people through out the country may be able to know whether we are working properly or not? Are you going to do something in this regard?

MR. SPEAKER : This subject matter does not pertain to his Ministry.

[English]

SHRI CHANDRA JEET YADAV : Sir, the Minister has said in his reply that it will be open to market forces and an element of competition will be brought in. He also said that he is getting enquiries from all over India and elsewhere. Does elsewhere include that he is getting enquiries from agencies like the Voice of America, BBC and other such agencies also? I would like to know whether the foreign organisations have also shown interest and does the Government intend to open it to the whole world? Can competitors come from all over the world?

SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA : As such, no foreign organisation has yet approached us. Some of the NRIs have shown interest and they are enquiring as to whether they can come over here, form a corporation of public limited nature within the parameters to be laid down by law, invest the money and make use of the offer.

SHRI CHANDRA JEET YADAV : Sir, I asked whether it is open to foreign organisations or not.

SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA : No foreign organisation has yet approached us.

SHRI CHANDRA JEET YADAV : I want to know your policy. I would like to know whether your policy is to open it to the foreign organisations or not. (Interruptions)

What is your policy? May I know whether your policy is open to foreign agencies or not?

SHRIMATI MALINI BHATTARCHA- RAYA : Prasar Bharati Bill has not been amended yet. How can you even take these proposals into consideration ?

SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA : I think the hon. lady Member is not right. It is there in the Act itself. In the Telegraphs Act, it is there. Its powers have not been taken away. If the hon. Member goes through it, she will find this. (Interruptions).

SHRI CHANDRA JEET YADAV : Sir, he has just started replying to the hon. lady Member without replying to my question. May I know whether it is open to foreign agencies or not. I think he seems to have more preference for the lady Member. (Interruptions)

SHRI K. P. UNNIKRISHNAN : Is the hon. Minister aware of the fact that the BBC's new satellite is coming up in 1992 with the result the entire technological dimensions will change and is he prepared for that ? It is not a political question but it has far-reaching implications

SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA . Yes Sir, we are aware of this fact. We are taking all steps in this regard so that there is no invasion in our well-established traditions and culture.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

[English]

LEAKAGE OF QUESTION PAPERS OF CIVIL SERVICES (PRELIMINARY) EXAMINATION, 1991

*64. **SHRI CHANDRA JEET YADAV** :

SHRI MADAN LAL KHURANA :

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state :

(a) whether certain question papers of Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination, 1991 were leaked out,

(b) if so, whether any investigation has been ordered by the Government into the matter; and

(c) if so, the outcome thereof and the action taken against the erring persons ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES AND PENSIONS (SHRIMATI MARGARET ALVA) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Yes Sir, at the request of the U.P.S.C., the Govt. advised the CBI to investigate the matter.

(c) An FIR has been lodged by the U.P.S.C. with the Central Bureau of Investigation. Investigation by the CBI is still in progress. Some suspects have been apprehended by the CBI in the course of their investigation.

ISSUE OF LETTERS OF INTENT

*65. **SHRI DHARMANNA MON DAYYA SADUL** : Will the PRIME MINISTER be please to state :

(a) whether a large number of letters of intent were issued to MRTP companies during the last six months for setting up industries where norms and regulations were not followed strictly ;

(b) if so, the details thereof, and

(c) the steps taken or proposed to be taken to cancel letters of intent in such cases, if any ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY (PROF. P.J. KURIEN) : (a) and (b) All the applications received from MRTP companies for the grant of letter of intent are considered in accordance with the prevailing industrial policy and procedures. 87 letters of intent were issued to MRTP companies during the period January to June, 1991 after following the prescribed procedure.

(c) Does not arise.