

LOK SABHA DEBATES

LOK SABHA

*Thursday, July 18, 1996/Asadha 27,
1918 (Saka)*

*(The Lok Sabha met at
Eleven of the Clock)*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

...*(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

SHRI MOHAN RAWALE (Mumbai South-Central) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I had given notice of a question but my question has been transferred to some other Members name as Starred Question for tomorrow ...*(Interruptions)* I have been fighting for the cause of textile workers for the last five years... *(Interruptions)*. Sir, it is the same question which has been included in the 'Starred List' for tomorrow...*(Interruptions)**

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : I will see to it.

...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI MOHAN RAWALE : *...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : I will see to it after going through the relevant papers

[English]

I will go through the papers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

[Translation]

Telecom Facilities to Panchayat Headquarters

*121. PROF. RASA SINGH RAWAT : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the decision taken earlier to provide telecommunication facility at each Panchayat Headquarter in the country is being implemented satisfactory;

(b) if so, the progress made so far in this regard, State-wise;

(c) if not, the time by which the above facilities are likely to be provided to all the Panchayat Headquarters;

(d) the allocations made for this purpose and the amount actually spent during the last two years and the current year so far, State-wise;

(e) whether the Government are aware that faulty instruments have been installed at most of the

* Expunged as ordered by the Chair.

Panchayat Headquarters and as a result of which the telephones remain dead; and

(f) if so, the measures being adopted to remove the faults?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA) (a) to (c). Village telephone facility has been provided in 1,54,352 Gram Panchayat Headquarters upto 1st April, 1996. State-wise details are given in Statement-I. The policy envisages provision of public telephone facility at all villages including Panchayat by the year 1997.

(d) Expenditure for providing public telephone facility at Panchayat Headquarter village in met out of the budgetary provision of transmission systems. During the last two years, the budgetary provisions for the transmission systems were Rs.3600 crores and the expenditure for providing village public telephone in Panchayat Headquarter is estimated to be approximately Rs.306 crores. State-wise estimated figures are given in statement-II.

(e) and (f). It has come to the notice of the Government that the installation at many places are not working properly. Measures taken to remove the faults are :

- Replacement or repair of equipment, improvement in design, introduction of solar panels for providing power. Instructions have been issued to all the Telecom Headquarters to ascertain daily the working of the Village Public Telephones.

STATEMENT-I

*Status of Gram Panchayat Public Telephones
as on 31st March, 1996*

S.No.	Name of Circle	GPPTs as on 1.4.1996
1	2	3
1.	Andaman Nicobar	33
2.	Andhra Pradesh	16569
3.	Assam	2067
4.	Bihar	8518
5.	Gujarat	11961
6.	Haryana	4868
7.	Himachal Pradesh	2327
8.	Jammu & Kashmir	705
9.	Karnataka	4807
10.	Kerala	982
11.	Madhya Pradesh	19224
12.	Maharashtra	21122
13.	North-East	2121
14.	Orissa	4956

1	2	3
15.	Punjab	8501
16.	Rajasthan	7746
17.	Tamil Nadu	12943
18.	Uttar Pradesh(E)	15650
19.	Uttar Pradesh(W)	5798
20.	West Bengal	3263
21.	MTNL, New Delhi	191
	Total	154352

STATEMENT-II

State-wise details of expenditure incurred in providing panchayat telephones during the last two years

S.No.	Name of Circle	Estimated Expenditure incurred in providing Panchayat Telephones during the last two years (Rs. in Crores)
1.	Andhra Pradesh	24.272
2.	Assam	1.808
3.	Bihar	16.112
4.	Gujarat (including Dadra Nagar, Daman & Diu)	23.064
5.	Haryana	10.368
6.	Himachal Pradesh	7.176
7.	Jammu & Kashmir	0.232
8.	Karnataka	16.376
9.	Kerala (Including Lakshdweep Islands)	Nil
10.	Madhya Pradesh	47.208
11.	Maharashtra (Including Goa)	54.696
12.	North-East (Including Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland & Tripura)	4.192
13.	Orissa	2.024
14.	Punjab	7.544
15.	Rajasthan	13.848
16.	Tamilnadu (including Pondicherry)	9.336
17.	Uttar Pradesh	62.816
18.	West Bengal (Including Andaman Nicobar & Sikkim)	4.656
	Total :	305.728

(Say : Rs. 306 Crores)

Note: The overall expenditure for providing one village Public Telephone is Rs. 80,000/-.

PROF. RASA SINGH RAWAT : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the reply of the hon. Minister's not satisfactory. All of us know that India is a country of villages and the village Panchayats are the first ladder of Indian democratic system. Since the time when the 73rd Amendment was made to the constitution to give a shape to the concept of 'Gram Swarajya' and a statutory status was accorded to the village Panchayats and the facility of reservation was provided to women, backward classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Village Panchayats, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parisad, a sense of social and political awareness has been emerged in them and now the people of rural areas are eager to avail the facility of telecommunication. Keeping this in mind, a decision was taken under telecommunication Policy to connect all the Gram Panchayat headquarters by the telephone facility. But as the hon. Minister has replied, I am sorry to say that in comparison to urban areas, the rural areas have always been neglected. As per the statement made just now that Rs 3600 crore were provided for telecom facilities but out of that amount only Rs.306 crore have been spent in rural areas. The obvious needs no evidence. It is evident that the rural areas are being neglected. The hon. Minister has also stated that 15,4352 Gram Panchayat headquarters have been connected with telephone facilities till 1.4.96.

I would like to know, through you, the number of Gram Panchayat headquarters in the country which lack this facility and which are likely to be provided this facility by the Government till 1997?...(Interruptions)

[English]

SHRI S. AJAY KUMAR : Sir, he should ask the question because it is Question Hour.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : I have already asked him to put the Question.

[Translation]

PROF. RASA SINGH RAWAT : I would like to know the Scheme through which you will be able to achieve the target by 1997?...(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : He has asked the question because I had permitted him to ask the question only.

SHRI SATYA DEO SINGH : You are disturbing more than he is doing I by asking the question.

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : I would like to thank Rawat ji for providing me an opportunity by asking this question to express my views on priorities, and services. Sir, it is true that the policy adopted for providing telephone facility to Gram Panchayats, has not been properly followed as a result most of the telephones remain out of order.

SHRI GIRDHARI LAL BHARGAVA : All of them are out of order.

AN HON. MEMBER : He is a Minister in true sense.

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : I do not disagree with you to great extent. It was planned to equip all the Gram Panchayats with telecom facilities by the year 1977. Now, it has been planned to provide all the villages the facility of telephone by the year 1997. I am not assuring you fully about the completion of this work but a quota of 75 thousand telephone connections has been earmarked for villages for the year. A separate monitoring cell has been set up for this purpose and I assure you that a separate budget will be allocated for it. Uptil now, there used to be only one budget and the amount was provided for village telephones out of that. Now, there will be a separate budget for village telephones. We will try to achieve hundred per cent target in this regard.

PROF. RASA SINGH RAWAT : I think whatever has been stated just now by the hon. Minister, is merely an assurance. My supplementary question is whether the United Front Government, which claims itself to be a champion of social justice and rural development, will pay special attention towards rural telecommunication facilities? The number of village having telephone facilities as on 31.10.95 is 193208 and those lacking this facility is 411717.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Are you asking a question or telling him the fact?

PROF. RASA SINGH RAWAT : I am coming to the point. So far only 31.9 per cent rural area has been covered under this scheme. The Private Sector has been invited to undertake the work. In this connection, I would like to know whether the private companies will provide its services to Urban and rich customers only or the customers of rural areas and towns will also be benefitted? part (b) is, whether the Government will set up rural cell and telecom centres in each district and deploy special employees in order to maintain the quality and services of telecommunication and to monitor these facilities in rural areas?

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are 3,87,274 villages in our country which do not have telephone facility. So far as the privatisation policy is concerned, there is a provision in it that they will have to provide 10 per cent telephone facility to rural areas. I have recently issued an order in which exchanges responsible for the maintenance of rural telephones have been asked to submit monthly report to the Ministry of Communication. Then, I shall look into it personally. I would like to seek your cooperation for proper functioning of telephones in the rural areas. I admit that 28 per cent telephones on paper are out of order but the actual number of the same may be more. India is a country of villages therefore unless the progress of the villages is made, the country will not progress. I fully agree with you on this point and I am ready to consider the suggestions whatever you want to give in this regard.

SHRI MAHENDRA KARMA : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, block headquarters of Makari and Katkaliyar in Bustar

district of Madhya Pradesh lack the telephone facility. Will you immediately arrange to provide telecommunication facility to these block headquarters in the current session itself?

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, this information is not available with me but I would like to tell you that a target of 9850 villages has been fixed this year.

SHRI MAHENDRA KARMA : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am talking of block headquarters where telephone facility has not been made available.

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I request the hon. Member to give it in writing. I shall consider the matter on priority basis.

PROF. AJIT KUMAR MEHTA : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, in reply to parts 'c' and 'd' of the Question, mention has been made regarding replacement of the equipment or its repairs, improvement of design etc., I want to tell the hon. Minister that the villages where MARR system has been provided the telephone system is not functioning properly for the past two years. Consumers are being told that equipment is not available and also Mechanics are not there to repair the equipments. The mechanic, perhaps comes from Madras, and carries out the repairs. He comes once in a year or once in two years. I would like to know whether this present position is likely to be improved. Can a mechanic be arranged for North India. Who can work in villages having MARR system?

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is true that most of the faults occur in the MARR system. Earlier, there used to be more faults. But after changing the design incidents of faults have come down. Help of the mechanic is being sought after the change of the design. A monitoring cell has been set up which will regularly carry out checks to find the fault and to suggest remedy... (Interruptions)

SHRI CHAMAN LAL GUPTA : Mr. Speaker, Sir, telephones have been provided in 1,54,352 panchayats. Out of these only 705 are in Kashmir. On this an amount of only Rs.32 lakhs has been spent. It is a totally militancy hit region. Incidents of terrorism remain unreported for even upto four days. We have not been able to provide telephones to the Panchayats. Specially in the Doda district. Similar is the case of big cities. I want to know the reasons why telephones have been provided in only 705 pachayats in Jammu and Kashmir and that the telecom department has miserably failed to perform its task.

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : Sir, I cannot tell the reasons for the past. But this year the target for Jammu and Kashmir has been fixed for 600 villages. And we will try to attain it at the earliest... (Interruptions)

[English]

SHRI MANORANJAN BHAKTA : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I am happy that the hon. Minister, while replying to

this question, has admitted that faulty instruments have been installed in most of the panchayats and he has also indicated that some measures have been taken to replace all such faulty equipments.

My particular question is that Andaman and Nicobar Islands, one of the most remotest island territories of our country, are badly suffering from lack of sufficient telephone facilities. Only 33 telephones have been provided in 33 panchayat areas. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he would like to consider giving high priority for these islands and remote areas in the country.

[Translation]

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : It is among our priorities. We do not have separate information for those areas. But whatever you point out, we shall get it examined by the Department.

SHRI MANORANJAN BHAKTA : I have asked you, whether you are ready to give priority to the remote Adivasi and the backward regions.

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : This is the policy of the Government. We will also give priority.

[English]

SHRI V.M. SUDHEERAN : Sir, the presidents of the Gram panchayats, block panchayats and the members of the district panchayats are not entitled to get telephone connections on a priority basis. It has caused a lot of difficulties for them in discharging their duties. So, will the hon. Minister kindly look into this issue and take immediate steps to provide telephone connections for these elected members on a priority basis?

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : Sir, this question is not related to the original question. But even then, I will like to say that there is a long waiting list in our country. And if the priority list will be widened, then those in the priority list, will also end up in the waiting list. This will therefore pose problems. Priority list should be widened only when essential... (Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : I admit that it is an important question. But there are other questions also. We have spent 20 minutes on it.

[English]

Procurement of Optical Fibre Cables

*122. SHRI RAM KRIPAL YADAV : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that DOT tender to procure optical fibre cables was shelved and, instead, certain companies were selected for the purpose;

(b) if so, the details thereof stating the value involved; and

(c) the compulsions for scrapping the tender in favour of the above companies?

[Translation]

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA) : (a) and (b). A tender for procurement of Optical Fibre Cables, which was issued on 22nd March, 1996, as scheduled was opened on 21st May, 1996, the tender was issued for procurement of 21,000 km. of Optical Fibre Cable whose estimated value was Rs.250 to 275 crores.

Separately it was decided to place orders, whose estimated value was Rs.250 crores on certain companies but no orders were placed on them.

(c) Does not arise since the tender was not scrapped.

SHRI RAM KRIPAL YADAV : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, through you, I would like to know from the Minister, that after inviting tenders, he suddenly took the decision not to award the contract to those companies. Since, the process would take much time, thereby adding to the cost. After that he decided to place orders with ten local companies. But he is yet to place orders with those companies. It was perhaps in his mind that processing of the tenders would take a long time and the rate will increase. But he had made up his mind to place orders with these ten companies for this work, but he has not placed the orders so far. I want to know from the Minister, that after so much time has the rate not increased? His stand was that if orders were not placed with those companies, the rate would increase. But, so far, he had not adopted any procedure. Has not the rates increased? Has not the rates increased? The work that you will do now, will it not entail more expenditure, as compared to what it would have cost earlier?

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : Sir, it is correct that tender was issued on 22.3.96. And on 28.3.96, orders were placed with some companies, at the previous year's rates. But orders have not been placed with companies, since there is not such precedent. It is a different matter, whether the cost is less or more, but all purchases are made through tenders. In view of the transparent policy of the Government the question of setting a precedent by placing order separately, does not arise. Therefore, the tenders that were invited, have not been cancelled. They are being processed. Companies, which were selected for orders on old rates, have not been given orders. Because it would set a precedent. Precedents should not be set, when it comes to placing orders.

SHRI RAM KRIPAL YADAV : Through you, Sir, I want to know from the Hon'ble minister, that he has decided to place orders with the old companies, at the old rates, then, the time by which orders would be placed with them, the time by which this would be processed and the time by which this process would be over.

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : There is a procedure for processing the tenders. At present we do not have