

Discussion on the Motion for consideration of the Post Office Bill, 2023

माननीय अध्यक्ष: आइटम नंबर 28, डाकघर विधेयक, 2023, माननीय मंत्री जी।

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS, MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND MINISTER OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHWINI VAISHNAW): Hon. Speaker, Sir, I rise to move:-

?That the Bill to consolidate and amend the law relating to Post Office in India and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, as passed by Rajya Sabha, be taken into consideration.?

? (व्यवधान)

माननीय अध्यक्ष: माननीय मंत्री जी, क्या आपको कोई विषय रखना है?

श्री अश्वनी वैष्णव : जी, अध्यक्ष जी। आज के इस पोस्ट ऑफिस बिल, 2023 द्वारा इंडियन पोस्ट ऑफिस एक्ट 1898 को रिपील किया जाएगा।

मान्यवर अध्यक्ष जी, जैसा हम सभी जानते हैं कि देश में एक इतना रिलाएबल नेटवर्क है, इसको डाकघर का नेटवर्क कहा जाता है। एक सदी से ऊपर की इसकी लेगेसी है। इस पूरे सिस्टम को किस तरह से पिछले साढ़े नौ वर्षों में टोटली ट्रांसफॉर्म किया गया है, आज का जो बिल है, वह बेसिकली इस ट्रांसफॉर्मेशन को रिफ्लेक्ट करता है।

मान्यवर अध्यक्ष जी, पिछले नौ वर्षों में पोस्ट ऑफिस को मेल डिलीवरी से सर्विस डिलीवरी में कंवर्ट किया गया है। पोस्ट ऑफिस से एक बैंकिंग सिस्टम में कंवर्ट किया गया है। इसके कई अच्छे उदाहरण हैं, जो जन प्रभावी हैं। देश में जन-जन को इसका बेनिफिट मिला है।

जैसे सर्विस डिलीवरी की बात करें तो पोस्ट ऑफिस के जरिए पासपोर्ट बनाने की जो व्यवस्था बनी, उसके कई ऐसे अच्छे उदाहरण हैं। हिमाचल प्रदेश के लाहौल स्पीति का एक उदाहरण है। श्री संसार चंद जी, जिनको पासपोर्ट बनवाने के लिए अगर शिमला जाना पड़ता तो 3 से 4 दिन लगते। आज कुल्लू मुख्य डाकघर में ही पासपोर्ट ऑफिस सेवा केंद्र के खुलने से एक ही दिन में पासपोर्ट बन जाता है। वैसे ही ओडिशा के बोलांगीर जिले में आदर्शपाड़ा के रहने वाले 62 वर्ष के एक भाई श्री जगदीश चंद्र पात्रो है। उनका पासपोर्ट बोलांगीर हेड ऑफिस में ही बन गया। इससे पहले उनको 300-400 किलोमीटर दूर भुवनेश्वर जाना पड़ता था।

मान्यवर अध्यक्ष जी, वैसे ही सर्विस डिलीवरी की इस भावना में डाक निर्यात केंद्र की बहुत अच्छी पहल की गई है। डाक निर्यात केंद्र के माध्यम से बिल्कुल सुदूर रिमोट एरिया में रहने वाले भारत के जो नागरिक हैं, वे भी अपनी हाथ से बनी हुई चीजों, या फिर उस एरिया की लोकल चीजों को बहुत ही आसानी से डाकघर के माध्यम से निर्यात कर पा रहे हैं। जैसे एक एग्जाम्पल है, उत्तराखंड में रुड़की से बहन गंगा देवी डाकघर निर्यात केंद्र द्वारा फ्रांस, कनाडा, स्पेन को ब्रांस के आइटम्स एक्सपोर्ट कर रही हैं।

वैसे ही जोधपुर की एक बहन, कमला देवी प्रजापति हैं, वह सेरामिक नॉब्स अमेरिका और कनाडा एक्सपोर्ट कर रही हैं। भागलपुर, बिहार के भाई अहमद नदीम, आसपास में रेशम की साड़ी और कपड़े का जो काम होता है, उसकी जो कतरन होती है, उसकी बेकार सामग्री से पर्दे, सोफा कवर, पिलो कवर इत्यादि बनाते हैं और आस्ट्रेलिया, कनाडा, ब्रिटेन को डाक निर्यात केन्द्र के जरिए से एक्सपोर्ट करते हैं। वैसे ही गोवा में बहन मोना डिसूजा हैं, वह पर्सनलाइज्ड फोटो फ्रेम सिंगापुर और यू.ई. निर्यात करती हैं।

अध्यक्ष जी, डाकघर को डाक डिलीवरी से सर्विस डिलीवरी में कन्वर्ट किया और साथ ही साथ डाकघर को एक तरीके से पोस्ट ऑफिस से बैंकिंग सिस्टम में कन्वर्ट किया। इंडिया पोस्ट पेमेंट बैंक की अगर हम बात करें, ओडिशा के गजपति जिले की 95 ईयर ओल्ड वृद्ध माता लबंगया जी को चलने-फिरने में बड़ी तकलीफ होती थी। वे 95 ईयर्स की हैं, तो उनको बैंक तक जाकर अपनी पेंशन लेने में दिक्कत होती थी। पोस्ट ऑफिस द्वारा जब यह सर्विस दी गई, तो इस फैसिलिटी से उनको घर पर ही पेंशन मिल जाती है। जन-सेवा के ऐसे अनेक उदाहरण हैं।

अध्यक्ष जी, पासपोर्ट सेवा केन्द्र से अब तक करीब सवा करोड़ से अधिक देशवासियों को इसका लाभ मिल चुका है। देश में करीब 10 करोड़ 36 लाख लोग ऐसे हैं, जिन्हें घर बैठे, अब तक 29 हजार करोड़ रुपये से ज्यादा का बेनीफिट घर तक पहुंचाया जा चुका है। किसी भी बैंक का एकाउंट होल्डर हो, पोस्ट ऑफिस के इलेक्ट्रॉनिक डिवाइस से आधार एनेबल्ड तरीके से, अच्छे से, आसानी से कनेक्ट करके आज सरकार की जो सुविधायें हैं, जो लाभ हैं, वे लोगों को घर तक पोस्ट ऑफिस के जरिए मिल रहे हैं। मैं सभी मान्यवर सांसदों से भी निवेदन करूंगा कि आप भी अपने क्षेत्र में इस फैसिलिटी का उपयोग करायें और जितना हो सके अपने क्षेत्र के निवासियों का पोस्ट ऑफिस में, इंडिया पोस्ट पेमेंट बैंक में एकाउंट खुलवायें, तो उनको घर बैठे लाभ मिल सकता है।

मान्यवर अध्यक्ष जी, पोस्ट पेमेंट बैंक के जरिए से करीब-करीब 8 करोड़ कस्टमर्स हैं, जिनमें से साढ़े 3 करोड़ कस्टमर्स तो बहनें हैं। यह आज इतनी बड़ी सुविधा भारत के प्रधान मंत्री श्री नरेन्द्र मोदी जी ने दी है, जिससे जन-जन के जीवन में एक बहुत बड़ा परिवर्तन आया है।

अध्यक्ष जी, मैं एक और विषय आपके सामने रखूंगा। वर्ष 2004 से 2014 तक इस पुराने विस्तृत नेटवर्क को एक तरीके से सिंक करने का, कमजोर करने का प्रयास किया गया। करीब 660 पोस्ट आफिसेज़ वर्ष 2004 से 2014 वाले पीरियड में बंद किये गये। मोदी जी के आने के बाद, एक बार फिर इस पूरे नेटवर्क को मजबूत बनाने का बीड़ा हाथ में उठाया और मजबूत बनाने के लिए कई कदम उठाये, जिसमें 5 हजार नये डाकघर खोले गये। सभी को 5 किलोमीटर के दायरे में सुगम बैंकिंग सर्विस डाकघर के जरिए से, पोस्टल बैंक के जरिए से मिल सकें, इसके लिए अभी हाल ही में 5,746 नये डाकघर भी सैंक्शन किये गये हैं।

अध्यक्ष जी, डाक सर्विस में, पोस्टल नेटवर्क में करीब 1 लाख 28 हजार लोगों को नया रोजगार दिया गया है। इसी तरह से डिजिटल नेटवर्क के 1 लाख 60 हजार डाकघरों को कोर बैंकिंग और डिजिटल बैंकिंग से जोड़ा गया है। 13,500 डाकघरों में आधार सेवा केन्द्र खोले गये हैं। अब तक साढ़े 8 करोड़ से ज्यादा लोग इसका लाभ उठा चुके हैं। 3 करोड़ से ज्यादा सुकन्या समृद्धि खाते खोले गये हैं।

अध्यक्ष जी, इस तरह से डाकघर को पूरी तरीके से परिवर्तित किया गया है और आज का यह जो बिल है, इसी परिवर्तन का एक साक्ष्य है। मैं सभी मान्यवर सांसदों से निवेदन करूंगा कि इसको यूनैनिमस्ली पास करने के लिए डिबेट करें।

माननीय अध्यक्ष : प्रस्ताव प्रस्तुत हुआ :

?कि भारत में डाकघर से संबद्ध विधि का समेकन और संशोधन करने तथा उससे संबंधित या उसके आनुषंगिक विषयों का उपबंध करने वाले विधेयक, राज्य सभा द्वारा यथापारित, पर विचार किया जाए।?

DR. SHASHI THAROOR (THIRUVANANTHAPURAM): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of my party to note some very grave concerns regarding this Post Office Bill, 2023. I had hoped to welcome this Bill because of many reasons. As former Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee overseeing the Postal Department, I had repeatedly flagged the need to revise and repeal the Indian Post Office Act, 1898, a colonial legacy long past its expiry date. But over the past decade we have often seen this Government in the guise of decolonizing our minds and updating colonial era lore, bringing in legislation that is equally if not more arbitrary and unreasonable, and that more often than not encroaches upon the fundamental rights of countless Indians.

Sadly, so it is with this Bill. Even as it seeks to revise a colonial Bill, this Bill retains its draconian and colonial provisions, that too while eliminating the burden of accountability which a governmental enterprise like India Post ought constitutionally to shoulder. Sadly, it offers no new ideas to bring our post offices into the 21st Century. As someone who has great respect for the Minister, I am disappointed to see him putting this half-baked reform before the House.

Mr. Speaker, let me first remind the House that there is no debate on any piece of legislation happening in a vacuum. There is always a context. Around a month or so ago, several outspoken Members of the Opposition, including myself, received a threat notice from Apple warning us of the fact that State-sponsored attackers were trying to infiltrate our phones, by doing which they could extract sensitive data and even hack our phones, cameras and microphones. Was it really so long ago that the threat of Pegasus loomed large on us all, surveilling our every move and tracking our every utterance? These are the realities we must bear in our minds as we begin debating this Bill, which strikes at the heart of our constitutional values, our Fundamental Rights, compelling every ordinary Indian to live at the mercy of our State's pervasive and suspicious mistrust of its own citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the one hand the Government says that it wishes to reinvigorate the Indian Postal Service by widening the range of services it renders so that it becomes more useful to the Indian populace. We heard the eloquent examples of my friend, the Minister. I will come back to this issue because I do not think that the Bill does this at all.

14.22 hrs (Shri N.K. Premachandran *in the Chair*)

Sir, on the other side, the Government through this Bill grants itself sweeping powers to infringe upon the citizens' rights to freedom of speech and expression as guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution and our right to privacy which the hon. Supreme Court in K.S. Puttaswamy case recognised as being a sub-set of the right to life and liberty enshrined in Article 21. The Government assumes these powers through clause 9 of the Bill. I would urge all of our friends to look on their screens clauses 9 and 10 of the Bill. This entitles that, using merely a notification, to empower any officer to cause any item in course of transmission through the post office to be intercepted, opened or detained in the interest of security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States etc. or upon the occurrence of any contravention of any of the provisions of this Act or any other law. Now, these are strikingly vague grounds and can be construed to cover anything that our Government does not like.

Indeed, the Government does not only seek arbitrary powers to spy on Indians by rummaging through their private correspondence and their shipments as clause 9(2) makes clear that they may also direct India Post to dispose of, which is to say to destroy or trash, any item, any personal article that has fallen foul of their ambiguous definition of what constitutes a threat to India's interest. Further through clause 9(3), our Government again by a simple notification may empower any officer of the post office to confiscate any item. I am summarising a rather long legal clause which is before you all on your screens.

Now, there is a lot to dissect in this one section alone, starting from the fact that the Supreme Court in the 1996 judgement of People's Union for Civil Liberties *versus* the Union of India, a matter concerning the interception of telecommunications, opined that a just and fair procedure must exist to regulate the power of interception because in its absence, it is not possible to safeguard the rights of citizens under Article 19(1)(a) and Article 21. To fill this gap, the Supreme Court laid down several safeguards such as establish the necessity for interception, limit the validity of interception orders, authorisation is required from high-ranking officials and, most important, interception orders are to

be examined by a review committee. I cannot help but wonder why our Government in conceiving of this Bill failed to take such a crucial verdict of the Supreme Court into account for as it stands, the Bill is far more detrimental to the Fundamental Rights of Indian citizens than the colonial era law it seeks to supplant.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, in some ways, the 1898 Act was less arbitrary because though it allowed interception, it specified, unlike this Bill, the circumstances under which interception could be carried out.

Section 26 of the 1898 Act empowered the Central Government, or a State Government, or a specially authorised Officer to direct through a written order any postal article to be intercepted, detained or disposed on the occurrence of any public emergency or in the interest of public safety or tranquillity.

Now, while examining the 1898 Act in 1968, the Law Commission opined that the term 'emergency' is not explicitly defined and provides far too wide a grant for interpretation, and therefore, for interception. The Commission added that a public emergency cannot be a constitutionally permissible ground for interception if it does not impinge on the security of the State, public order or any other thing specified in the Constitution. Therefore, it can certainly be said that the criterion of emergency which unfortunately again features in this 2023 Bill may be beyond the scope of the reasonable restrictions permitted by our Constitution.

Even as recently as 2015, in the matter of *Shreya Singhal vs. the Union of India*, the Supreme Court reaffirmed that arbitrary grants for restricting freedom of speech and expression are unconstitutional. Here, once again, our Government is being wilfully indifferent to the wise counsel of the highest court of our land. In fact, by not even defining what sort of matter and material cannot be sent through post, something which the 1898 Act does, our Government has sought to make Indians yet more vulnerable to this attempted mass surveillance.

Section 9 of the Post Office Bill, 2023 not only grants the Government all valiant powers to intrude into our lives by intercepting, detaining, and destroying our correspondence or our consignments, it also does not provide for any mechanism whereby the concerned citizen can even be informed of their correspondence or consignment having been intercepted, and whereby they can contest India Post's decision to intercept, detain or destroy their correspondence. In other words, there is simply no grievance redressal mechanism in the Bill, an absence which is felt all the more keenly if you just scroll down to Section 10. By keeping Indians in the dark as to the interception, detention or destruction of their correspondence and consignments and by not allowing them to contest these decisions which are inherently arbitrary, our Government has violated every principle of natural justice and due process of law because in cases like these neither will it bother to listen to the other side nor will it grant the concerned citizen the right to make a case for themselves.

In this regard, the 2023 Bill is also violative of Article 14 of our Constitution. The problem of this Bill in not having a grievance redressal mechanism becomes specially agonising when we look at Section 10. What an irony it is, Mr. Chairman, Sir, that today the private courier services in our country are far more accountable to the people of India than the Indian Postal Service which is an undertaking of the Central Government! While the Consumer Protection Act of 2019 holds our private couriers to account, that does not apply to India Post. Now, pursuant to the second sub-

clause of Section 10 of this Bill, no officer of the post office shall incur any liability with regard to a service provided by the post office unless the officer has acted fraudulently or wilfully caused loss, delay or mis-delivery. Now, this clause bolsters our Government's power to intercept, detain or destroy our postal articles without being in any way accountable to the people of India. We also cannot hold postal workers liable for loss, delay or mis-delivery. Then, we will commence a debate about whether the omission was committed wilfully or with a fraudulent intent plunging the ordinary Indian citizen into endless red-tape. Indeed, because the Bill does not provide for a grievance redressal mechanism, Indians have absolutely no avenue to hold the postal service liable and because the Consumer Protection Act does not apply to India Post, the people of India are not entitled to compensation should they incur any loss or damage owing to the post office's negligence. Interestingly, the prescription of liabilities is itself a power that the Government assigns itself. If you look at Section 10(1), it says: "Notwithstanding anything in any other law for the time being enforced, the post office shall not incur any liability, except such liability as may be prescribed with regard to a service provided by the post office."

Now, Mr. Chairman, Sir, I must say to the Minister that when you yourself can decide where you will be accountable to the people, when you yourself can choose whether you want to be accountable to the people, and how much you are accountable to the people, that means you are not accountable at all.

This is the broad meaning of this outrageously drafted Bill.

To send across a letter or parcel through India Post is to fling it essentially into a black hole with no accountability whatsoever as to whether it will reach its destination or be received by whoever you are sending it to. What is more, you would not even get to know what happened with your letter or parcel because nowhere in the Bill does there exist any provision to notify the concerned citizen that their item has been intercepted.

Now, this is profoundly worrying. It would have been one thing to exempt postal workers from liability relating to intercepting items. That the Bill does not even consider them liable for such blatant wrongs as loss, misdelivery, delay or damage is downright unacceptable not least for those e-commerce portals that are the backbone of Digital India and they choose to deliver their products through India Post.

I love those examples our Minister gave us. Miss so and so here, Begum so and so there and so on have been sending those items. But under this law, if those items are damaged, misdelivered or stolen, no one will know anything. They would not even be notified. What kind of Bill is this Mr. Chairman?

All in all, Section 10 might well be interpreted as the Government absolving the employees of the Indian Postal Service -- even though they are public servants -- of the accountability that all public servants legally have to the citizens they serve. Moreover, given that India Post is planning to add an array of financial services and products to its portfolio, it is imperative, especially while rendering services where citizens' sensitive data is involved that we proceed with the utmost caution protecting our consumers and our citizens from fraud, data breaches and similar transgressions.

I should like to remind this House that it is only by strictly ensuring that postal workers are liable for wrongdoings that we will succeed in reinvigorating India Post. Ultimately, in the absence of a grievance redressal mechanism, the citizens will have no option but to seek justice by moving the courts in accordance with Articles 32 and 226 of our Constitution and that will merely increase the pendency of cases piled on top of our already overburdened judiciary.

Mr. Chairman Sir, let me draw your attention to the fact that the Indian Post Office Act of 1898, this colonial law, was far more accountable to the Indian people than this new law which is presented to us as a break from the colonial past. Under the 1898 Act, for instance, the illegal opening of postal articles by a postal officer was punishable with imprisonment for up to two years or a fine or both. In stark contrast, under this Bill of 2023, there is no repercussion for such a flagrant violation of our right to privacy.

As I have already mentioned, the Bill in Section 10 states that no officer will be liable with regard to a service rendered by India Post. Of course, the fact is that if an officer does indeed wilfully commit transgressions, the Bill does not specify what the punishment is, unlike the 1898 Bill. Formerly, under the 1898 Act, transgressions like theft, misappropriation, destruction of postal articles by an employee of India Post used to be punishable with imprisonment up to seven years and a fine. But the Jan Vishvas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023 struck off all such provisions. All such punishments are gone. So, first Jan Vishvas watered down the offences and penalties that an officer of India Post was subject to under the 1898 Act, and now this Bill, by dispensing with these offences and penalties wishes to make the officers of India Post, the employees and therefore our Government wholly unanswerable to the citizen of India. Wah!

Now, the jarring absence of either any liabilities or a grievance redressal mechanism in the Post Office Bill, 2023 flies in the face of how the same Minister's other Ministry, the Railways, holds itself accountable to Indians. The Railway Claims Tribunal Act, 1987 instituted Tribunals for dealing with complaints against the Indian Railways for lapses of services. If your 2023 Bill here did not want to go so far as to establish a Grievance Redressal Tribunal, at the very least you could have incorporated the Supreme Court's 1996 recommendations regarding the exercise of the power of interception.

Through this Bill, our Government has sought to make itself the judge, jury and executioner in all those cases where a citizen's correspondence or consignment is found violative of the Bill's excessively vague ground. On this Bill, there is nothing that is reasonable. There is plenty that is restrictive.

According to the Universal Postal Union, 73 per cent of postal services the world over suggest that without a complete digital overhaul of postal facilities, the survival of post offices is simply not feasible. That are Government, in an age of Digital India, Self-Reliant India, Atmanirbhar India, should fail to lay down the groundwork for such a reinvigoration is unimaginable and saddening. Imagination is what this Bill lacks.

Today, India Post has a monopoly only on conveying letters. Gone are the days when they had monopoly and our post offices could be steeped in antiquity, and staffed with demotivated employees whose only job was to push

files. Our postal services are at a turning point today, and must compete in order to remain relevant. If it envisages India Post as rendering e-commerce, e-government and e-finance services, then our Government ought to move towards its rapid digitization and diversification.

A simple step, just to illustrate the point I am seeking to make, is the introduction of an encrypted, digital post box service being introduced, like an India Post e-mail service which will save Indians quite a lot of money in postage costs. Through this service, citizens can view, manage and organise their digital communications from numerous providers in a single location, that too through just one account. Through this account, citizens can receive and respond to several transactional communications and securely manage by linking it to their UPI, other necessary affairs such as booking railway, bus and air tickets, paying for governmental services - LPG, electricity, water, and so on - alongside paying for subscriptions like Netflix and Spotify. They should also be able to upload and store documents, and receive important notices and reminders. In other words, the goal should be to make India Post useful to the ordinary Indian by thinking out of the box, as also by discussing threadbare in Parliament what sort of facilities we must offer to our citizens, and why? India is not alone in being at this crossroads. Several countries of the European Union ? it was manifested in their Government Benchmark Report 2019 ? have grappled with this, and many of them have reached the conclusion that digital services must be introduced to help postal services survive, and launched them into a glorious new era.

Many European Governments have introduced measures to communicate with their citizens digitally in a secure and trusted manner. Then again, we must remember that citizens will be willing to share their personal data online only if their Government can guarantee them the highest standards of digital safety and security.

HON. CHAIRPERSON: Please conclude.

DR. SHASHI THAROOR: We also have at our disposal a magnificent latticework of real estate that can and must be put to better use and made commercially profitable.

In an economy like ours that is fast becoming an e-commerce delivery chain, as the hon. Minister has said, postmen who are given, of course, to go everywhere in our country to the most remote places can be utilised as a last mile carrier and India Post is collaborating with Amazon already. We have this robust infrastructure and we have lakhs of dedicated postal workers. The endeavour now must be to reimagine and remould it so that the post offices can actually move into the 21st century, and provide financial services which is already mentioned, like India Post Payments Bank. Why not, for example, institutional credit? Nearly 40 per cent of our rural population lacks access to credit ? another gap that India Post can strive to fill.

In many countries, post offices have been repurposed to provide additional services beyond their traditional role. The hon. Minister mentioned several exports from remote areas but that was already there. The work of the post office is sending out any packages. Why can we not think more imaginatively about service delivery? Would it not be wonderful in rural areas to see them transformed into internet hubs that enable students to access educational material

and complete formalities like filling examination forms online, all without any need to venture too far away from their homes? Why not voters? registration and driving licence? Some post offices abroad have expanded their offerings to include retail services including selling stationery, books, and gifts, and so on like the Japan Post Group does. In some countries, post offices have partnered with healthcare providers to offer medical services such as vaccinations, health checkups, and prescription delivery.

HON. CHAIRPERSON: Now, please conclude.

DR. SHASHI THAROOR: I will take just one more minute. Let me just complete it. These are important points.

HON. CHAIRPERSON: You have already spoken on the Bill. That is why, I am saying.

DR. SHASHI THAROOR: I have gone into the Bill in some detail because it is important. We are seriously discussing this Bill. Anyway, I will try and conclude very quickly by just pointing out that the Minister's goals he mentioned are all laudable aspirations. They are crucial for the reinvigoration of India Post. But perhaps the greatest flaws of this Bill, the evident disdain for our fundamental rights, apart from that is the fact that it harps on about its alluring destination, without prescribing a map that will get us there. Nowhere in the Post Office Bill does our Government spell out how exactly it intends to convert India Post into a network for the delivery of citizen centric services. We are being asked to take solace in the fact that once the Bill is passed into law, our Government will whirl a magic wand of rules and regulations and catapult our postal services to bedazzling new heights. There is no specific promises to the citizens of India, other than that the post office will not be accountable, the post office will not be liable. ? (*Interruptions*) Sir, I will just conclude. If this transformation comes at the cost of endangering every Indian citizen's right to free speech and expression, every Indian's right to privacy, every Indian's right to natural justice and the due process of law, then the remedy is worst than the disease. Therefore, I would say this Bill is a great disappointment, and I request the Minister to kindly return to the drawing board and come back with something better.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Jai Hind!

माननीय सभापति : श्री तापिर गाव जी।

? (व्यवधान)

HON. CHAIRPERSON: No, please.

? (*Interruptions*)

श्री कल्याण बनर्जी (श्रीरामपुर) : महोदय, राज्य सभा स्थगित हो गई है?(व्यवधान)

HON. CHAIRPERSON: Rajya Sabha proceedings cannot be quoted here.

? (*Interruptions*)

HON. CHAIRPERSON: No, Rajya Sabha has nothing to do with the Lok Sabha.

? (Interruptions)

श्री तापिर गाव (अरुणाचल पूर्व) : माननीय सभापति महोदय, आज 1898 के इंडियन पोस्ट ऑफिस एक्ट?(व्यवधान) आज 125 साल पुराने ब्रिटिश लिगेसी एक्ट को?(व्यवधान) मैं डाकघर विधेयक, 2023 के समर्थन में बोलने के लिए खड़ा हुआ हूँ?(व्यवधान) आज कांग्रेस पार्टी के लोग इतना हल्ला कर रहे हैं?(व्यवधान)

HON. CHAIRPERSON: Yes, Adhir Ranjan ji.

? (Interruptions)

श्री अधीर रंजन चौधरी (बहरामपुर) : महोदय, अभी-अभी यह खबर मिली है कि आज जो दो शख्स गैलरी में आए थे, वे दोनों बीजेपी पार्टी के किसी एमपी से पास बनवाकर सदन में घुसे थे, तो सुरक्षा कहाँ है?... (व्यवधान) बीजेपी के एमपी खुद?(व्यवधान)

HON. CHAIRPERSON: No. The hon. Speaker has already ordered that at 4 PM there will be a meeting of the Party leaders.

? (Interruptions)

HON. CHAIRPERSON: This will be discussed there, and after that, it will be discussed in the House also.

? (Interruptions)

श्री तापिर गाव : महोदय, आज 125 साल पुराने ब्रिटिश लिगेसी कानून को?(व्यवधान)

HON. CHAIRPERSON: Adhir Ranjan ji was also there at the time when the hon. Speaker was giving the ruling. You were also there.

? (Interruptions)

14.44 hrs

At this stage, Shri Hanuman Beniwal came and stood on the floor near the Table.

श्री तापिर गाव : महोदय, माननीय प्रधानमंत्री मोदी जी और माननीय मंत्री अश्वनी वैष्णव जी, इस बिल को लेकर आए हैं। इस बिल के माध्यम से? (व्यवधान) आज कांग्रेस पार्टी के लोग इतना चिल्ला रहे हैं?(व्यवधान)

कांग्रेस के जमाने में वर्ष 2004 से लेकर 2014 तक 664 पोस्ट ऑफिसेज बंद करवा दिए गए थे। मोदी जी ने सत्ता में आने के बाद वर्ष 2014 से 2023 तक 5,000 नए पोस्ट ऑफिसेज खुलवाए हैं?(व्यवधान) इस साल 5,746 पोस्ट ऑफिसेज देश भर में खुलने जा रहे हैं और खुल रहे हैं?(व्यवधान) इन पोस्ट ऑफिसेज के माध्यम से दूर-दराज और बाहरी इलाकों के गांवों में पोस्टल की सारी सुविधाएं मिल रही हैं?(व्यवधान)

14.45 hrs

At this stage, Shri Kodikunnil Suresh, Shri Kalyan Banerjee,

Shrimati Aparupa Poddar and some other hon. Members came and

Stood on the floor near the Table.

श्री तापिर गाव : सर, कोविड के समय में पोस्टल की बहुत सुविधा मिली थी। मोदी साहब और अश्विनी साहब इस चीज को आगे ले जा रहे हैं? (व्यवधान) आज हिन्दुस्तान में पोस्ट ऑफिस सेविंग्स बैंक में 28 करोड़ अकाउंट खोले गए हैं और इनमें 17 लाख करोड़ रुपये डिपॉजिट भी किए गए हैं। इसके माध्यम से सुकन्या समृद्धि योजना में 3 करोड़ अकाउंट्स खोले गए हैं और 1 लाख 41 हजार करोड़ रुपये डिपॉजिट हुए हैं? (व्यवधान) महिला सम्मान सेविंग्स सर्टिफिकेट्स की ओर से 21 लाख की सेविंग सर्टिफिकेट हुए हैं। पोस्टल सर्विस एक सिटीजन सेंट्रिक सर्विस है। हमारे ऑनरेबल मैनबर ऑफ पार्लियामेंट साहब बोल रहे थे कि अगर नया कानून लाते हैं तो देश की अच्छाई के लिए और सर्विस की अच्छाई के लिए लाते हैं, लेकिन कांग्रेस हर चीज के विरोध में निकल आती है और आप लोग पब्लिक सेवा को भूल जाते हैं? (व्यवधान) पोस्टल ऑफिसेज में पासपोर्ट सेवा केन्द्र बना दिए गए हैं। आज तक 434 पासपोर्ट सेवा केन्द्र देश में खुले हैं, जिनमें 1 करोड़ 25 लाख ऐप्लीकेंट्स को सुविधा मिली है। पोस्टल डिपार्टमेंट की तरफ से आधार एनरोलमेंट के लिए 13,500 सेंटर खुले हैं और इनमें 8.83 करोड़ कस्टमर्स को ट्रांजेक्शन की सुविधा मिली है? (व्यवधान)

सर, कांग्रेस के राज में इंडिया पोस्ट पेमेंट्स बैंक्स में institutions and organisations were to be closed in the country. अब मोदी जी ने इस पोस्टल सर्विस को आगे बढ़ाया। पोस्टल सर्विस में 1.54 लाख एक्सेस पॉइंट्स के साथ 650 ब्रांचेस खुली हैं? (व्यवधान)

HON. CHAIRPERSON: If you go back to your seats, I will give you the opportunity

? (Interruptions)

श्री तापिर गाव : इंडिया पोस्ट पेमेंट्स बैंक्स में 8 करोड़ अकाउंट्स खुले हैं और 8 हजार 800 करोड़ रुपये डिपॉजिट हुए हैं? (व्यवधान)

HON. CHAIRPERSON: When the Speaker was here, when Shashi Tharoor ji was speaking, no disturbance was there, no interruption was there.

? (Interruptions)

श्री तापिर गाव : इसके साथ ही देश में आधार एनेबल्ड पेमेंट्स (एईपीएस) में 10 करोड़ रुपये का ट्रांजेक्शन हुआ है और 3.5 करोड़ डीबीटी अकाउंट्स खुले हैं? (व्यवधान) पब्लिक और हमारे देशवासियों को दूर-दराज गांवों तथा हिमालय में बसे लोगों को भी इस पोस्टल सर्विस से बहुत लोगों को सुविधा मिल रही है। इसलिए मैं इस कानून का समर्थन करता हूँ? (व्यवधान)

मैं कांग्रेस और विपक्ष के लोगों से यह रिक्वैस्ट करूंगा कि पब्लिक सेवा के लिए यह कानून अमेंड करने के लिए 125 साल के बाद लाया गया है? (व्यवधान) इसलिए हम सभी को मिलकर इस बिल को पास करना है ताकि गरीब जनता को देश भर में सुविधा मिले? (व्यवधान) उनको इसकी सेवा मिले, इसलिए मैं इसका समर्थन करता हूँ और साथ ही मैं माननीय मंत्री जी को यह रिक्वैस्ट करूंगा? (व्यवधान) हम जैसे गांव और दूर-दराज के इलाकों में जो लोग रहते हैं, उनको नेशनलाइज्ड बैंक्स सुविधाएं नहीं दे पाते हैं? (व्यवधान) इस पोस्टल सर्विस से हिमालय बेल्ट के दूर-दराज गांवों में पोस्टल सर्विस का अकाउंट खुले? (व्यवधान) सेंटर खुले ताकि हमारी गरीब जनता इसका उपयोग कर सके? (व्यवधान) देश भर में इसको फैलाना चाहिए ताकि गरीब जनता को इससे सहायता मिल सके? (व्यवधान) वे लोग इसका उपयोग कर सकें। इन शब्दों के साथ मैं इस बिल का समर्थन करता हूँ। जय हिंद।

HON. CHAIRPERSON: Now, the next speaker is Shrimati Kanimozhi Karunanidhi ji.

? (*Interruptions*)

14.50 hrs

(Hon. Speaker *in the Chair*)

? (व्यवधान)

माननीय अध्यक्ष : माननीय सदस्यगण, मैंने आप सभी की भावनाओं को पहले ही यहां व्यक्त कर दिया है। मैंने 4 बजे इस विषय पर सभी दलों की मीटिंग बुलाई है।

सभा की कार्यवाही चार बजे तक के लिए स्थगित की जाती है।

14.51 hrs

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Sixteen of the Clock.

16.00 hrs

The Lok Sabha re-assembled at Sixteen of the Clock.

(Hon. Speaker *in the Chair*)

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