

TWENTY-SIXTH REPORT
STANDING COMMITTEE ON
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
(2001)

(THIRTEENTH LOK SABHA)

MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS
(DEPARTMENT OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS)

COMPLAINTS/GRIEVANCES REDRESSAL
MACHINERY IN DOT/BSNL/MTNL

Presented to Lok Sabha on 24.8.2001
Laid in Rajya Sabha on 24.8.2001



LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

August, 2001/Sravana, 1923 (Saka)

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COMPOSITION OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE
ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
(2001)

Shri Somnath Chatterjee — *Chairman*

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SECRETARIAT

1. **Shri P. D. T. Achary** — **Joint Secretary**
2. **Shri S. K. Sharma** — **Deputy Secretary**

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairman, Standing Committee on Information Technology (2001) having been authorised by the Committee to submit the Report on its behalf, present this Twenty-Sixth Report (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) on 'Complaints/Grievances Redressal Machinery in DoT/BSNL/MTNL' pertaining to the Ministry of Communications (Department of Telecommunications).

2. The Committee took oral evidence of the representatives of the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd. (MTNL) at its sitting held on 5 October, 2000. The Report was considered and adopted by the Committee at its sitting held on 22 August, 2001.

3. The Committee wishes to express its thanks to the representatives of DoT, BSNL and MTNL for appearing and placing before it detailed information that the Committee desired in connection with the examination of the subject.

4. For facility of reference and convenience the observations and the recommendations of the Committee have been printed in bold letters in the body of the Report.

NEW DELHI;
22 August, 2001
31 Shrawana, 1923 (Saka)

SOMNATH CHATTERJEE,
Chairman,
Standing Committee on
Information Technology.

REPORT

Introductory

Telecom services are vital for socio-economic development of the country. An efficient and advanced telecom infrastructure is the *sine-qua-non* for development and integration of a vast country like India. In recent years, considerable efforts have been made for expansion of telecom network and services. However, the quality of service has not received the desired attention. This fact can easily be gauged by the number of complaints received by the Department and public representatives all over the country. The Committee has also been receiving frequent representations from the people about the inadequacy of quality in service. The Committee, therefore, decided to examine the facts which hamper the growth and improvement of telecom service in the country.

Public Grievances Redressal Machinery

2. The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) in a note has stated that the process of handling of public grievances/complaints can be divided into three stages. In the first stage, steps are initiated by the Department to minimise the cases of public grievances by providing relevant information required by the subscribers. In the second stage, Public Grievances Redressal System (PGRM) has been set up by the Department at the headquarters and at various area levels for handling complaint cases. The PGRM at Headquarters receives complaints from the public and calls reports from the Public Grievances (PG) cells operating in different areas. The PG cells in various areas in turn forward the complaint cases to field-units working under them. Apart from receipt of complaints from Headquarters, the PG cells in various areas also receive complaints directly from Directorate of Public Grievances (DPG), from the subscribers of their respective areas etc. In third stage, DoT initiates steps to monitor the performance of various units and takes *suo-motu* action for the benefit of the subscribers.

Public Grievances

3. The Committee was informed that Public Grievances cases received by PGRM Hqrs during the years 1997-98 to 2000-2001 were as follows.

Circle	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001
MTNL DL	1101	1322	661	1421
MTNL MB	103	66	73	87
Other Circle	7736	6041	7322	5119
Total	8940	7429	8056	6627

4. The Committee asked about the procedure evolved to register complaints/grievances of subscribers and whether any record of complaints/grievances registered on telephone and through written communication has been maintained. In reply, DoT has stated that the general procedure is to lodge the service complaint by dialing 198 or xxx 2198. Further, Interactive Voice Response System and Computerised fault repair services are available in MTNL, Mumbai and Delhi and several other places in the country through which subscribers could book the complaints 24 hours a day. Moreover, grievances which are received by the PG cell of TCHQ are registered in the cell and a registration/dairy no. is allotted for each grievance. Thereafter, all complaints/grievances are sent to concerned telecom circle for prompt remedial action.

5. As regard adherence to any fixed time frame for disposal of complaints/grievances, the following information was furnished to the Committee.

Category of Complaints/grievances	Time taken to redress
(i) Issue of acknowledgment and forwarding of petition to the concerned Circles/units.	2 weeks in cases received by the circle directly.
(ii) Issue of final reply to the petitioner	6 weeks in cases received by the circle directly.
(iii) Disposal of DPG cases	within 4 weeks of receipt from DPG by the circles
(iv) Disposal of MoC/VIP/Chairman cases	within 4 weeks of receipt from TCHQ by the circle

6. Referring to the above statement, the Committee desired to know whether the number of complaints/grievances mentioned above included telephonically communicated as well as written complaints. In reply, the Secretary, DoT stated that in non-MTNL areas, only written complaints are received at District, Circle and Headquarter levels. In other words, the record of complaints does not include the ones registered on phone through 198 services. He further added that phone fault complaints are not included in the above figures.

7. In reply to another query in this regard by the Committee, the Member (Services), Telecom Commission stated in evidence that roughly 15 per cent per month is the fault rate, in other words out of 3 crore telephones installed in the country there are about 45 lakh complaints per month about faulty functioning throughout the country.

8. The Committee then asked what action is taken in case complaints/grievances are not redressed within the prescribed time frame as mentioned above. The Secretary, DoT submitted that if a complaint remains unattended for a particular period of time, the head of the Circle is required to monitor and fix responsibility for that.

9. The Committee, in the course of on-the-spot study tours to various places in the country, tried to get first hand information about the functioning of telecom network through interaction with individuals, representative bodies of trade, industry, commerce, consumers and social organisations etc., and came to the conclusion that there is a lot of discontentment among people about faulty functioning of phones. The Committee as well as the Members of Parliament have been receiving regular complaints about the fault prone telecom service. In this context, the Committee asked whether the Circle heads were actually monitoring the service to fix responsibility. To the utter astonishment of the Committee, the Secretary, DoT responded that the procedure evolved was more on paper.

10. The Committee then desired to know how many grievances pertaining to various circles were pending in TCHQ. In reply, the following statement was furnished to the Committee:—

Pending PG cases in DoT HQs

Sl.No.	Name of the Circle	VIP	DPG	Others	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Andman & Nicobar	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
2.	Andhra Pradesh	Nil	01	03	04

1	2	3	4	5	6
3.	Assam	01	01	01	05
4.	Bihar	27	17	11	55
5.	Gujarat	01	02	10	13
6.	Haryana	03	04	14	21
7.	Himachal Pradesh	01	Nil	Nil	01
8.	Jammu & Kashmir	01	01	03	05
9.	Karnataka	01	02	Nil	03
10.	Kerala	Nil	Nil	03	03
11.	Madhya Pradesh	03	01	06	10
12.	Maharashtra	04	01	01	06
13.	North East	Nil	02	01	03
14.	Orissa	Nil	05	04	09
15.	Punjab	01	01	01	03
16.	Rajasthan	01	01	05	07
17.	Tamilnadu	Nil	02	04	06
18.	U.P. (East)	03	07	11	21
19.	U.P. (West)	13	13	13	39
20.	West Bengal	01	02	03	06
21.	Calcutta Telephones	Nil	03	Nil	03
22.	Chennai Telephones	06	Nil	02	08
23.	MTNL Delhi	16	47	18	81
24.	MTNL Mumbai	02	Nil	Nil	02
Total		85	115	114	314

11. A perusal of the above statement revealed that a total number of 314 cases were pending at the DoT HQRS out of which 85 were VIP cases, 115 were DPG and 114 pertaining to others. Out of the 314 cases, Bihar accounted for 55 cases (27-VIP, 17-DPG and 11-others), U.P. (West) 39 Cases (13 each in VIP, DPG and others) and U.P. (East) and Haryana 21 cases each. The largest number of pending cases was in MTNL, Delhi where 81 cases (16-VIP, 47-DPG and 18 others) were pending for more than two months.

12. In this context, the Committee desired to know the reasons for such a large number of cases lying pending for more than two months. It was replied that those complaints were general in nature like improvement of services, addition of new services, irregularity/malpractices in the provision of services, misbehaviour of the staff etc. and therefore, required more to settle. It has further been stated that PG cell of DoT has stepped up its efforts in chasing/monitoring the progress of the cases through E-mail, frequent telephonic contact at officers' level in addition to the usual correspondence.

13. The Committee then asked how MTNL, Delhi has higher number of pending cases as compared to other Circles. It was replied the PG Cells stationed at Delhi are within easy reach of local customers and moreover the customers at Delhi are more conscious about their rights.

14. The Committee desired to know whether the PG Cells were adequately staffed for smooth and speedy disposal of complaints/grievances. In reply, DoT has stated that staff provided in PG section are not adequate for handling large number of grievances received from all over the country. Therefore, sanction of additional three posts of ADs and one post of ADG is under process. Apart from the shortage of staff, the other constraint is stated to be the delay in full computerisation of the PG Cell.

15. Asked if the sanction of four additional posts would improve the position, the Secretary, DoT candidly admitted that getting more staff in Sanchar Bhavan alone would not redress the problem.

16. The Committee then desired to know the steps taken by the PG Cell to monitor the cases for their direct disposal and the time limit prescribed for the Circles to furnish the compliance reports. It was stated in reply that the PG Cell has not been monitoring the progress of direct disposal cases. However, 15 days time-limit has been prescribed for the Circles to furnish compliance reports.

17. To a specific query of the Committee regarding measures taken by BSNL and MTNL to redress the grievances of the subscribers expeditiously, it has been stated that PG Cells have been working at Secondary Switching Area (SSA) and Circle levels. These are looked after by PG officers who are of the rank of SDE/DE and DGM. Departmental officers are accessible on all working days to the public for redressal of their complaints and grievances. Further, all the field officers of Grievance Cells have been instructed to remain in their office and be available to the public between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. on all working days.

18. It has been further stated that in MTNL Delhi, customers can meet respective GMs without prior appointment from Monday to Thursday between 1500 Hrs. and 1600 hrs. and on Friday between 1000 hours to 1300 hours for redressal of their grievances. In addition, CGM is available twice a week on Tuesday and Friday for grievance redressal without any prior appointment. At the HQrs, Director (PG) meets the public every Wednesday from 1000 hours to 1300 hours. In addition, MTNL has taken certain other measures like issuance of pagers to line staff, opening up of Quick Restoration Cell (QRC) and Customer Service Centres, regular holding of permanent telephone Adalats etc. to expeditiously redress the grievances of the subscribers.

19. The Committee asked about the reasons for wide spread dissatisfaction amongst the subscribers despite the fact that so many measures as mentioned above have been taken to redress their grievances. In reply, DoT in a note has stated that in certain cases/ areas depending upon special circumstances, dissatisfaction has still been felt by the customers. This is attributable to the fact that the Department's customer interface still leaves a lot to be desired.

Position in Rural Areas

20. The Committee pointed out that in rural areas, complaints such as non-functioning of telephones, excess telephone bills, supply of faulty telephone instruments etc. remain unattended for months and the rural subscribers have to run from pillar to post to get their grievances redressed. DoT, in a note furnished to the Committee, has stated that rural telephone network is laid in sparsely populated areas and in some cases, cable pass through difficult terrain and therefore it takes time to repair fault in rural areas. Moreover, the maintenance personnel who look after a group of exchanges are not necessarily stationed at each Exchange. Further, irregular power supply, inadequate transport facilities and shortage of skilled maintenance personnel make the situation worse. Therefore, it takes comparatively a longer time to rectify the faults in rural areas.

21. Asked to state measures initiated to strengthen the grievances redressal machinery in rural areas, it was stated that fault booking on 198 has been centralised at the Short Distance Charging Centre (SDCC) level. The maintenance in-charge *i.e.* SDE has been provided with a vehicle to improve the functioning of fault rectification. They are required to visit the Exchanges under their charge periodically and meet the public to redress their grievances. Further, action has been taken to recruit more JTOs to man the network in rural areas.

22. The Committee specifically desired to know whether records of public grievance in rural areas are being maintained. It was replied that it has not been possible to carry out the required paper work to maintain such records in rural areas because of severe shortage of supervisory/administrative staff. However, records of public grievance cases received from rural areas are being maintained in PG Cell of Headquarter.

Telephone Adalats

23. To a further query, the Committee was informed that Telephone Adalats are being held every three months to settle the complaints/grievances of the consumers. In some cases, if a subscriber does not turn up or if the case is required to be referred to the CGMs etc. then a few cases are postponed to the next Adalat. Asked to furnish the details about the number of cases settled through Telephone Adalats during the last three/four years and the nature of cases pending, if any in the Adalats, it was replied that data in this regard is not being monitored centrally.

24. The Committee desired to know the number of complaints/grievances pending in Consumer Forum against MTNL. It was stated that as on September 2000 in MTNL, Delhi 807 cases and in MTNL, Mumbai 139 cases were pending in Consumer Forum.

25. In the course of evidence, the Committee asked that instead of compelling the consumer to continue the proceedings in the Consumer Forum, why the Department/BSNL/MTNL themselves do not take initiative to settle the complaints. The Secretary, DoT replied that the complaints/grievances of the consumers should be redressed at the lower level itself.

30. The Committee further asked whether any analysis has been made to find out the break up of the fault rates *i.e.* actually where the fault occurs the most. The Secretary, DoT stated that with the improvement of technology, particularly in Exchanges, internal faults have come down to two per cent whereas external faults constitute 98 per cent of faults. Asked to differentiate between 'internal' and 'external' faults, the Secretary clarified that internal fault means only the faults in exchange equipment whereas external faults suggest complete outdoor plant including fault in the last mile which connects the drop wire to the main instrument.

31. The Member(S) elaborated the point stating that indoor or exchange faults are less than two per cent; cable faults, unless and until the cables are stolen or washed away, are between two to six per cent; drop wire or the last mile faults are around sixty per cent and instrument and house wiring faults are ten to twenty per cent.

32. The Committee asked why Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (BSNL) has not been able to achieve the target in fault rate rectification and what action has been contemplated to bring down the fault rate in its area of operation. In reply, it has been stated that the network operated by BSNL consists of various types of copper cables in the outdoor plant. A large quantity of such cables has become very old and fault prone for which fault rate has been consistently high. Efforts have been made to reduce the fault rate by rehabilitation of outdoor plant which includes cables, pillars, DPs etc. with the aim of bringing down the fault rate to single digit. Replacement of old cables and use of five pair cables instead of drop wire for extending connection to the subscriber's premises are stated to be some of the additional measures being taken by BSNL in this regard.

33. The CMD, BSNL supplemented in evidence that the approach has to be in the long term, an overall improvement in the network. Therefore, BSNL's approach would be to try and get the most effective methods, make them available to units, ask them to choose for themselves the most effective method for their area and try to implement the same in a particular time frame.

38. In reply to another specific query, it was stated that instructions have been issued from time to time by Telecom Headquarters to the field officers to be polite and courteous in their dealings with the public. Further, in order to bring attitudinal changes in respect of staff at cutting edge level, behavioural training has been imparted to the operative staff manning trunk, special services and fault repairs. After such training programmes, significant improvement has been noticed in the behavioural pattern of the staff.

39. Asked to state whether any surprise checks are conducted at the field level and action taken against the impolite and discourteous offices, it has been stated that surprise checks are conducted and impolite/discourteous officers are counselled. It has further been stated that disciplinary action has been taken against erring officers by issuing them strict warning or transferring them to positions which do not encounter public contact.

40. The Committee pointed out that non-shifting of telephones, delay in fault repair, wrong billing, non-receipt of bills etc. constitute bulk of the complaints/grievance of the consumers and desired to know why it has not been possible to overcome these problems with a positive approach. The Secretary, DoT replied that the entire mindset towards the customer services has to change as dissatisfaction of the customers in 90 per cent cases is probably due to the 'human response mechanism'. He further stated:

"Unfortunately, I admit and I beg pardon for this, we have not been able to set a human approach in providing service".

41. Referring to the Special Cell constituted in Sanchar Bhavan to look after complaints/grievances of MPs and VIPs, the Committee pointed out that the Special Cell so constituted was not functioning properly and asked why a special favour was accorded to MPs and VIPs by a public service Department and what would be expected from the General Public Grievance Cell when the Special Cell itself was not functioning properly. The Secretary, DoT responded that a separate Cell has been constituted for VIPs and MPs in the office of the Minister to supplement Department's effort to deal with all complaints with the importance that they deserve. He simultaneously stated that a whole the efforts are to give the same service to everybody.

42. The Committee further pointed out that one of the reasons for wrong billing, the major source of complaints/grievances of the subscribers has been the charges for STD/ISD calls fraudulently made by tampering the outside cables of a subscriber with the connivance of the field staff of BSNL/MTNL. In this context, the Committee asked whether the Department has been aware of this fact and if so how many such cases were detected during the last three years and what measures are taken to check such malpractices. In reply DoT has stated that, although the Department was aware of such fraudulent acts, the record of such cases detected has not been maintained centrally. In order to prevent such malpractices, STD/ISD service with dynamic lock facility has been provided to the subscribers. A customer, on request can obtain a fortnightly meter reading to have a preventive check. Further, Field Units have been instructed to identify calling numbers where call beyond a regular figure are registered in a given time. Such a subscriber is intimated by Exchange Maintenance Staff about such calls. In addition, all vital points where there is a possibility of deliberate mischief or tampering of telephone lines, like distribution points, are being kept locked. Moreover, to avoid clerical errors, billing work has been computerised in most of the Secondary Switching Areas (SSAs).

North-East States

43. The Committee pointed out that during its on-the-spot study tour to the North-Eastern States, working of telephone facilities was reported to be far from satisfactory and asked about the measures initiated by the Department to improve telephone services in those areas. In reply, it has been stated that telephone facilities are being provided in rural areas in the North-East Circles despite so many constraints. The Department further stated that provision of stable commercial power supply for the telephone exchanges and improvement in road connectivity would facilitate telecom services as well as its proper maintenance in N-E States. As regards position of complaints/grievances in North-Eastern States, the Committee was informed that no case of public grievances/complaints has been pending for more than two months in the North-East Area.

44. The Committee further pointed out that most of the linemen in the North-East States are reported to be overage and as a result they find it difficult to climb telephone poles to repair faults. In this context, the Committee asked about the alternate measures taken by the Department. The Department has replied that in North-East Circles most of the linemen are old due to ban on recruitment in the concerned cadre since 1989. It has further been stated that after the introduction of the re-structuring scheme, the cadre of linemen has been declared as a 'wasting cadre' and hence no further recruitment has been done. However, some posts are being created in the cadre of telephone mechanic as per the departmental norms and recruitment is being made, which will improve the situation considerably. Moreover, in order to avoid usage of poles and drop wires, use of wireless technology and cables in the subscribers access network as well as wall mounted DPs at the subscribers premises has been undertaken.

45. The Committee learnt that there are 342 Telephone Advisory Committees (TAC) all over the country. Each TAC is required to hold its meeting normally every quarter when Parliament is not in session. Matters regarding service complaints, improvement of telecom service, cable problems etc. are some of the common problems reported by the Members in TAC meetings.

46. The Committee asked whether TACs met regularly all over the country, especially in North-Eastern States and if so, what are the general recommendations of TAC in improving services in the North-East Region. In reply, DoT in a note has stated that TAC meetings are held regularly all over the country including North-East States. Details of TAC meetings held in North-Eastern States during 1999-2000 are stated to be as under:—

Name of State	No. of Meeting held	Last Meeting held on
Arunachal Pradesh	2	June, 2000
Manipur	1	21.07.1999
Meghalaya	2	19.07.2000
Mizoram	2	26.09.2000
Nagaland	1	12.05.2000
Tripura	2	January, 2000

Overcharging by Hotels

49. In evidence, the Committee pointed out that different Star Hotels are charging the customers astronomical prices for usage of telephones and whether the Department could take any measure in this regard. The Secretary, DoT replied that there is a distinction between what the Department is recovering from the Hotels and what the Hotels add on as their overheads on phone services etc. He made it clear to the Committee that for their services, the Department recovers from the hotels the normal charges of a telephone. He further stated that even if one complains to the concerned Hotels or to the consumer courts, it is the responsibility of the Hotels to explain how they are adding on to the basic cost and this is an area where the Department has not tried or gone to the court of law. He however, agreed that the matter could be taken up.

50. Asked to state what could be a solution, the Secretary clarified that use of Virtual Calling Cards (VCC) could be one. The Committee pointed out that many Hotels do not allow use of VCCs even. The Secretary, DoT assured that he would take up the matter with the Hotel Association to prevail upon them that at least VCC should be permitted in the Hotel premises.

51. The Committee notes that there are more than 30 million telephones installed by Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd. (MTNL) all over the country and about 4.5 million telephone faults are recorded in a month which comes to 15 percent of the Direct Exchange Lines (DELs). Besides, during the year 2000-2001 6,627 written complaints/grievances were also received in the Public Grievances and Investigation (PG&I) cell at the Telecom Head Quarters, New Delhi. Out of these, 6,627 cases, 1,421 pertained to Delhi Telephones, 87 to Mumbai Telephones and 5,119 to other Telecom Circles. Here, it is pertinent to note that the complaints/grievances registered do not include verbal complaints registered on phone number 198 of the Exchanges all over the country as stated by the Secretary, DoT in evidence. Nonetheless, an impression has been given by the Department that it has made a differentiation between "complaints" and "grievances" — complaints are to be lodged verbally whereas grievances are to be communicated in writing. The Committee fails to understand what prompted the Department to go for such a differentiation in view of the fact that customers, when inconvenienced, lodge their complaints over

198 phone service of the respective Exchanges as it is the most convenient method devised by the Department itself for the benefit of the consumers. It is only in rare cases that the complaints are communicated in writing which the Department considers as grievances. The Committee, therefore, does not approve the practice of differentiation between complaints and grievances as resorted to by the Department and recommends that both the terms should be treated with equal importance, synonymous as they are. The Committee further desires that henceforth records of verbal complaints should also be properly maintained alongwith the written complaints so that effective steps are taken in a transparent manner for prompt disposal of complaints/grievances.

52. The Committee notes that for issue of acknowledgment and forwarding the complaint/grievance to the concerned Circles/Units and issue of final reply to the petitioner, the Department has prescribed two weeks and six weeks of time respectively. Similarly, for disposal of DPG/MOC/VIP/Chairman cases, four weeks' time has been prescribed. In case the complaints/grievances remain unattended after the expiry of the prescribed time limit, the head of the circle is required to monitor and fix responsibility. However, in actual practice, this procedure is not being followed in most of the cases as has been admitted by the Secretary, DoT in evidence. It is really distressing to note that the procedure evolved for disposal of public grievances/complaints in a given time frame has remained more on paper. Even though the Head of the Department of Telecommunications and various circle heads are fully aware of this aberration, no step has been taken to enforce strict compliance of the prescribed procedures. The Committee feels that mere prescription of time-limits for disposal of complaints/grievances will in no way benefit the consumers and increase efficiency unless the same are redressed promptly and responsibility is fixed for non-adherence to the prescribed time-limit. It is a well known fact the faulty phones are rarely set right within the prescribed time-limit. The Committee, therefore, impresses upon the Department of Telecommunications to ensure that complaints/grievances of the consumers are redressed promptly failing which individual responsibility be fixed and stringent action taken against the concerned officials.

53. The Committee observes that as 31 October, 2000, 314 cases were pending for more than two months at the DoT Headquarters out of which 85 were VIP cases, 111 DPG cases and 114 other cases. Out of these pending cases 55 pertained to Bihar, 39 to U.P. (West) and 21 cases each to U.P. (East) and Haryana. The largest number of pending cases has been found in MTNL, Delhi where 81 cases (16-VIP, 47-DPG and 18-Others) were lying pending for more than two months as on that date. BSNL's reasoning that there are certain types of complaints which are general in nature like improvement of service, irregularity/malpractices in the provision of services, misbehaviour of staff etc. and hence the delay in disposal of grievances is not at all convincing. The Committee, therefore, recommends that the public grievance cell of DoT should step up its efforts to chase/monitor the progress of pending cases in various circles more vigorously so that public complaints/grievances are attended to promptly.

54. The Committee is surprised to note the reasons advanced for higher number of cases pending in MTNL, Delhi. The two reasons advanced for pending cases in Delhi are that people in Delhi are more awakened and enlightened about their rights and they have easy access to the Public Grievance Cells. It implies that in other Circles, even though the people might be having genuine grievances/complaints about the functioning of their telephones, they can not get the same registered for quick redressal and continue to suffer silently. What really surprises the Committee is the fact that instead of making sincere efforts to dispose of public grievances quickly in Delhi Telephones, the Department is taking recourse to such untenable reasons. The Committee, therefore, urges the Department to gear itself for timely disposal of complaints/grievances in Delhi Telephones as well as in other Circles. The Committee also desires that the Department itself should enlighten the subscribers, through print and electronic media publicity and other means, about the procedure to get their grievances redressed in a given time frame. Besides, the Grievance Cells should invariably be made accessible to the public in each and every Telecom Circle including Mumbai Telephones so that consumers are not inconvenienced at least when registering their complaints.

55. The Committee notes that inadequacy of staff in the PG section of TCHQ and delay in full computerisation of the Public Grievance cell are the reasons put forward for constraints in handling large number of grievances received from all over the country. However, the Secretary, DoT is of the view that sanction of more staff in Sanchar Bhavan alone would not redress the problem. If availability of more staff would not facilitate prompt disposal of complaints/grievances, the solution perhaps lies somewhere else and it becomes the responsibility of the Department itself to see how it can perform better with the available or additional manpower that is at its disposal.

56. The Committee fails to understand why the Public Grievance cell has not been fully computerised as yet. Appreciating the problem and constraints that the staff in the PG cell might be facing due to delay in full computerisation of the cell, the Committee recommends the Department to take immediate measures in this regard in order to facilitate smooth disposal of complaints/grievances.

57. The Committee is concerned to note that Public Grievance cell at the Telecom Headquarters is not monitoring the progress of disposal of complaints/grievances at the circle levels. It has only prescribed a time limit of fifteen days to Circles for furnishing compliance reports to the Headquarters. The Committee does not appreciate such callous approach of a public service Department for the reason that as the administrative Ministry, it is bound to review and monitor the performance of various Circles. The Committee agrees that it may not be feasible for the Department to monitor each and every individual complaint that is supposed to be redressed at the Circle level, but periodical monitoring of the performance of the Circles in disposal of complaints/grievances should never be overlooked or even minimised. Merely by prescribing a time limit of fifteen days to the Circles for furnishing the compliance reports, the Department should not absolve itself of its responsibilities. Therefore, what is required is to ensure that the circles are really serious in dealing with public complaints/grievances, failing which the Department should take disciplinary action.

58. Although BSNL and MTNL have reported to be taking measures like constituting Public Grievance cells in almost all the Secondary Switching Areas (SSAs) and Circles; instructing the field officers to make themselves available to the public on all working days; issuing pagers to the line staff; opening Quick Restoration Cell (QRC) and Customer Service Centres (CSCs) etc. to expeditiously dispose of complaints/grievances, yet the Committee finds from various available sources that people are generally not satisfied with the services rendered by both BSNL and MTNL. The Committee feels that this general dissatisfaction is attributable to the fact that telephone services throughout the Country in respect of external plant and customer interface still leave a lot to be desired. Therefore, it becomes imperative for BSNL and MTNL to further improve their services appreciably if they want to remain in business in the emerging competitive environment when Private Service Providers with improved technology are entering into telecom business in a big way all over the country. Needless to mention, the overall onus lies with DoT to ensure effective customer service from its Public Sector Units at least for their own survival.

59. The Committee observes that due to irregular power supply, inadequate transport facilities, shortage of skilled maintenance personnel, difficult terrain etc. it takes comparatively a longer time to rectify the faults in rural areas for which the Department is taking a number of measures like providing a vehicle to the SDE, recruiting JTOs to man the network in rural areas etc. The Committee feels that while the Department has to withstand natural constraints like difficult terrain in rural areas, other problems like inadequate transport facilities, shortage of skilled manpower etc. can be overcome with timely correctively action. Keeping in view the fact that provision of telephone services particularly its maintenance and rectification of faults are far below expectation in rural areas, the Committee recommends that BSNL/MTNL should activate their maintenance staff through strict supervision and monitoring.

60. The Committee notes with concern that records of public grievances in rural areas are not being maintained on the plea of severe shortage of supervisory/administrative staff. But such records have been stated to be maintained in the Public Grievance cell of Telecom Headquarters. The Committee fails to understand when records of public complaints/grievances are not being maintained at the field level itself *i.e.* rural areas, on what basis it is being maintained at the Headquarter level. The two statements are contradictory and, therefore, should be reconciled. The Committee recommends that henceforth records of public complaints received in rural areas be maintained properly, notwithstanding constraints.

61. The Committee observes that although Telephone Adalats are being held throughout the Country every three months to resolve subscribers' grievances, yet details regarding number of cases settled, number of cases pending, nature of grievances etc. are not being maintained centrally. It is for the Department to explain how it would monitor the performance/achievement of Telephone Adalats when records of such performance are not being maintained at the Headquarters. Needless to say, omissions in this regard should be set right without further loss of time.

62. The Committee notes that Customer Service Centres have been opened in almost all the Secondary Switching Areas (SSAs) with a view to have a single window concept so that the customer requirements are taken care of at one place. But neither any specific study has been made nor feedback invited from the customers regarding functioning and performance of the Customer Service Centres. In view of large scale discontentment amongst the telephone subscribers over the quality of service rendered by the Telephone Department, it becomes much more important to self-assess the performance of schemes innovated for the benefit of the customers. In the absence of such appraisal, things cannot be improved. The Committee, therefore, recommends DoT to take up some sample cases, make an indepth study and invite feedback from the customers so that such schemes intended to provide the customers with all the facilities under one roof do not go awry.

63. The Committee notes that during the year 2000-2001 the all India target for fault rate was 10.5 while the actual fault rate has been 14.7 per 100 telephones whereas in Delhi telephones, the corresponding target was 14.7 and the actual rate has been 31.7. In this context, the Committee notes that with most of the old exchanges having been replaced with digital technology, internal fault rate *i.e.* faults in Exchange equipments has come down to around two percent. However, external faults *i.e.* cable faults, dropwire or the last mile faults, receiving instruments and house wiring faults constitute approximately 98 percent of the total faults. BSNL's reasoning that it has inherited a legacy of old and fault prone copper cable network and hence higher fault rate cannot be taken at its face value by the Committee simply for the reason that it was the position prevailing all over the country and in fact, Delhi was better placed in this respect. While the all India fault rate is 14.7 per hundred telephones, Delhi *i.e.* MTNL area has more than double *i.e.* 31.7 per hundred

fault rate. The position therefore requires to be explained properly. Further, since BSNL is responsible to provide telephone service all over the country excluding MTNL areas, it should make every endeavour to see that customers get fault free service. In this regard, measures taken by BSNL to rehabilitate the outdoor plant which includes cables, pillars, DPs etc. are steps in right direction and should be pursued vigorously/properly in order to bring down the fault rate. Most importantly and as has been pointed out by the CMD, BSNL, the approach should be to get and ask the Circles to choose for themselves the most effective method for their area and try to implement the same in a given time-frame.

64. Fault rate as high as 31.7 per 100 phones in Delhi is a matter of serious concern to the Committee. The reasoning that Delhi is developing at a much faster rate and thereby damaging MTNL's cables in the process is not a tenable reason for such a high fault rate in Delhi because the matter could be taken up with the agencies at the appropriate level in order to protect the cables as well as the interest of the telephone subscribers. Similarly, it is shocking to hear that maintenance of external plant network in MTNL, Delhi has almost been ignored due to thrust on achievement of productivity targets and reducing the wait list period for New Telephone Connections (NTCs). It shows lack of foresightedness in planning and complacency in approach of Delhi Telephones towards its customers, to say the least. The Committee fails to understand what good it would make if the wait list period for NTCs is reduced when a very large number of customers, who have already got telephone connections, are suffering due to frequent faults. Therefore, alongwith providing new connections, maintenance aspect requires top-most attention.

65. Putting a DP on the wall of the building or taking inside it, providing Optical Fibre Cables (OFCs) and Wireless in Local Loop (WLL) service etc. are some of the appropriate measures that are being adopted by MTNL, Delhi to bring down the fault rate. Over and above all these measures what demands urgent attention is to change the entire mindset of the telephone department towards the customer services as dissatisfaction of the customers in 90 percent cases is perhaps due to 'human response mechanism', as has been admitted by the Secretary, DoT. That behavioral training is being imparted to the operative staff and significant improvement has been noticed in their behaviour are clearly inadequate in view of the rampant discontentment prevalent amongst the subscribers against Delhi Telephones. Therefore, exercises should be intensified for bringing attitudinal changes in the working staff/officers with a view to enabling them to address the problem of repeated faults as well as to interact better with the customers.

66. In this context, the Committee cannot but refer to the special call constituted at Sanchar Bhavan to look after VIP and MP cases the reason for which does not impress the Committee. Secretary, DoT's statement that Department's effort is to provide the same service to everybody is negated by the constitution of such a cell, more so in view of the poor functioning of even the special cell as would be evidenced from the resentments expressed, more often than not, by VIPs and Members of Parliament against the service they are getting. Such special privileges by a Public Service Department to a special category of subscribers are not justified when subscribers generally are not being attended to properly.

67. The Committee notes that one of the major reasons for excess billing is charges for fraudulently made STD/ISD calls from the telephones of the subscribers with connivance of the field staff. Although a number of measures like provision of dynamic locking facility, computerisation of billing work etc. have been adopted to check such malpractices, yet these are not tamper proof, particularly for the staff who have access to it. The junction boxes should therefore be properly maintained, sealed and secured. Even though arrangements have been made for surprise checks, yet it has failed to deter the delinquent officials. Therefore, monitoring and vigilance in this regard requires to be further strengthened.

68. The Committee finds that telephone facilities in the North-Eastern States are far from satisfactory. Department's reply that telephone facilities are being provided in the North-East despite so many constraints sounds as if a favour were being done to the people of those areas. In other words, as sole service provider, BSNL is obliged to provide effective telephone services throughout the country especially in the uncovered and neglected areas and in the process, if it faces constraints, it has to overcome the same. DoT, as the administrative Ministry should help resolve those constraints instead of providing them as an excuse for non-performance. Therefore, the Committee recommends that all possible measures be taken to facilitate better telephone services in the North-Eastern States and also in J&K.

69. The Committee notes that due to ban on recruitment since 1989 most of the linemen in North-East areas are too old to climb the telephone poles to repair faults. In order to avoid poles and dropwires, the Department has innovated use of wireless technology and cables in the network besides providing wall mounted DPs at the subscribers premises. Moreover, recruitment is being done in the cadre of telephone mechanic which will improve the position. The Committee feels that these are steps in right direction and should be continued so that older people are not forced to climb the poles and fault repair is done at a faster rate.

70. The Committee cannot agree with the reply given by the Department that Telecom Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings are being held regularly *i.e.* every quarter throughout the country. As would be seen from a statement furnished by the Department itself, during the year 1999-2000 only one meeting each was held in Manipur and Nagaland whereas two meetings each were held in other four North-East States. The Committee recommends that such meetings should be held regularly and the recommendations of the TACs be taken more seriously.

71. The Committee notes that 425 PCOs under MTNL, Mumbai were raided in the month of February, 2000 and 171 cases of overcharging were detected and their lines disconnected. It is surprising that statistical record for the whole of the country in respect of such inspections has not been maintained. The Committee disapproves of such piecemeal approach and desires that surprise checks should be carried out at other places also to deter PCO franchisees from their nefarious activities. Based on the findings, stringent action should be taken against the PCO booth operators indulging in fraudulent activities. Records of such inspections should invariably be maintained.

72. The Committee notes that different Star Hotels are charging exorbitant rates for usage of telephones although the Department recovers the normal charges from the Hotels. As assured by the Secretary, DoT in evidence, the Committee would like the Department to take up the matter at the appropriate level. The Committee also desires that the matter pertaining to reluctance of some Hotels in allowing usage of Virtual Calling Cards (VCC) in their premises be seriously taken up with the Hotel Associations and the Committee be informed of the outcome.

73. To sum up, the Committee finds that an undesirable differentiation has been made between 'complaints' and 'grievances'; prescription of time limit for redressal of complaints/grievances has remained more on paper; excuses have been taken recourse to for non-redressal of grievances; important records are not being maintained in most of the cases; fault rate has taken menacing proportion especially in MTNL, Delhi; utility and performance of Telephone Adalats and Customer Service Centres have not been assessed; lack of positive human approach has caused widespread discontentment amongst the consumers; overall telephone facilities in rural areas as well as in North-Eastern States are far from satisfactory; PCOs are indulging in fraudulent activities and there has been no accountability and responsibility, to say the least. All these aspects should be seriously looked into by the concerned Departments and authorities for necessary remedial action.

NEW DELHI;
22 August, 2001

31 Sravana, 1923 (Saka)

SOMNATH CHATTERJEE,
Chairman,
Standing Committee on
Information Technology.

ANNEXURE I

MINUTES OF THE THIRTY-SECOND SITTING OF THE STANDING
COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
(1999-2000)

The Committee sat on Thursday, the 5th October, 2000 from 1100 hours to 1300 hours in Committee Room 'E', Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

PRESENT

Shri Somnath Chatterjee — *Chairman*

MEMBERS

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Mahendra Baitha
3. Shri Tara Chand Bhagora
4. Shri Nikhil Kumar Chaudhary
5. Shri T. Govindan
6. Dr. C. Krishnan
7. Shri G. Ram Mohan
8. Shri K.A. Sangtam

Rajya Sabha

9. Dr. M.N. Das
10. Shri Balkavi Bairagi
11. Shri Shatrughan Sinha
12. Shri Narendra Mohan
13. Dr. Y. Radhakrishna Murthy
14. Shri Kartar Singh Duggal
15. Shri K. Rama Mohana Rao
16. Shrimati Kum Kum Rai
17. Shri Rajiv Shukla

SECRETARIAT

1. Shri P.D.T. Achary — *Joint Secretary*
2. Shri S.K. Sharma — *Deputy Secretary*
3. Shri A.S. Chera — *Under Secretary*

**Representatives of department of telecommunications and
department of telecom operations**

1. Shri Shyamal Ghose, Chairman, Telecom Commission & Secretary, DoT
2. Shri R.N. Goyal, Secretary, DTO & Member (Production)
3. Shri A. Prasad, Member (Finance)
4. Shri N.R. Mokhariwale, Member (Services)
5. Dr. Vijay Kumar, Member (Technology)
6. Shri S. Sadagopan, Advisor (HRD)
7. Shri Sampath Kumar, Advisor (Operation)
8. Shri Dhanendra Kumar, Additional Secretary (T)
9. Shri Ramesh Chandra, Sr. DDG (MS)
10. Shri K.S. Guliani, DDG (CS) & DDG (Reg)
11. Dr. D.P.S. Seth, CMD, BSNL
12. Shri M.K. Jain, DDG (PG), DTS
13. Shri Chandrahas, Director (PG)
14. Smt. Bindu Roy, ADG (PG)
15. Shri Narendra Sharma, CMD, MTNL
16. Shri S. Sundarsan, Director (Fin.), MTNL
17. Shri G.D. Gaiha, Director (Tech.) MTNL
18. Shri S. Ramani Iyer, CGM, MTNL, Mumbai Unit
19. Shri K.H. Khan, CGM, MTNL, Delhi Unit

2. At the outset, the Chairman welcomed the Secretary, Department of Telecommunications and Secretary, Department of Telecom Operations and other officials accompanying them.

3. The Committee then sought certain clarifications on the issues relating to the subject "Grievances/Complaints redressal machinery in DoT, DTO and MTNL".

4. The Chairman thanked the officials for furnishing valuable information to the Committee and for expressing free and frank views on various points raised by the Members.

5. A verbatim record of the sitting has been kept.

The Committee then adjourned

ANNEXURE II

MINUTES OF THE THIRTY-NINTH SITTING OF THE STANDING
COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (2001)

The Committee sat on Wednesday, 22 August, 2001 from 1500 hours to 1645 hours in Committee Room No. 63, Parliament House, New Delhi.

PRESENT

Shri Somnath Chatterjee — *Chairman*

MEMBERS

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Mahendra Baitha
3. Shri Pawan Kumar Bansal
4. Shri Adhir Ranjan Chowdhary
5. Shri T. Govindan
6. Adv. Uttamrao Dhikale
7. Shri K.K. Kaliappan
8. Dr. C. Krishnan
9. Shri Bhartruhari Mahtab
10. Shri Simranjit Singh Mann
11. Shri A.K. Moorthy
12. Shri K. Balrama Krishan Murthy
13. Shri K.A. Sangtam
14. Shri Chandra Vijaya Singh
15. Shri Vinay Kumar Sorake
16. Shrimati D.M. Vijaya Kumari

Rajya Sabha

17. Dr. M.N. Das
18. Shri Balkavi Bairagi
19. Shri Narendra Mohan
20. Dr. Y. Radhakrishna Murthy
21. Shri P.N. Siva
22. Shri Kartar Singh Duggal
23. Shri K. Rama Mohana Rao
24. Shrimati Kum Kum Rai
25. Dr. Dasari Narayana Rao

SECRETARIAT

1. Shri S.K. Sharma — *Deputy Secretary*

2. The Committee took up for consideration the Draft Twenty-Sixth Report on "Complaints/Grievances Redressal Machinery in DoT/BSNL/MTNL" and adopted the same with the modifications/amendments as shown in the Appendix.

3. The Committee authorised the Chairman to finalise and present the Report to the House in light of the factual verifications received from the Department.

The Committee then adjourned.