

Title: Regarding announcement of new policy on privatisation of long distance telephone services by the Minister, Department of Telecommunications outside the Parliament House during the current session.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI (RAIGANJ): Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to bring two matters to the attention of the House. After the House adjourned on Friday, there has been a recess of four days. During this recess, we read in the newspapers about the distinguished Minister of Communications Shri Ram Vilas Paswan announcing a new policy decision in regard to privatisation of STD to enable the entry of multinationals and others into the sector. This is not proper. Propriety demands that policy decisions are announced in the House when the House is in session. The Minister could have made this announcement today and could have avoided keeping the entire House in the dark. I, therefore, request that a direction be given to the Government not to repeat this in future.

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL (HOOGLY): Sir, I associate myself with the hon. Member on this issue. The Minister should not have made this announcement during the recess.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA (BANKURA): It is regarding the statement of the Government outside the House when the House is already in Session. On a number of occasions, the Government has done like this....(Interruptions)â€; The Minister should not make any policy statement outside the House when the House is already in Session....(Interruptions)â€; But they are in the habit of making the statements outside the House even when the House is in Session....(Interruptions)

They cannot make policy statements outside the House when the House is in Session....(Interruptions)

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN): Sir, as far as the opening of national long distance telephony is concerned, this was announced by the hon. Prime Minister on the 15th July, 2000 in the IT Ministers' Conference itself. So, firstly it is not a new thing....(Interruptions)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA (BANKURA): No....(Interruptions)

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Will you allow me to complete?... (Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: This is not good. Let him complete first.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: You must allow me to complete firstâ€; (Interruptions)â€; Sir, he is not allowing me even to complete one sentence....(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Basu Deb Acharia, please take your seat. Let him complete first.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: What is this Sir? He is not ready to allow me to speak even a single sentence....(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Let him complete his reply.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Nothing will go on record except what the hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs speaks.

(Interruptions)*

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Let me complete my submission. Then, if you want to ask something, with the permission of the hon. Speaker, you can do so....(Interruptions)â€; But you are not allowing the Minister to speak even one sentence....(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Rup Chand Pal, let him complete first.

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Sir, what I am trying to say is that as far as the opening of national long distance telephony is concerned, it was announced by the hon. Prime Minister....(Interruptions)

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : But not on the floor of the House....(Interruptions)

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Now, please allow me to speak....(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Rup Chand Pal, this is not the 'Question Hour'. This is 'Zero Hour'. Let the hon. Minister complete his reply. What is this?

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: You are not allowing me to complete even one sentence...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Now, he is allowing. Please continue.

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Sir, this House has been meeting since 24th July onwards. First thing, it is not a policy decision. It is not a policy at all. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA : What are you saying? Is it not a policy decision?...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Do not shout. You have to listen to me first...(*Interruptions*)

* Not Recorded.

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Rup Chand Pal, please take your seat.

...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Sir, he is not allowing me to complete even one sentence.

As far as the opening of national long distance telephony is concerned, it was announced by the hon. Prime Minister on the 15th July, 2000 in the IT Ministers' Conference. Secondly, the only thing he said was that, "as far as the details are concerned, the guidelines will be announced before the 15th August, 2000." He has given a time limit for the DoT to complete it.

So, in this regard the hon. Minister of Communications had only announced the guidelines for opening of national long distance telephony. So, there is no breach of propriety....(*Interruptions*)

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not correct....(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs has made it clear that the hon. Minister of Communications had announced only in regard to guidelines.

...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA : No, Sir...(*Interruptions*) We can see how this House is being treated by the Government when it is already in Session....(*Interruptions*)

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA (GUNA): Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are some very healthy norms and conventions that have been laid down, which guide this Parliament for the last over 50 years.

I would request the Government not to hide behind the commas, full stops and technicalities. ...(*Interruptions*)

Please listen to me. I listened to you very quietly. You are violating the very principle that you are trying to lay down. ...(*Interruptions*)

This debate whether this is a guideline or this is a policy can go on endlessly. All of us feel very definitely that it is such an important fundamental issue that it becomes a policy. However, we may have a difference of opinion. But there is a spirit in which this Parliament is conducted.

Time and time again – this is not the first time – over the last six to eight months, at least, there have been several occasions when after a Cabinet meeting there is a Press briefing in which Shri Pramod Mahajan, who is the spokesman for the Cabinet, briefs the Press when Parliament is in Session. I do not think that this is a very healthy practice. Therefore, I would request the Government to understand the spirit that has guided this Parliament and in that spirit, rather than hide behind technicalities, come forth in a candid fashion and announce whatever it wants to announce in Parliament. ...(*Interruptions*)

You could have announced this on last Friday too. If you wanted to announce it before the 15th of August, you could have announced it on the last Friday, which was the last sitting of Parliament before the 15th of August. You did not do so. My request to you is to please keep those conventions and healthy practices in mind. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : Sir, has this sovereign House not the right to know of such a major policy decision when Parliament is in Session? ...(*Interruptions*)

I could have cited any number of examples of what is happening that involves the national security concerns. This House is being ignored and denigrated. You are the custodian of this House. We seek your protection. This Government should be told in the fittest language that they have no right to denigrate this House. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Sir, as far as the conventions are concerned, I totally agree with the Deputy-Leader of the Congress Party that any political party, whether in power or in the opposition, should respect these traditions.

As far as the second issue about the Cabinet meetings is concerned, you would also appreciate that Parliament meets for four or five weeks. In the Budget Session, we meet for about two to two-and-a-half months. Naturally, the Cabinet meetings take place during these periods and we do brief the Press. I would like to recall here the instance of the Agriculture Policy. Though the Policy was cleared by the Cabinet, we did not announce at the Press Conference what the Agriculture Policy was. We only said that the Policy had been cleared and since Parliament was in Session, Parliament would have the first right to know what the Policy was. So, wherever the word policy comes in, technically or otherwise, we never announce it. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA : This is also a policy.

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN : Let me complete.

At the same time, you would appreciate that you cannot stop the briefings after the Cabinet meetings. Otherwise, there would only be speculations next day in the newspapers. So, it is not proper. We must inform them wherever there are administrative decisions. Barring administrative decisions, all policy decisions would first be communicated to Parliament and nobody else.

Lastly, as I have already said, as far as the issue in question today is concerned, the hon. Prime Minister had already announced that before the House met and the implementation of it is not a policy decision. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : What about the right of this sovereign House to know what major decisions are going to be taken? ...(*Interruptions*) What about this House? ...(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Nothing should go on record now.

*(Interruptions)**

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Vijay Goel, the hon. Minister has already replied.

... (Interruptions)

श्री सत्यव्रत चतुर्वेदी (खजुराहो) : मैंने भी नोटिस दिया है। (व्यवधान)

अध्यक्ष महोदय : आप चेयर को कोआपरेट करेंगे तो स्ब को बुलाएंगे, अन्यथा प्रोब्लम हो जाएगी।