

13.07¹/₂ hrs.

[English]

COMMITTEE ON PRIVILEGES

Fourth Report

SHRI SHIV CHARAN MATHUR (Bhilwara): I beg to lay on the Table the Fourth Report (Hindi and English versions) of the Committee of Privileges.

13.08 hrs.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

PANCHAYAT SANCHAR SEWA YOJANA

[English]

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SUKH RAM): Mr. Speaker, Sir, Hon'ble Members are aware of the Government's commitment to provide postal services throughout the country as a part of creating the basic communication infrastructure. During the last 47 years since independence the postal network has expanded from 24,000 post offices to 1,52,786 post offices at the end of March 1994. Considering the fact that majority of our people live in villages, 90 per cent of the post offices are located in rural areas. In spite of the planned expansion of the postal network, out of 234,000 Panchayats in the country it has been possible to establish post offices only in about 112,000 Panchayats.

The expansion of postal services in the country during the last 47 years has also resulted in the Department of Post incurring heavy deficits for the last 25 years. The multifarious demands on the resources of Government do not permit increased budget support for the Department of Post in its plans for expansion of the postal network.

Considering the recurring deficits of the Department of Post and the gap between demand and allocation of funds for expansion of the postal network, Government has been exploring possibilities of introducing certain innovative methods for provision of postal facilities in the rural areas.

Hon'ble Members are aware that after the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution, Panchayats have become the third tier of administration. It is, therefore, considered appropriate that the participation of Panchayats could be invoked for provision of basic postal facilities within their area. Keeping this in view, a scheme called Panchayat Sanchar Sewa Yojana has been evolved to provide basic postal facilities through people's participation. The salient features of the scheme are—

- (1) Participation of the Gram Panchayats in the scheme will be voluntary;
- (2) An unemployed educated youth from within the Panchayat area will be identified by a Committee to be prescribed to perform the postal functions within the area of the Panchayat;
- (3) The person so identified by the Committee will act as an agent of the Panchayat for operating the Scheme. However, for the purpose of operation of

this Scheme, the Panchayats will enter into an agreement with the Department of Post;

- (4) Gram Panchayats will earmark a suitable building, preferably a building owned by it for locating the Panchayat Sanchar Sewa Kendra. The location of the Kendra will not change with the change of incumbent;
- (5) Postal facilities would be made available to the people on all days of the week, except Sundays and Postal holidays. There will be no fixed business hours but timings will be decided according to the convenience and needs of the local people;
- (6) The Gram Panchayat will be accountable to the Department of Post for ensuring proper and efficient functioning of the Panchayat Sanchar Sewa Kendra. The Sanchar Sewa Kendra would also be subject to regular supervision and inspection by the Department of Post;
- (7) The Panchayat/Panchayats will be paid a fixed allowance of Rs. 300/- per month for performance of the work of delivery and collection by the Panchayat's agent, in an area prescribed by the Department of Post;
- (8) The agent of the Panchayat will be compensated for other postal services provided in the Panchayat Area by payment of—
 - (a) a commission of 10 per cent on the sale of stamps and stationery;
 - (b) a commission of 50 paise for booking and delivery of a registered article; and
 - (c) commission at the prescribed rates for handling Postal Life Insurance, Savings Bank and Mahila Samridhi Yojana accounts.

The Department of Telecommunications already has a scheme of providing PCOs in the Panchayats. The person identified by a Committee to perform the postal functions within the area of the Panchayat will also operate the PCO in the Panchayat area on the basis of prescribed revenue sharing. It will not only ensure availability of both Postal and Telecommunications services through a single window in the Panchayat area but will also ensure that the income on account of the commission earned both from the Postal and Telecom services would provide a substantial amount to an educated unemployed youth in the Panchayat area.

I can assure the Hon'ble Members that since the person to operate the Postal and Telecom services in the Panchayat area will be identified by a Committee in which local officers of the Departments of Post and Telecommunications will be represented, minimum standards of service in the Panchayat area will be ensured and deviations will be taken note of. After giving the Gram Panchayats a place of dignity in our constitutional scheme of things, it is only natural that we should also repose trust in the ability and good sense of the institution to maintain standards of public service.

I commend the Scheme for the consideration of the House.