

12.20. hrs

# CALLING ATTENTION TO MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

[English]

Agitation by Junior Engineers  
(Telecommunications)

**SHRI P.R. KUMARAMANGALAM**  
(Salem) : I call the attention of the Minister of Communications to the following matter of urgent public importance and request that he may make a statement thereon :

The situation arising out of the continued agitation by the Junior Engineers of the Department of Telecommunications and the action taken by the Government in that regard.

12.21 hrs.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *In the Chair*]

**THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV)** : Sir, The Junior Engineers Telecommunication Association had given a notice and have been resorting to work-to-rule agitation from 16.10.1986. This has affected the telecommunication services, particularly the long distance services significantly. The restoration of faults has been delayed and the number of circuits faulty at any time has been between 50 to 100% more than normal. This has affected the putting through of trunk calls, STD and telex & teleprinter services.

The Junior Engineers Telecommunications have been demanding a higher scale of pay (Rs. 550 900 pre-4th Pay Commission against Rs. 425-700). They feel that their jobs involve much higher technical competence and responsibility than similar jobs elsewhere. Their entry qualifications are also higher and they undergo intensive training before final appointment.

The Department has been sympathetic to their demands but before these could be conceded, all aspects had to be considered in consultation with the Ministry of Finance. This matter was discussed with the Ministry of Finance and in 1983, on the advice of that Ministry, the case was referred to the 4th Pay Commission.

The 4th Pay Commission took note of the demands of Junior Engineers Telecommunications as well as the recommendations of the Department of Telecommunications. They also recognised that the technology in the field of telecommunication is changing rapidly and it is necessary for the Department to have trained manpower of requisite calibre. They, however, felt that the suggestion for higher pay scale actually relates to job evaluation to determine relative worth of charge of different posts. They felt that it was not possible for them to undertake this work. The Government has taken note of these remarks of the Pay Commission and is taking appropriate steps in this regard.

The Junior Engineers Telecommunications had also launched an agitation in July, 1986 soon after the submission of the Report of the 4th Pay Commission. There had been discussions at various levels and an assurance was given to them that the matter will be represented by the Ministry at various levels. This was done, but the Government did not find it feasible to concede straightaway the demand for raising the pay scale of the entire cadre without suitable further study as suggested by the Pay Commission. To meet the demands part of the way, it was agreed to give a promotional grade for 65% of the posts in the cadre. Simultaneously, it was decided to constitute an inter-Departmental Group to study the matter further.

The inter-Departmental Committee held a number of meetings, but the Chair person came to the conclusion that the Committee, as constituted, could not reserve the matter and that actual job evaluation would be necessary.

While this matter was being further considered, on the release of the Government decision on the recommendations of

the 4th Pay Commission, the Junior Engineers Telecommunication Association gave notice and started fresh agitation. The matter was taken in conciliation. Discussions have been held at various levels including the level of Member (Personnel), Secretary (Telecommunications) and the Ministers, both directly and under the auspices of the Chief Labour Commissioner. The matter was also examined by a Committee of Secretaries. It was decided that the Inter-Departmental Committee be re-constituted with higher powers and with specific power to engage consultants for job evaluation. A specific proposal to decide the method of selection for 65% of posts in the higher grade was also given for consideration of the Association. They were also told about the constitution of the High Level Committee and requested to call off the agitation. During these discussions, the Hon'ble Member, Shri P.R. Kumaramangalam had also met the Minister, secretary (Telecommunications) and the Chief Labour Commissioner and was explained the position at length.

The representatives of the Association, while appreciating the position of the Department, pleaded that they were not in a position to call off the agitation and that in view of the long delays in settling this matter, the rank and file may not respond to such a call. They requested a meeting by the Secretary (Telecommunications) and the Sanchar Mantri with their Executive Committee including their Circle Secretaries. This was agreed. The meeting is scheduled for this afternoon.

The position is that there are nearly 2 lakhs employees in the related scale of Rs. 425-700 and it is not possible to grant a higher scale to one section of them without a proper study and evaluation. A High Level Committee has been appointed on 27.7.86 to undertake this study and evaluation. The Committee has been requested to make available its recommendations as early as possible and in any case not later than three months. The continuing agitation is, causing inconvenience to the public and also resulting in economic losses. I take this opportunity to appeal to the agitating employees

to withdraw their agitation and restore normally in services and cooperate with the High Power Committee to help resolve the issue. In this connection, I may mention that Government has armed itself with powers under Essential Services Maintenance Act to deal with the situation in case it becomes necessary. I am, however, confident that good-sense and goodwill will prevail and it will not be necessary to resort to provision of Essential Services Maintenance Act.

**SHRI HARISH RAWAT (Almora) :**  
It is a hopeless statement, Sir.

**SHRI P.R. KUMARAMANGALAM :**  
Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am a little surprised by the statement and amused because one is constrained to understand that in between the lines there is an indication that firstly, when I was explained the matter at length, I seemed to have understood in a very sympathetic fashion and that the representatives of the Association also appreciated the position of the Department and pleaded that they were not in a position to call off the agitation.

At the outset, I would like to say that that is not right for the simple reason that this issue is not an issue that has been born today. In 1980, when the late C.M. Stephen was the Minister of Communications, he took up the matter. Again the matter was taken up in 1983. Then it was taken up by the Minister of Communications Shri V. N. Gadgil and then again in 1986 by the previous Minister of Communication Shri Ram Niwas Mirdha. The most amusing thing is that the Department is sympathetic with us. They say that the demand is not unjust, is not unfair and the demand is over seven years old. The demand is not just based on the fact that we are technically superior. That goes without question. The demand is also based on the fact that the people who are in the junior cadre, i.e. from the cadre from which people are promoted to J.E. are getting a higher scale. In other words when RSAS go through competitive examination and pass, they move from higher pay scale to low pay scale to a superior post. Such an anomaly is pending not for one or

[Shri P.R. Kumaramangalam]

two years but for six years. Minister after Minister takes up the matter. What is on? Committee after Committee are appointed. I would have understood if no evaluation had been done till now. The Indian Institute of Management, very well knows, very popular, at Bangalore, was engaged an independent body Lakhs of rupees were spent by the Department to analyse, rationalise; understand, study the P & T Department. They gave it in their report in favour of J.Es., in favour of technicians and say that technology is going up. You require to have high qualification. It is a fact that JEs today require minimum qualification of either a Graduation in Science or in Engineering. The technician requires Diploma in Engineering. But they are treated at lower level than the Matrics in other Departments and you expect to go to the 21st Century with technological advances and pay of these technical personnel is the least! While on the one hand you pay Junior Accounts Officer, Inspector of Excise—one does understand that. Charity begins at home but does it stop it home? That is a question. If one is willing to give Junior Accounts Officer and to Inspector of Excise, because they belong to the Finance Department, why can't technical employees be given justice?

It is not a question that this issue did not come up and was not agreed to by the Ministers. Both the Ministers in writing as well as orally one after another said, "Yes, your issue is just. We will try and get you. Certainly we will fight up the case and fight for you." But what has happened? The real truth is that the bureaucracy in this Government have learnt the art of weaving wool over the eyes of the Ministers. They have learnt the art of ensuring delay in giving justice to the employees. They appoint Committee after Committee, get evaluation after evaluation for years without end.

I may, at this stage, point out that this work to rule agitation is not only a work to rule agitation which is being done by the Junior Engineers, Class III technicians are also on agitation. It is surprising—though their qualification is Diploma (Engineering), their scale is the lowest in the Government of India compared to any technician. Other technicians

can be Matric, but they get scale of Rs. 1200 and Rs. 1400 while these technicians get Rs. 925. Whenever the issue is taken up—when it went to the Pay Commission, the Pay Commission said, "Technical evaluation has to be done." Technical evaluation was done by the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore. No mention of it was made as if it does not exist on record at all and there is no Report. Very sincerely they say 'no'. We wish to agree to your demand. However, to discriminate 2 lakh employees, we require evaluation. What about evaluation? What has been done earlier?

All right, A Group of Ministers appointed a Committee. The Chair Person of the Committee was one Smt Khosla, Joint Secretary, Department of Personnel. She stayed for one month. She resigns. She does not say she was helpless and she requires to have consultancy service of some experts to do job evaluation, No. She resigns and says, 'No, I do not want to be the Chairman' Then you keep quiet for a period of time, then you appoint another committee with a retired Secretary of Communications—with due respect to him, Mr. Agarwal—and in that committee you put the same Chairperson, Mrs. Khosla, who resigned saying, 'I am incapable of handling the issue'. How much and how long are the employees going to be fooled around? To what extent? If you want the credibility of your move, then there must be some basis behind it. Merely going to the employees and saying that 'I sympathise with your matter' or 'we sympathise with your issue, but we are constrained' is not enough. There has to be some action. We have seen historically that these committees—I often say there is like for the Committees, that committees of government and sub-committees of government are similar to diarrhoea, that in both cases there are sittings, in both cases there are reports and in both the cases the matter is dropped. That is what is happening with every single committee, and committees do not lend credence, they are always treated as a way out of the problem somehow to buy peace for the moment. This peace has been bought not once, not twice, but six times in telecommunications. Every time a committee is appointed,

Today the employees in the Telecommunications have reached a stage where they have said, 'We want no more committees. You say, our demand is unjust, throw it out of the window, we will, face it. But tell us clearly where we stand. There are enough committees and enough reports which are in our support; not a single report is against us. Take it, accept it or reject it, but please for God's sake do not appoint another committee. We do not want committees.' That is the stand of the employees, whether they are technicians or whether they are junior engineers. If the Indian Institute of Management at Bangalore, which is supposed to be an independent body, where I understand even Ministers and bureaucrats go for refresher courses or training courses. . . (Interruptions) In Hyderabad also there is an Institute. Bangalore is also named. Well, if they are good enough for Ministers to be trained and refreshed, I think their report is valuable enough and should be treated with credence by Government.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, in this particular case, in addition to the fact that committee after committee is being set up and nothing is happening, the truth is today neither can the Association of Junior Engineers nor can the technicians withdraw their agitation in the name of another committee for the simple reason that not only will they not be able to satisfy their members, but definitely the public at large will ridicule them. And I am unable to understand that when it is an admitted fact that faults are doubled, why is it that this Government does not feel that it is necessary for it to take a decision? Why is it that the bureaucracy's point of view is prevailing?

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, if I may submit quietly while making an appeal to the unions to withdraw their strike. . .

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Please wind up.

SHRI P.R. KUMARAMANGALAM : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I would like to

have two minutes, it is important, telephones and communications all over the country are slowly coming to a grinding halt. It is not a matter of just a Calling Attention. It is a serious matter where a demand considered, admitted just—they say they are sympathetic, but they are not willing to concede it and giving committee after committee, excuse after excuse to buy time. Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, while making an appeal to the agitating employees to withdraw their agitation and restore normalcy—that is almost a plea—simultaneously they announced that they have armed themselves with ESMA. In fact they have armed themselves with it on 4th of November.

SHRI THAMPAN THOMAS : MISA.

SHRI P.R. KUMARAMANGALAM : It is not MISA, it is only ESMA. Why if their demand is just, if the movement is just, when it is accepted that the issue has been delayed for years and when the workmen are agitated, is it the role of this Government to throttle them, close their mouths using a draconian law known as ESMA? Every time, workers raise their voice as saying we want justice, we want injustice corrected, is ESMA going to be shown to them? What is happening in this country? Are we being ruled by the people's representatives or are we being ruled by the bureaucracy? That is the issue. Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, all of us know that we write letters to bureaucrats. As a simple Member of Parliament, I know that the normal reply comes, it is a formal rejection—of course, very politely worded. How many issues which are just settled by the bureaucrats? They have no accountability. They are not answerable to anybody. But still they think, they rule this country. Often jokingly I say that we Members of Parliament are called temporary employees, Ministers are casual and they consider themselves to be the permanent employees, the rulers of this nation. It is unfortunate that the bureaucracy are prevailing and real justice is not being given.

I would like to end, Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, by just saying this much that the working class will not be cowed down,



[Shri P. R. Kumaramangalam]

We will not take injustice. We will be reasonable, one are willing to negotiate, we are willing to discuss. If the JETA union says that let the Minister and Secretary address the Executive, they said it because they do not want to sound as if they are blocking the cadre for meeting the Ministers, blocking the cadre for meeting the Secretaries and as if we have played politics. Our objective is to settle the issue amicably. If the Government comes forward, we are most willing to settle. But, however, if the Government is under the impression that using the threat of ESMA or applying ESMA, I would like to go on record, to say that the working class as a whole, without exception, without any political colour, will revolt. We will not tolerate it. We will ensure in this country that not a single wheel moves if ESMA is used. If at all with velvet gloves, an iron hand is extended, we are still willing to grip it. We are not against it. May I take this opportunity to appeal to the Communications Minister, to appeal to the Finance Minister to appeal to the Prime Minister, my beloved leader that it is time now that our people's representatives or Ministers remove that veil which the bureaucrats have so efficiently knitted over the eyes of the Ministers and see the reality. Come forward and settle.

We are the working class who stand by right from the beginning to the end. But please don't allow yourself to become tools in the hands of the bureaucrats who do not have the interest of the poor, the working class or the employees of any single institution in their heart. They belong to a class and they will only serve their class interest.

DR. CHINTA MOHAN (Tirupati) : Sir, at the outset, I sympathise with the striking Junior Engineers of the Telecommunication and at the same time, I condemn the attitude of the Government. All the time they come down with the weapon that this shall be considered as essential service and therefore this sort of attitude should go out from the mind of the Government of India. When the servant is on the long strike, the master is likely to be at fault. When the Government of

India servants are on strike means, the Government of India is at fault.

The Government service mainly depend on the productivity, efficiency and standard of living conditions of the Government servants. When compared to pre-independence days, today the price-rise is about 6 times high. This is all due to the wrong planning of the Government.

12.45 hrs.

[SHRI SOMNATH RATH *in the Chair*]

In spite of more than 35 years of Congress rule, the country and the Congress-I do not have a clear concept and they do not have a clear ideology. They have finished sixth Five Year Plans and we have entered into the Seventh Five Year Plan. In the Seventh Five Year Plan, we have finished almost two years and, you have raised the 7th Five Year Plan outlay to about Rs. 1,87,000 crores. Out of that, you are mainly depending upon the public sector. You are planning Rs. 42,000 crores for the public sector but the public sector is today in shambles. Coming to the field of public sector, most of the public sector units like SAIL are getting loss of Rs. one crore per day. At this juncture, we cannot mainly depend on the public sector. The Government is not having a clear-cut concept and we are getting losses. On the expenditure side, it is Rs. 22,220 crores. We will have a budget deficit of Rs. 35,000 crores by the end of the Seventh Five Year Plan. (Interruptions). We have revised the tax structure in 1974 with the appointment of the Mathai Commission. The trade deficit is about Rs. 9,000 crores. With all that, I say that the Seventh Five Year Plan is a big fiasco. I say that the economic policies of the present Finance Minister are at stake.

With all this, I do not blame the Communications Minister for the strike. I blame the Finance Minister who is not able to control the present situation of the price rise and, at the same time, these telecommunication staff have gone on strike today. Today about 2 lakh people and

tomorrow some more people come and ask for the wage rise. Actually, they are getting basic pay of Rs. 225-700. But their demands are very genuine. Radio technicians and lab technicians are getting more than what they are getting at present. Suppose, a Member of Lok Sabha is getting Rs. 1,000/- and a Member of Rajya Sabha is getting Rs. 1,500/- Naturally I will be worried. I will demand and agitate and do some sort of a strike. (Interruptions) Mr. Kumaramangalam was saying that since six years, no Communication Minister has taken any time to look into the problems. They say that they are evaluating the problems. At the same time, they say they are studying this. It will not help the people at large. I would like to say that you should deviate from such tactics. Just by raising the pay structure and pay scales, the standard of living of a particular Government employee will not raise. If the pay packet is mainly spent on liquor and lottery, it will not increase the standard of living. Today a person is getting Rs. 1,000. If you increase the salary to about Rs. 1,500/-, the quality and standard of living will not change at all. Suppose, today a worker will take a beedi, tomorrow he will definitely jump into a cigarette. By his just smoking a cigarette, you will not say that the standard of living has gone high. For all that, we should set an example. The masters should set an example. Then only the servants will follow. Unfortunately, today the masters in the Ministries who are sitting there, they are living in Five-Star culture. When they are living in a Five-Star culture; how can you expect the Government Servants to be satisfied... Because they keep in mind the price rise.

(Interruptions)

In the Seventh Five Year Plan, you have raised Rs. 1730 crores....

(Interruptions)

In the Seventh Plan outlay, regarding the Communications Ministry, you said about the balanced growth in the network of this Communications Department and you have promised to give rapid modernisation and quantum of technology and productivity. I do not know any reason

to appreciate all these four factors. With this, I condemn the attitude of the Government and support the workers' strike.

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI (Deogarh) : Sir, in fact, there is a serious situation today in the country arising out of the work-to-rule agitation resorted to by about 22000 Junior Engineers of the Telecommunications Wing of the Ministry of Telecommunications. After going through the statement made by the Minister here and supplied to us a little bit earlier, I was entertaining a hope that today in the afternoon there will be a solution to this vexed problem and that would naturally give a sigh of relief to everybody. But I am confused after I heard my hon. friend Shri Kumaramangalam, because there is a reference given in the statement on page 3, in the para preceding to the last para it states :

"the representatives of all the associations while appreciating the position of the Department pleaded that they were not in a position to call off the agitation and that in view of the long delay in settling this matter, the rank and file may not respond to such a call off. They requested a meeting by the Secretary with the Telecommunications and Sanchar Mantri with their Executive Committee including their circle Secretary. This was agreed. The meeting is scheduled for this afternoon"

You heard Shri Kumaramangalam who is deeply involved in this matter, that this was not exactly the position. So, the confusion is worse confounded.

Sir, Shri Arjun Singh has taken over this Ministry recently. He is a Cabinet Rank Minister. Shri Santosh Mohan Dev is assisting him as Minister of State. They are quite new. They have stepped into the Ministry in the midst of this agitation. In fact, I think, this agitation has greeted them to this Ministry. We have faith in

[Shri Sriballav Panigrahi]

the ability of the Minister. Shri Arjun Singh is known as a trouble-shooter. So, whatever might be the vexed situation, I am quite hopeful that there will be a solution and a very early solution to this problem.

One thing I fail to understand. You know, this problem is not one of today. This is quite an old problem lingering on for the last several years. In the year 1983, on the advice of the Finance Ministry, this matter was referred to the Fourth Pay Commission. These demands had received the moral support of as many as four Ministers in charge of Communications from then on till now. But how in spite of all these things, this demand which has been called 'justified', which had received the moral support from the Ministry from all the Ministers in charge the Ministry, till now this demand has not been fulfilled? Now, there is a conflict going on between.....

MR. CHAIRMAN : I cannot help you. The rule permits only five minutes.

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI : Sir, I am just making only points. It seems to us that a confusion, confrontation is going on between the Ministry of Communications and the Ministry of Finance. I would like to know whether the Finance Ministry or the Pay Commission directly gave such concession to other categories of employees of this grade, and the equivalent grade.

They have now left the matter to the department on the plea of job evaluation. When a job evaluation has already been done by a known Institute, the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, I do not know why again Committees after Committees are being appointed to go into this. Naturally, that is bound to arouse the anger of the people and displease the people who have been fighting for long for their genuine demands. They have naturally demanded higher pay scales to be on par with their counterparts working in other Departments. The Pay Commission also has recognised that the work involved is of a higher technical nature.

I would now come to one thing. Job evaluating was already done in Bangalore by the Indian Institute of Management. Again another Committee was appointed. What were the terms of reference of the Khosla Committee? Why did she resign? What sort of attitude is this—on the part of a civil servant? When some specified work was entrusted to them, they have avoided that responsibility. Again a Committee has been appointed. How long will this drama continue? Naturally, it is the people who are suffering. Today there is no telephone line functioning between Delhi and other parts. The newspapers are also suffering because the tele-communications lines are defunct. The SAARC Conference is going to be held in Bangalore shortly. What will happen if this strike is not called off, if this agitation is not called off immediately? Things will go worse.

When the Minister feels that the demands are justified and genuine, how is the bureaucracy coming in between? In a democracy it is the political leadership which is supposed to be the master of the situation and master of the rules and regulations; they should not be slaves to the rules and regulations. If any rule comes in the way, that is a point for consideration and that has to be sorted out.

There is force in what Shri Kumaramangalam has said. The demands are genuine. The job evaluation has already been done by the Indian Institute of Management. The Department has also recommended. So, there should not be any further delay in accepting their demands and thus bringing about a happy and honourable solution to this problem which is causing concern in different circles.

SHRI THAMPAN THOMAS (Mavelikara) : Sir, I would like to raise certain very important things on this matter. I would place this issue from three angles: one as a consumer, another as a trade unionist and the third as a Member of Parliament. Today the position is that the tele-communications in the country are completely paralysed because of this strike. In fact, the Ministry has been sleeping over this issue for the last 15 days.

The news which I have received today from my constituency is this. There is a hospital where dead bodies are kept in my constituency, in Thiruvalla, and they are waiting for the relatives of the dead to come from the Gulf countries. Normally the dead bodies are kept in cold storage, but since there is no space in the mortuary to keep the dead bodies, they are kept out, and the whole area is smelling bad. This is happening because the relatives of the dead who are in the Gulf countries could not get the message and, therefore, could not come and attend to the burial. This is the situation in my constituency because of this strike. This has been published in leading Malayalam newspapers. This is the exact news which I have got.

There is another thing. In Ahmedabad, the Mayor of the city has placed a wreath on the telephone and buried it.

This is the situation prevailing in this country. I do not know how this Government is going to tackle this issue. This Government is posing in this House that it is a Government which is working but I say that it is a Government which is sleeping over issues. And it has been proved very well because you had no mind to settle this matter with the representatives of the trade union all these days. The demands raised by the workers are genuine. Of course, the issue has the support of all the working class in the country because it relates to their service conditions and there is discrimination among themselves who are doing the same work. They want the same salary which is a common and natural issue. You are not ready to tackle it and hear them. Because of that the whole situation has gone to such a position.

13.00 hrs.

I say as a consumer that no rent or telephone charges should be collected from 14th October onwards when these workers started strike. Otherwise we will start a civil disobedience in order not to pay the charges.

MR. CHAIRMAN : The Hon. Member will continue after lunch. The House is now adjourned for lunch.

13.01 hrs.

*The Lok Sabha then adjourned for Lunch till Fourteen of the clock*

*The Lok Sabha re-assembled after Lunch at six minutes past Fourteen of the Clock.*

[MR DEPUTY-SPEAKER in the Chair]

CALLING ATTENTION TO  
MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC  
IMPORTANCE—CONTD.

[English]

Agitation by Junior Engineers Tele-  
Communications)

SHRI D.N. REDDY (Cuddapah) : Sir, I want to be the first to congratulate you here. I have received your invitation today. Heartiest congratulations and best wishes on the occasion of your marriage.

MANY HON. MEMBERS : Congratulations from all of us.

SHRI D.N. REDDY : I wanted to be the first to congratulate you.

PROF. MADHU DANDAVATE (Rajapur) : On a point of order Can anybody marry prospectively ?

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Thank you. I request all over friends to come over to Madras. That is my request.

Shri Thampan Thomas.

SHRI THAMPAN THOMAS (Mavelikara) : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I was mentioning about the liability of the subscribers to pay for the period from October 14 if this event continues. I feel that no subscriber in India is liable to pay to the Telephone Department after 14th October since there is no *quid pro quo*. They are not giving us any service and



[Shri Thampan Thomas]

without giving any service they cannot take money from us. As a consumer I feel that the consumers of telephones in India should take the position that they will not pay the amount to the department. I feel that this is in consonance with the teachings of Gandhiji's civil disobedience movement. According to that, where injustice is done to the people, they should not be prepared to pay the money.

Then, as a trade unionist, I would like to point out to the issue which has come out of this agitation, and which shows how the Fourth Pay Commission has approached the problem of workers and because of that how the anomaly has crept in. The trade unions in India were demanding equal pay for equal work. Why have they not given that treatment to the junior engineers, which are also technical hands. They are also doing technical work, but they were not taken care of. They are not even being paid the salary that a sweeper may be getting in any public sector undertaking. That is their plight. The sweeper and other such employees might be getting more in terms of D.A., and other facilities. If that is the case, it is only natural and desirable that the demands of the workers in terms of their salary etc. will have to be considered and settled. This has been a long pending issue. This is an issue which you could have discussed with them and finally settled with them. But you have not done that.

The issues raised by the workers are genuine and have to be morally supported; that deserves our support.

However, the course of action adopted by them to put the consumers into difficulties was rather embarrassing. Instead of that, they could have gone for a total strike in consultation with other trade unions and Government would have reacted on that. Anyway, I am not going into the details of it. However, this issue requires settlement at the earliest.

I also find that the technology that you are adopting for the communication

system is a total failure. You were telling about the communication systems which you are importing from abroad. The various technologies that you are importing from abroad have now proved to be a total failure. The cross-bar system or the CLT system, whatever it be, ultimately because of the few technical hands who were handling them, the whole nation has come to a standstill.

Here I would also like to point out that the technology that you are importing from abroad is a scrap, which has been thrown away by other countries, including the French system. This has been criticised when you were importing this system at a high cost, by the engineers concerned at that time and it has come in the press also as a big news item. Therefore, I would urge that the Government of India and the Telecommunications Ministry should find out an indigenous method which is akin to our country. A system which suits our country should be developed, but you have, so far, not made any attempt in this regard.

Also, the employment conditions provided in the Telecommunications Department are alarming. You are still using what is called the RTP—Reserve Training Pool. At very low wages, you are engaging people as RTP and you are using their services. There are so many vacancies which are not filled up. Many a time, the reply given to this House is that there are financial constraints and therefore the Department is not in a position to appoint people and because of the stand taken by the Ministry of Finance, the vacancies which are existing in the Department are not filled up. As a result, the *Mazdoor*, RTP and all such classes are being exploited. You should try to prevent this sort of a thing by appointing proper people and developing a suitable technology and save the consumers from these difficulties.

Today, it has been brought to my notice that you are charging Rs. 10,000 for every telex machine from the press people. If they want to instal teleprinters in their Delhi Bureaus, you are charging them Rs. 10,000 without interest. I do not know

as to why you are charging this amount like this. This only means that you are coming in the way of giving news through tele-printers to the press. By all means, it only harasses the consumers.

I would like to point out here that this is the situation today with a Government which wants to prove or show that it is a 'working' Government! I would like to suggest that this matter has to be settled with the unions by negotiating with them. And I am glad to say that the statement which the Minister has given to us today afternoon shows that you are having a discussion with the trade unions representatives. I would urge the hon. Minister and the Department to take a constructive attitude towards this issue and settle the matter in the interest of the public of the country.

**SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA (Basirhat):** This agitation, I think, has established its point. The point that they want to establish through this agitation has been adequately established. The services are paralysed by and large and naturally the public in the country who are interested to know the reasons for this crippling agitation are also now informed and today the Lok Sabha, Parliament of India is also discussing this matter.

Now, it is upto the Government to take some bold step to see that this deadlock can be resolved. I am not at all in favour of holding out this threat of action under ESMA and so on. It is contained in the statement also. The entire trade union movement has long ago opposed tooth and nail this whole concept of ESMA. Those people who advocated ESMA at that time thought that a threat of action under ESMA would perhaps prevent strikes from taking place. But it has done nothing of that kind. If the workers feel honestly that they have got some justified demand or cause, they are not going to be cowed down by such threats. I only want to say one general thing, that is, the context in which the whole thing is taking place should be seen rather in a larger perspective.

It is all connected with this advent of new technology which the Prime Minister, particularly, has been advocating so stridently, that our country has to import, acquire and establish new technology in order to modernise all our services. Now, this is not happening only in the tele-communications, I know, but I won't go into details because there is no time in many other sectors also. Two things come up. One is the conflict of the interests between the bureaucrats—traditional bureaucrats—and what you may call the technocrats, this is here, also, because you cannot run this technology without people who are highly qualified and who have been given the requisite technological training to handle this new equipment. These are people, Sir, who are working on electronic Exchanges, handling this co-axial cable equipment and so many new things which are coming and will be coming in future. Here all standard routine practices which have been followed in our Government Departments from time immemorial, at least from the British time, is that everything must be on the basis of seniority alone. Seniority alone is the sacrosanct channel through which everybody has to pass. This will not conform or it will not meet the necessity or the requirements of the modern technology. This is the trouble. So, naturally the people who are technically trained, who are technically qualified, who are handling all these complicated and intricate equipments, they do feel that they are not getting the due that they should get. There may be some resistance from the older people who may be, as you were saying, only matriculates and people like that who have been promoted due to seniority and who are senior to these people, most of whom are being recruited during the last five or six years, these technologically trained people are junior in that sense. So this is the conflict which will develop and not only here, I do not think, we have seen the last of it, but also I think, in the days to come, in many sectors of our economy, unless this matter is handled in a proper way, there will be conflict. There may be even a spate of disputes and agitations on this issue. Incidentally, if properly trained people are not put on the job, much of this equipment may get spoiled also, if it is not handled properly. The people handling this costly equipment

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must be capable people. In our country, so far, we had rather a dearth of such people. Now, we have to give special attention to their training and to their technical qualifications. The demand of these engineers is, sympathetically looked at by everybody, including the Government. According to your own statement, I believe, there was a Committee some years ago, the Sarin Committee. That Sarin Committee also admitted that these people—technically trained technologically staff and cadre—must be given proper treatment and they must be given proper emoluments and career opportunities.

The Pay Commission, because it felt, it could not go into the question of job evaluation, left it at that, but otherwise, it said, something must be done for them. I would say that you are having some negotiations this afternoon. I do not want to say anything which might queer the pitch. Mr. Kumaramangalam is here. He is competent enough to deal with that. Some questions will arise. For example, what retrospective effect, are you prepared to give, in case these revised pay scales are accepted. Some revised pay scales are ultimately accepted and some retrospective effect has to be given. The Pay Commission has awarded retrospective effect of its recommendations from the 1st of January, 1986. Now, the position is that the Government has shifted it to the 1st of January, but as far as these people are concerned, I would plead that in their cases, depending on the qualifications, the training they have received, and the period of service they have already put in, it may be considered in their cases, whether some favourable retrospective conditions can be considered.

Then, Sir, the question is that, you are saying that we cannot finish this job evaluation in one day. Time is required. Some High Level Committee composed of whom, I do not know, I would like to know incidentally who are the Members of this so-called High-Level Committee, I suppose they are mainly bureaucrats—officials of the Ministry and so on. They certainly cannot do this job. They will probably have to appoint some so-called consultants

or somebody, I do not know who. If you give us some information on this, we would be wiser about it.

Consultants in this field are generally taken from among the private sector people; and I do not know exactly by what means they will evaluate the jobs of these telecommunication engineers. These are not things which can be subjected to the usual time and motion study, and that kind of a thing. Naturally, there is no finality, there is no definiteness about it: how it will be done, how long it will take; when it will be finished, and having been finished whether it will be accepted and whether it will be applicable. The trouble is that people engaged in this kind of a prolonged agitation, want a settlement which will not be completely open-ended, an open-ended thing, without any kind of finality about it, and nothing definite.

I do not know whether it is possible; I hesitate because I do not know what Mr. Kumaramangalam's reaction would be. In order to get an early settlement, I do not know whether it is possible for Government to accept the minimum and maximum of a new payscale for these people: the minimum, and maximum, and then pending this job evaluation which must be done within a fixed time limit, the actual fixation of individual people within that pay scale can be done. That will vary to some extent, according to the job evaluation. But the minimum and maximum of that new pay scale which they are demanding, should be fixed now, and granted and announced. Why not?

Mr. Thomas was right; I find that in public sector enterprises, probably for a Peon or a Sweeper the total emoluments in some public enterprises would not be less than what these junior engineers are being given. This is an absurd thing which we have inherited in this country, unfortunately. An engineer may be getting less than a Sweeper or a Peon. Their demand before the Pay Commission was parity with the public sector enterprises. That rejected by the Pay Commission. Now you have an absurd position wherein people are working side by side, in one place. *khalai*

e.g. working in a railway loco yard, working side by side with another *khalasi* who is working in the marshalling yard of a steel plant. The latter is a Steel Plant employee.

I can tell Mr. Arjun Singh that this happened a few years ago in the Bhilai marshalling yard. There were *khalasis* who were employees of the steel plant; and for the shunting of wagons and all that were railway *khalasis* who were working side by side with them. The latter were the employees of Railways. And the gap in emoluments between the two is of the order of Rs. 300 or Rs. 400 p.m.; because one happens to be a public sector employee, he is getting much more than the other man doing exactly the same job, but who happens to be a departmental employee of the Railways. These are anomalies of a very crude kind which we have inherited from the past. I would say that in this case also, such types of engineers who are called upon to handle all these new equipments and high technology, should be treated in a new way. They must be looked at in a new light. If these are the people who are going to build the new India of tomorrow, then they cannot continue to be treated in the same old way which we have followed all these years.

So, these are my suggestions: one is regarding retrospective effect: some further consideration should be given in their case. Secondly, I am suggesting that pending this job evaluation—I think without that, Government will not agree to anything; what kind of job evaluation, I do not know—there is a new pay scale which they are demanding, i.e. a revised pay scale. That pay scale can be announced, with a minimum and a maximum. The fitting of the engineers into that scale can be finalized. Now, some ad hoc thing can be there. It can be finalized when the job evaluation is completed. Whether they are willing to agree or not, I do not know.

I would finally say this: I am also some sort of a trade unionist, a bit older than my friend, of course. I am sorry these people, before they went on this agitation and even after they went on it, never bothered to approach any of us, for our support.

He also belongs to another central trade union. They have never approached us, never canvassed us for the justice of their demand and never asked us for our support. At least, I can say that I would have come out publicly.

SHRI THAMPAN THOMAS : I too.

SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA (Basirhat): But they have not done that. Well, that is their right, they can and they cannot, as they want to do. I cannot force them to do anything. But I would say one thing, that they should consider one thing. I began by saying that their agitation has established their point that they are very well organised, they are united, they are strong in their demand and they have shown by their action that they can effectively paralyse a very vital wing in the whole chain of our national economy; they have done it. Now, I think, they should consider whether some kind of an interim step can be taken pending final settlement by which this paralysing of this thing can at least be looked into.

Fortunately or unfortunately, nowadays, trade unions are also learning from their experience that to win their cause they require public support and popular sympathy. Without that, by antagonising public, it is very difficult for the working class to win their demands. Now, somebody has said that if the trade unions turn their back upon the people, then the people will turn their back upon the trade unions. Unfortunately, the detractors of the trade union movement in this country go on accusing trade unions saying, you are only concerned with your economic demands, how much more money you can get, you don't bother about anything else. "But when some trade unions bother about other things, then we are told." "Why are you bothering about those things? Those are not your concern, you concern yourself with your bread and butter." "However, we will do whatever we think correct. But I think they have fought a struggle in which they have established their strength and their unity and they should go in that spirit to these negotiations and try to see if they can get an honourable settlement. In no



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strike or struggle are we hundred percent victorious. First of all, the government should not threaten them. That is the main point. If you threaten them and try to break this strike with the help of other personnel from outside and so on, then, of course, whether Mr. Kumaramangalam wants it or not; we will also have to enter into it, because that kind of thing today will be with his people, tomorrow it will be with somebody else. So, I beg of you don't like me to go to that path and try to work out some formula by which it will be possible to come to a settlement and end this struggle and confrontation which is causing so much trouble to the public.

I have been trying in the last five days to ring up my family in Calcutta, because somebody is sick there. I can neither get trunk booking nor get STD nor get no delay demand nor get lightning call; nothing; everything is paralysed. So, other people are also suffering. The business community; I do not know, why they are keeping quiet; there is something very fishy about it. I would have expected the big business houses to make a big row about this; apparently, they have got an alternative channel by which they can do it; we cannot do that.

**MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER :** This year is ending and there may be so many demands from the house to collect money. Therefore, it is convenient for them to keep quiet. Otherwise, it is not possible to do it.

**SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA :** They have got other services also everywhere. That is all I have to say, and I would like to hear from the hon. Minister how they are thinking of dealing with this subject.

**THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI ARJUN SINGH):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am quite conscious of the situation which these unfortunate series of events have led to and I would like to join with our hon. senior member of the House, Shri Indrajit Gupta, in expressing my—I

could only use the word 'sympathy'—sympathy for the thousands and thousands of citizens of this country who use the facilities of the Department, because, in a sense, any activity by a democratic government or public utility service cannot but have the interest of the people at heart primarily; everything else has to and will always come after that. Therefore, when Shri Indrajit Gupta says that, all said and done on both sides of the House, we must be aware where to draw the line so that inconvenience of the citizens of this country does not reach a point of no return.

I am sure, not only I would agree but I think all sections in this House would agree with this proposition.

As Mr. Kumaramangalam has said, this is a six-year old issue. He is much more conversant with it, I will go by what he says. He has also given a narration of what happened when and how things were not clinched at some time or the other. There again, I would let his statement stand even though there may be some information to the contrary. I would like this House to come to two or three basic points about which I presume, you will agree with me, there is no dispute. One is the number of committees which have sat on this problem and given recommendations. You have cited names and I think there are one two more names here when this matter was taken and I again agree with Mr. Gupta that the real crux of the problem is not the pay scale but it is a sequel to that. The crux of the problem now, and which will continue to be, before us, is the adjustment that we have to make with high technology working. Not only for the employees who are going to run those machines but also for us who are going to use them and that adjustment, I think is one of the reasons why this friction has arisen. I am always, and I have always been a supporter of the plea that the new technicians in a broader sense of the term we are going to run our machines and our systems must get not only respect but also emoluments which are in no way demeaning to their status as technical people. And I am sure, that this is an approach which is inherent in the statement of the Prime Minister when he exhorted the nation to use technology for the

development of this country so that the pace of development becomes faster and faster.

At the same, time, neither I nor any Member of this House can be unaware that there are certain system through which we are working at the moment and for some time to come we are going to continue in those systems. So, however, exasperating we may become, however angry we may become, here I would like to clarify if that impression is gained by the statement, that Shri Kumaramangalam came to me or to somebody else we were not able to satisfy him, at least I can say, that he did come to me, I made an attempt but he went back an angrier man than when he came to me.

**MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER :** Because he is a trade union leader.

**SHRI ARJUN SINGH :** That is right. But I think he has objected to that, but I want to clarify that it was never intended that way. But the fact still remains that an attempt to explain to him was made which I think also is not some thing which we can gloss over.

The point in this case is, that before the Pay Commission was appointed this matter was taken up and though I would not like to say it as a categorical statement, but what the information before me seems to spell out is, that the reference to the Pay Commission was made within the knowledge of the trade union people and the services. Anyway, the Pay Commission had taken cognizance of the entire Central Government services and its report has come.

All Pay Commission reports always create some residual problems. This is not the first time it has happened. You look to any Pay Commission report, there are problems which arise after the Pay Commission report has come because it is a question of relativity, a question of so many other parities and all these things come and naturally some people feel that they have not been dealt with justly and they start agitating immediately after the Pay Commission report has come. Understandably every one would expect that once

the Pay Commission report has come, that is the end of the matter at least till the next Pay Commission is appointed. But that does not happen. In this case also the Junior Engineers felt that whatever the Pay Commission had said, they are not fair to them. The Pay Commission also has not made its recommendations conclusively so far as these people are concerned. While conceding the point that they have a special case to be considered and its inability to go into it, the Commission suggested some kind of a job evaluation. Now, as is borne out by the records, I think it was as a sequence to this comment of the Pay Commission that the first Khosla Commission was appointed. Again I do not know whether you agree to it or not, but at least, there was an acquiescence if not agreement. And if there was an acquiescence and if the unfortunate event of Mrs. Khosla having resigned had not occurred, I think, this problem would not have arisen or because in due course of time, she would have given a report and that report, for better or for worse, would have been considered and acted upon. As to why she resigned and what was behind that I do not want to go into it because that is nothing with which I am concerned. Her resignation created that suspicion that perhaps the Government wants to play with this issue and does not want to come to the conclusion on this issue. As matters go, in such situations, in certain circumstances, perhaps, the suspicion may not be unjustified, in certain circumstances, it will totally be unjustified. But I will leave it at that. I would say that if the principle of accepting the committee for job evaluation had been agreed to or acquiesced to and the Pay Commission having made that observation, I think, the principle of appointing a committee should not be objected to as such. The point that should always be kept in view is that the Committee should not be an excuse to postpone or prolong a decision. I will not deny that in certain circumstances the appointment of a committee does become another instrument to postpone things and then sometimes everyone agrees also that it should be done because certain situations demand that the present situation should be defused and subsequently we may have a second look. I think, this I would like to dispel totally that the appointment of this

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job evaluation committee under the Chairmanship of Mr. Agarwal, who was the Secretary of Telecommunications, is not going to be a committee which is being appointed just to stall issues or to postpone issues. I would request the committee—I would like to inform the House—to submit its recommendations within a month of its starting work and certainly not later than 10th of December, 1986.

**SHRI INDRAJIT GUPTA :** Who are the members of this Committee? Are they all officials?

**SHRI ARJUN SINGH :** The members are :

Mr. S.M. Agarwal—Chairman

Mr. V. Devarajan, Member Finance and Addl. Secretary, Department of Telecommunications—Member

Shri B.C. Verma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Finance

Shrimati Khosla, Joint Secretary, Department of Personnel

Shri N.K. Mathur, DDG (I), Department of Telecommunications.

**SHRI K. RAMACHANDRA REDDY (Hindupur) :** Will the report come by the end of December?

**MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER :** The Minister has already assured that it will come before 10th of December.

**SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI (Deogarh) :** How Mrs. Khosla who resigned as chairperson of a committee, has been taken as a member in this new committee again? What were the terms of reference of that committee?

**SHRI ARJUN SINGH :** Let us have a second try. The question of evaluation and how it is to be done was a point which was also raised. A reference was made to the evaluation already made by the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore. I would like to say that this Committee will take into consideration also the evaluation already made by the IIM and whatever the

recommendations in that evaluation are, they will consider them and also try to see how much of that can be utilised for their recommendations. Apart from that, there will be other consultants, I mean, the consultants which are well-known. I cannot decide for the Committee, therefore, I will not like to go into it, but on that account I would like to assure you.

The other point that was raised by Mr. Gupta was the issue as to from which date these recommendations regarding the pay-scales will become effective. On this issue I have had a discussion with the Finance Minister and I am glad to inform the House that the Finance Minister has agreed that these will be given retrospective effect from 1.1.1986.

I would now like to say one thing. The question of asserting one's right, specially in the trade union movement, is indisputable and that is one right which can never be challenged and should not ever be challenged. The Indian labour movement has a very illustrious historic past and in the development of this country, the labour movement and the labour force of this country has played a very epical role and shall continue to play that. Of that we are all sure. At the same time, there are some things which we should not ignore. As Mr. Gupta said, having made the point, having established the case, it is now to find a way out as to how it is to be implemented. This is all that is left. At this moment of time, I would appeal to the leaders of the trade union movement and especially to the unions of these Junior Engineers that what they are now concerned with is certainly their legitimate right and that right we respect and we shall try to see that their interests are protected and served to the extent possible. At the same time, we would also like them to consider that the area in which they are working is not an area which concerns a certain part of the country, a certain section of the people or certain interests which may be ignored for some time even if there is no work going on.

Telecommunications, the House will agree, are the sinews, the nerves and the

veins of a nation and I do not think it can be justified on any account that they should be paralysed to make a point or to gain advantage to one's own interest, which may be justified on its own account. The stage has now come when any further escalation would certainly paralyse those sinews of the nation, the veins and arteries of the nation, and the House will agree that such a situation should not be allowed to occur, should not be allowed to happen, and I am quite confident that my appeal shall be heard and responded to in the spirit in which it is being made. But the Government has a higher responsibility also because telecommunications, as I said, affect practically every part of national endeavour, including our security, our defence, everything. We cannot allow a situation of drift in this matter. If national interests so demand, with a very heavy heart, we will have no choice but to enforce ESMA. I do not consider ESMA as a solution. I do not agree that the labour movement of this country has to be faced with that. But, at the same time, I would be failing in my duty if I were to remind the House that under certain circumstances where national interests demand, there may be no way out. I am sure, that situation will not arise and the manner in which this issue has been broached by all Members in this House, will help those who are contesting for their aims to come to a settlement. It is a question of a month from now. I do not think the heaven will fall if after a month they realise what they had wanted, perhaps, they have got to a substantial degree. Unless we are prepared to rise to such occasions, I do not think we are really serving the interests either of the labour movement or of this country. This is all I have to say.

14.46 hrs.

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

[English]

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF FOOD AND CIVIL SUPPLIES (SHRI H.K.L. BHAGAT): Sir, with your

permission, I rise to announce that Government Business in this House during the week commencing 10th November, 1986, will consist of :—

- (1) Consideration of any item of Government Business carried over from today's Order paper.
- (2) Consideration and passing of the Delhi Fire Prevention and Fire Safety Bill, 1986:
- (3) Discussion and voting on :
  - (a) Supplementary Demands for Grants (Railways) for 1986-87.
  - (b) Supplementary Demands for Grants (General) for 1986-87.
- (4) Consideration and passing of :
  - (a) The Atomic Energy (Amendment) Bill, 1986.
  - (b) The Indian Post Office (Amendment) Bill, 1986.
  - (c) The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Bill, 1986, as passed by Rajya Sabha.
- (5) Discussion under Rule 193 regarding ethnic problem of Tamilians in Sri Lanka.

[Translation]

SHRI KAMMODILAL JATAV (Morena) : Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, kindly include the following subjects in the List of Business of the Lok Sabha for the next week :

Sir, arcawise, Madhya Pradesh is the largest State of the country but it is quite backward in the economic, social, educational and cultural fields because even after about 40 years of independence well-planned progress and development has not taken place there.