

14.41 hrs.

ANNOUNCEMENT RE: POSTPONEMENT OF SITTING OF HOUSE FOR WANT OF QUORUM

[English]

Secretary-General : There is no quorum. So, the House cannot meet; and we cannot start the House till there is quorum. Hon. Deputy Speaker has directed that the House will re-assemble at fifty-five minutes past Fourteen of the Clock.

14.57 hrs.

[English]

*The Lok Sabha re-assembled of Fifty-Seven Minutes
past Fourteen of the Clock.*

(Mr. Deputy-Speaker in the Chair)

INDIAN TELEGRAPH (AMENDMENT) BILL—Contd.

Mr. Deputy Speaker : We will take up further consideration of the Bill. The Hon. Minister has spoken. Now, I shall call Major D.D. Khanoria of BJP to speak.

The Time allotted to this subject is two hours. Each political party has given the names. The list is there. It is very difficult to accommodate them. Therefore, I would request the hon. leaders of political parties to see who are the persons who are to participate in this debate. The time shall have to be limited.

When two hours were allotted, we dragged on up to four to five hours with the result that we were not able to finish the business of the House. So, kindly stick to the timings also. Of course, each political party has been allotted time—for example, congress 40 minutes, BJP 25 minutes, and CPM 8 minutes. So, kindly try to arrange yourselves according to the time allotted to each political party. Thank you.

[Translation]

Major D. D. Khanoria (Kangra) : Sir, the Indian Telegraph Amendment Bill, 1995 brought by the hon. Minister of Communications was the need of the hour in our country. I would like to congratulate Shri Sukhramji for this Bill. People in remotest corners of the country are benefited by the telephone facilities and the telecom network throughout the country has expanded to the maximum possible limit. It would have been better if a statutory body had been constituted under the Bill instead of non-statutory body as we know that telecommunication is a permanent feature. The field of Telecommunication will immensely progress through setting up of 'Telecommunication Regulatory Authority of India' as we have suggested.

15.00 hrs.

Setting up of Regulatory Authority of India will benefit its employees, on the other hand, customers will get all the

facilities. When we talk of foreign companies, there is an apprehension that these companies may dominate indigenous smaller companies. Therefore, the hon. Minister should think over this aspect so that small companies get encouragement and also benefit. At the same time, all employees of this Department from the lowest rank to the highest, should be given promotions. It has been found that there is a shortage of staff in every Telephone Exchange due to which most of the telephone connections, STD are dead. Therefore, more employees should be recruited in this Department so that it may make progress.

Today, telephone facility is available everywhere in the country. Hon. Minister, is making efforts to strengthen the system and I hope that he will succeed in his endeavour and our Telecommunication Department will March ahead and make more progress in the near future.

In some offices of this Department the employees are not satisfied. We will have to abide by the rules and regulations to fulfil their hopes and aspirations. If we satisfy them, they will benefit our customers also and the number of grievances of subscribers regarding overcharging of Bills and other complaints would certainly come down. Besides, if our workers are trained in adequate number, they will be able to solve the problems of customers where telephones remain out of order for several days.

I would like to give more suggestions in this regard. Generally, wire-thefts are reported in this Department. The Government should form squads in order to stop such thefts. These wires are very costly, that is why their theft should be stopped because we have found that telephones remain dead for several days only due to such thefts. Such thefts cause huge loss to this Department, to the Government as well as to the whole country. Therefore, squads should be formed and they should function under the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India. The Secretariat of this Authority should control the Telecommunications in the entire country.

With these words I conclude and thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak.

[English]

Shri Shraavan Kumar Patel (Jabalpur) : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I stand in support of this Bill. Telecommunication has become the most crucial factor of economic development.

15.05 hrs

(Shri Tara Singh in the Chair)

The new Economic Policy—when this Government took over in 1991—has enunciated two main objectives. Number one is 'achieving rapid economic growth through globalisation' and number two 'inviting foreign investments on a scale that could sustain the proposed development'.

The new Telecom Policy 1994 has therefore to be dovetailed keeping in view these twin objectives in mind. The new Telecom Policy obviously aims at upgradation of our telecom services to world standards; meeting the ever-increasing consumer

demand at reasonable price; and thirdly ensuring fair competition.

In order to achieve these objectives, the Department of Telecom has deemed it essential to separate regulatory functions from service. This is the general trend all over the world. It is, therefore, proposed to set up an independent authority to be called "The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India" which in the beginning will be a non-statutory body and it will play the role of a watch-dog for the Telecom sector in an effective manner.

Under section 3(6) of the Indian Telegraph Act 1885, presently the Secretary, Telecom who has been notified as the DG, Telecommunications, exercises regulatory powers and performs functions as delegated by the Central Government under the Act from time to time. It may be pointed out that the intention of the Bill is to amend section 3(6) of the Indian Telegraphs Act 1885 so that the regulatory powers of the Telegraph Authority vest in the now proposed new Telecom Regulatory Authority.

Sir, the reasons for not coming up with a comprehensive Bill to set up a statutory authority with independent powers at this stage are that the Government would like to watch the working of such an authority for at least two to three years and learn from the experience and secondly, after getting necessary feed back from the Chairman, Members and various groups it would frame a comprehensive law to make it a statutory body. Then the authority will derive its powers directly from an Act of Parliament.

Sir, the current trend in the Telecommunication sector the world over, is to distance policy making functions, operational functions and regulatory functions from each other and to entrust the regulatory functions to an independent authority.

This will, hopefully, inspire the confidence of the subscribers and also various operators in telecom field.

Sir, I also understand—the other day, the hon. Minister himself indicated—that the Cabinet has decided that the new regulatory authority will be chaired by a retired or serving Chief Justice of a High Court or a retired or a serving judge of the Supreme Court and it will have two members of the status of a Secretary Additional Secretary to the Government of India of standing of 3 years.

Sir, the tenure of the Chairman and the members would be secure and protected to five years or upto the age of 62 years. Similarly, so far as the emoluments and other terms and conditions are concerned, they would not be changed to their disadvantage. Therefore, the intention of the Government is to send a clear signal, a positive signal that the authority will act independently and in a judicious manner and it would protect the interests of the operators and subscribers.

Let us hope that the Telecom Regulatory Authority will have a healthy impact on the working of the telecom services in the country. It is hoped that it will act as a watch dog, ensure level playing field, monitor quality of services and protect and promote the consumers' interests.

I, therefore, congratulate and compliment the hon. Minister

for bringing forward a timely Bill in front of this House. Let us also hope that with this change, the position of telecom services in India, particularly rural areas of the country would witness a radical change.

Sir, I would like to make a point that so far as the rural India is concerned, the condition was far from satisfactory and you would also agree that India resides in its rural villages. Therefore, it is very very essential that the changes that we bring about through these Acts of Parliament, should also benefit the rural masses of this country.

On March 31, 1991, there were 0.86 telephones per 1000 population in rural India as against the figure of 6.01 telephones per 1000 population in the rest of the country. These figures are expected to reach 1.85 and 14.0 respectively, as per the Eighth Five Year Plan projections. Out of over 6 lakh villages, only about 1,42,000 villages had the telephone facility on March 31, 1991. Over 4,58,000 villages are still without the telephone facility. To cover such a large number of villages with the telephone facility, the policy of the government initially was to provide a public phone within a walking distance of 5 km of any habitat. However, under the National Telecom Policy, one public phone will be provided in each of over half-a-million villages by April 1, 1997. Under the new policy, telephones are to be provided, on demand, throughout the country by April 1, 1997.

In addition to this some important features of the new Telecom Policy are :

1. Five lakh new phone connections for four metropolitan cities, i.e. Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras.
2. All villages to be provided telephones by April 1, 1997.
3. A Public Call Office (PCO) for every 500 urban population.
4. Special emphasis to remote, hilly and backward areas of the country.

I am also happy that the Department of Telecommunications is recognising the need for participation by private sector in areas like E-mail, Voice Mail, Video Conferencing, Audio Text, 64 KBPS, V-SAT services and Direct Access Customer Dialling. Very shortly we are going to have countrywide cellular phone and paging services.

To conclude, rapid economic development is inconceivable without matching advancement in telecommunications. The new Telecom Policy aims at developing adequate telecommunications infrastructure by the end of the century.

In the end, I welcome the Bill being brought by the hon. Minister and I support it.

Thank you for giving me time to speak.

Shrimati Suseela Gopalan (Chirayinkil) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, this Bill has been brought before the House since it became necessary to bring a Bill after the announcement of the National Telecom Policy. This policy was never discussed in this House. And now, a Bill is brought before the House to implement that wrong policy. I would like to know why it was not discussed earlier in the House. When the Prime Minister was about to

go to America, this Telecom Policy was announced just to appease them since it has wide ranging implications. Especially, through this policy the basic telephone services are going to be privatised. Long before, you had taken a decision to give the Value Added services to private people.

Privatising the basic telephone service has some implications. It affects the security of the country itself. It should have been discussed with the people concerned. This Policy should have been discussed in this Parliament. The Government has come with a *fait accompli* that now that the policy is announced to bring a regulatory authority, this Bill is necessary. But without discussing the Telecom Policy, how can this Bill be considered? It is going to affect India in so many ways which need to be discussed.

What was the necessity for inviting private sector into the basic telephone service? I say this because all sorts of things were said. In the Five Year Plan it is said that only 75 lakh telephones are required. But then, all of a sudden, the requirement was raised to 100 lakh. It is so because the Government has to give some excuse for bringing private sector into the field. Now that the private sector is brought into the field, you are saying that tenders are invited and the public sector also can participate. But, at that time private sector was not allowed to participate. Now you are saying that tenders are invited and they are in the process of being opened. That is one thing. You have also said that even if private sector comes into this field, a condition must be laid that only those who had the experience of tackling five lakh connections can participate in this. This is a clear indication that actually you do not want Indians to participate in it even if the public sector is in a position to tackle it. You want the multinationals to have joint-ventures with these people. The Government does not want monopolisation of the telecom sector. But what is going to happen in future is, another monopoly is coming into being. Who has field application for tenders in all the sectors? It is the Reliance. Another monopoly is coming into being here. That is because even the public sector was not given a chance.

Shri Srikantha Jena (Cuttack) : They only rely on Reliance.

Shrimati Suseela Gopalan : They can only rely on Reliance. That is the only thing that comes to mind. But is it beneficial to the country? There was no necessity for this. Our DoT could well have given these telephone services to the public. You have commended them only last year. You have given a 'good' certificate to them that though the target was for 14 lakh, they have invested 17 lakh. The DoT has the capacity to do whatever more is needed. Money also will come because when they wanted money and invited money from the public, they wanted to take loan. How much did you get? I think it is Rs. 7000 crore. Much more is possible. Why should you ask the MNCs to come in? It is a dangerous thing to do. In the whole world, very few countries have actually given it to the private sector. British people have given it with the result that within ten years half of their work force has been finished. That is the result.

Mr. Chairman : You hardly have two minutes to finish.

Shrimati Suseefa Gopalan : There are so many points to be mentioned. The Policy is involved in this. I want a little more time.

In America the equity participation is 20 per cent only. But there is a wide gap here. The foreign equity of the capital there is only 20 per cent, but here in India it is 10 to 49 per cent. What does it mean? It means that it can go up to 49 per cent. It means that they can direct the policy of the Government. Do you think that these private people who are coming in can provide telephones in the villages? One telephone connection in a village, from what I understand, costs about Rs. 1,25,000. The annual interest on that itself comes to Rs. 1,600.

We are giving it for Rs. 350 or Rs. 250. How can they give it? They will tell that they will give it to the villagers also but ultimately it is the villagers who are going to suffer. Actually, the private companies want to earn profit. In a way they will be deceiving 10 per cent of our people. They have a novel idea. They will think that these MNCs are giving good service. If the upper strata people who constitute ten per cent go to the private sector, then our Telecom service will become sick. About five lakh workers will suffer as also the people who are getting good and cheap service. At the present moment, you are charging only Rs. 3000 for fresh registration. They will say that they will also charge only Rs. 3,000 but in due course, they will raise that amount to Rs. 10,000 or Rs. 30,000. It is because, they want profit. At the time of war, what will happen? What was our experience during the Second World War? Those MNCs had helped the Nazis. That experience is before us. If this service is handed over to them, whatever is being spoken by our Prime Minister to the Personnel of Ministry of Defence will reach other countries. They can get every news. Now, the security of our country is in peril. As far as our security is concerned, you are not taking enough safeguards. Even the former chairman, Telecom Board, Mr. D.K. Sangal had said and I quote :

"Building in specific safeguards in regard to security issues, particularly, in respect of border States—get this aspect examined in depth by a group consisting of three arms of defence forces, the police and their intelligence agencies."

Did the Government care about it? I feel, it is a security risk. But, still, his proposal is there; his recommendation is there and nothing has happened. They did not care. They said all security measures are taken and that is why, the Government is giving the guarantee. What guarantee have they given? It is the MNCs who will actually give all the guarantees. Anyway, the future of our country is in peril. The consumers are also going to suffer. This service is going to cost much more. At the moment only Re. 1/- is charged per call, but that is going to be difficult.

Mr. Chairman : Your Party has already taken eighteen minutes.

Shri Salfuddin Choudhury (Katwa) : Still, it is not complete!

Shrimati Suseela Gopalan : These are vital issues. Everybody is supporting this Amendment. But the Members who are opposing this Amendment should be given a chance to speak.

Mr. Chairman : Nobody is saying that you take my time.

Shrimati Suseela Gopalan : They were giving compliments to the Minister. There may be some others who may be opposing it. It is because, our party has a policy towards these things and all the people who are speaking will oppose this. That is what I understand. I thought that the BJP will be opposing this also because they have cancelled the Enron which was a timely action. Such a Bill is actually harmful. So, what I propose is that this Telecom Authority itself is not needed. The entire thing should be re-discussed. Now, all the top bureaucrats are very happy. Many of them have retired and have gone to the private people. Many more are aspiring to go to the private people. Only some patriots who are there in this sector, who are still in the bureaucracy are opposing it. It is because they know it that it is detrimental to the country. So, this is a nexus between these top bureaucrats and the MNCs.

These are the things you have to take into consideration because so many experiences in the world has seen. How are they behaving especially the private sector? When the plague started all the private people went away. Only the public sector like transport, telecom and railways remained there and worked there. All the private sector people even from hospitals have fled the area. So, like that in times of peril you will find it very difficult. It is such a vital sector that this is going to affect our country very badly.

I want to bring to your notice another notice. Now, you have taken action against the people who have fought against the policy. You have seen what has happened in the country in the five days. That capacity is still there. Do not think that by taking action you can prevent all these things. The patriotic sections in the country will fight back together. You are inviting private people in all the sectors. See the division of the revenue itself. How is it divided? 75 paise for the companies and 50 paise for the Department. Who divided it? What is the necessity to divide it before the formation of the telecom authority? They could have invited tenders and then discussed with them and given the revenue share. But that is done earlier. What are they going to do now? Can they re-discuss it? They will go to court. We have this experience in other services. It was delayed because they went to the court and now only it is settled. Even if they want to redivide it, will it be allowed? The MNCs will go to the court because this is the condition the Government has given. It is only a farce. The telecom authority itself will be a farce. The MNCs are going to control the entire thing. This is what is going to come. This is very much detrimental to the interest of the country. The whole thing should be discussed in the Parliament. A Bill on the telecom policy and telecom authority cannot be discussed within two hours. The Minister has promised several times that the whole policy can be discussed but never gave an opportunity to discuss. So, that opportunity should be given. There should be a proper discussion on that. This has very wide implications regarding the future of the country. So, I oppose it tooth and nail and I appeal to the Government to withdraw this Bill and re-discuss everything and then decide the policy. Otherwise it will be detrimental to the interests of the country.

With these words I conclude my speech.

[Translation]

Shrimati Girija Devi (Maharaj Ganj) : Mr. Chairman, Sir,

we have many times come to learn that the Department of Telecommunications is going to bring about not only national but a global change in the level of its telecom services. We are, of course, tired of hearing about this global change but, it had, simultaneously, raised a hope that the country will be benefited to some extent by bringing forward this new Bill. The reason of change has been attributed to the fact that our law is quite obsolete. The telecom policy was chalked out in a planned manner in 1885 for the whole country. Subsequently, it was amended in 1951. While talking about change, it was perceived that after 110 years, due to corruption, our unweariness and unmindfulness etc., we are not able to keep pace with the time.

This Ministry has been working unabatedly and the words 'Ahamisham Sewamahe' are captioned on the album but it would be appropriate if the word 'vishramahe' replaces the word seva.

We talk of the global change and the pace of the time but the figures given by Patel Sahib from the treasury benches are intriguing. We want to peep into the window of the world but refuse to peep into the window of our own village. There is no mention in it as to how far our rural areas will be benefited by it. So, what change will this development bring about here? We have achieved progress, acquired the cellular telephones, the paging system but what has the 90 to 95 per cent population living in rural areas got? All the Panchayats have not got telephone connection so far. Even if the connection has been provided, the telephone remains dead. If it functions at times, the operator replies that 'the route is busy. Please dial after some time'. There is no mention in the Bill as to how to remove and rectify all these lacunae, how to help them, what punishment is to be given to the guilty persons and how much time will it take exactly to get a telephone line.

I am aware, Mr. Minister, and I reiterate my submission already made to you that four years ago your telecom department issued pamphlets saying that an exchange will be provided where there are 10 subscribers but no exchange has so far been provided in Bhagwanpur Hat area of my constituency where 24 people have applied for telephone connections and deposited the money whereas you and I are informed by the department that only 13 applications have been received. Even going by their figures, this number still exceeds 10. Why, then a new exchange has not been provided?

Shri Buta Singh sent us heavy documents of Consumer Protection Act. Why has not the hon. Minister brought this department under the purview of the Consumer Protection Act through this Bill? We deposit the money. Why does the department not fix a time frame for providing the telephone connection to a subscriber?

At the outset, the national telecom policy, 1994, inter alia, lays emphasis on providing countrywide services, raising the quality of telecom services at the global level, fulfil the subscribers' demands at reasonable rates, providing comprehensive services within permissible range, ensuring the participation and competition of companies registered in India in the infrastructural telecom services sector and also on the management of protection, augmentation of the interests of the subscribers. Sir, all this protection, augmentation is meant to protect their interests but how to do? It is not clear anywhere as to what

criteria are being fixed in the department for the purpose or what is the formulation for the extra-departmental management.

Then, there is the geographical imbalance. Any department of telecommunications or posts or telegraphs can be set up and functions more than smoothly in the most progressive area but a backward area is meeting abominable injustice at the hands of every department. Sir, one can speak on a telephone for three minutes in just one rupee within the bounds of a metropolis and other contiguous towns around it like Ghaziabad and NOIDA but under the exchanges opened in the rural areas, the subscribers have to deposit an additional amount of Rs. 100 per km. on the rental money of two months for a distance of more than five kilometers. First, exchanges are not opened for those poor, backward, rural farmers whom the Government talks of helping and if there is an exchange, more money is charged from them.

Fine is charged on them because their houses are located far away. I request you to withdraw your telecom policy at once. It has not been fully discussed as yet. It may be brought at the global level after holding a detailed discussion but before looking at the facilities available in other countries, we should bring about parity of the sorts in our own country where the urban folks can talk to anybody in any corner of the world by merely pushing a button and a rural person has every right as a citizen of this country to avail of this facility. Non-availability of a telecom connection is one of the main reasons of anarchy prevalent in many places today. Today, the whole world is progressing by enormously. The will and capacity to progress is present in all but there is also the need to make provision for extending facilities of every department. A separate authority will be constituted. It will be headed by a retired judge or other judges. In case of any default, the head will be removed by a process similar to that of impeachment of a judge. He is probably in a negative mood. It is mentioned in the second page of the report of the standing committee that its Members will enjoy the privileges a secretary to the Government of India is entitled to. It is also envisaged that the tenure of the Chairman and the Members is secured. Their term of office is secured whether they do the work or not. What is the need of constituting a separate authority when a well arranged infrastructure already exists? Will not it necessitate spending of money? It is being said that material, stock is not available. Why not, then, to ensure and strengthen the departmental services. A separate arrangement will call for additional expenses. The Government often say that for bearing the expenditure, they do not get adequate funds from the budget and they are also not earning so much profits from it. Then why the Government is spending so much and setting up a separate authority? It has also been said that this is the temporary arrangement. If we have to decide about the facilities to be given to this authority after one year, then why this bill is not being brought after a proper deliberation? Now apprehension arising out of this bill is whether this has been brought hastily for benefiting certain particular persons and some companies? This is just a matter of one year only. We have waiting for it eagerly and now when it has been brought it has been brought temporarily for one year only. You may bring this Bill after one year.

This authority's tenure will be very safe and their rights are also protected. Only one thing that is unprotected in it is that

what service it would render. This has not been made clear as to whether it can do it or cannot do it. It will be an autonomous body. Who will mediate when there is a conflict between them and their President? This is also not clear as to who will be the Senior most among them. These all things have not been made clear.....(Interruptions)

We have so many grievances like wrong telephone bills, dead telephones are not being attended, or being connected to other after getting them tampered etc. People get tired of giving their representations to the Consumer protection Forum but they are not heard. If foreigners come to our country, then our workers will become jobless. The material which can be produced in our country is being purchased from abroad by the Telecommunications Department. People of Mankapur and Naini come to us often and their union leaders also meet them regularly. We have got the capacity to manufacture cellular phones or any other telephones but when power is in their hands, they have handed over these things to the foreign companies. When it will completely be in the hands of foreign companies then there can be a authority of the foreigners, then what service it will render to rural areas, poor people and common people. The grief that we have suffered because of changes in the Telecommunication Policy is not of any individual alone but of the common people at large. With these words, I oppose this bill because I cannot support such a bill.,

Shri Rajnath Sonkar Shastri (Saidpur) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I had never thought that I would be given an opportunity to speak so soon. Thanks for giving me the opportunity.

We welcome the Indian Telegraph Amendment Bill 1995. It was indeed very necessary to introduce this Amendment Bill in today's circumstances. The National Telecommunication Policy was introduced in 1994. The Bill was necessary in the situation that emerged within the sphere of new Telecommunication Policy. We congratulate the hon. Minister for having presented this Bill at the appropriate time.

Comprehensive changes have taken place in the Indian Society during the recent decade. The system of our society has completely changed. Our system and our economic life have registered revolutionary changes. Many scientific inventions have taken place in this decade. A need of new Telecommunication Policy was being felt under such circumstances and our Telecommunication Department was fully aware of it.

Our present system has welcomed this new Telecommunication Policy 1994. No complaint has been received from any quarter and no adverse reaction has been witnessed on the part of our people as well. Today, 30 lakhs lines are needed and Rs. 30 thousand crore are needed for this. Rs. 23 thousand crore are required for providing telecommunication facility to the village level. An effort has been made for fulfilling this requirement under the new Telecommunication Policy. Foreign private companies have been allowed to work in the basic telecommunication services under the new Telecommunication Policy. Foreign Companies have been allowed with 49 percent equity. A indication of privatisation under open economy was also given in the new Telecommunication Policy. Indian companies working in collaboration with foreign companies will also adhere to the condition of 49 percent share of foreign companies under the new Telecommunication Policy.

Under this policy a call has been given to adopt foreign capital and foreign technology. We hope that this new Telecommunication Policy would bring about revolutionary changes in telecommunications sector with the collaboration of developed country's technology and Indian Industries. This will definitely satisfy Indian consumers. Today our telecommunication service is in trouble. We see that our consumers are not fully satisfied. Our new policy also pays attention towards these things. We have invited foreign companies to our country. This will give rise to competition in our country and this competition will become a means of betterment of our telecommunication services.

The new telecommunication policy has been criticised by some specialists and some people have expressed many apprehensions. Some people have also expressed their doubts as to how private companies will have participation in laying down cable on roads and setting up the equipments. People opposed to it say that this will give rise to new controversy in the matter concerning participation of public land and courts will be thronged with endless litigation. Not only this, people have said that Mobile telephone and paging services will be adversely affected. But our critics perhaps do not remember that International Services have been envisaged in the National Telecommunication Policy. A draft is being prepared under the new Telecommunication Policy in order to bring the quality level of our telecommunication services to the international standard. Our new Telecommunication Policy envisages to fulfill the demands of consumers at appropriate prices. How to promote the interests of consumers by protecting their interests has been talked about in the new Telecommunication Policy. Attention has also been paid in it on Competition management. New Telecommunication Policy also emphasises as to how our services be made effective.

The Indian Telegraph Amendment Bill has been presented keeping in view all these things. A proposal has been made in the amendment that one Indian Telecommunication Authority be set up. Just now a reference has been made to this authority. It has been envisaged to regulate the powers of Director General of Post and Telegraph through this body. This authority will consist of a Chairman and two members. It has been said that the Chairman of the authority will be any judge of the Supreme Court or Chief Justice of High Court or retired judge or retired Chief Justice. Even the retired persons can be appointed on these posts. Its tenure will be of five years. There is no doubt that it is a good idea and a good experiment. Parliamentary Standing Committee has also welcomed it but there is an apprehension about it. I would expect from the hon. Minister that he should explain as to why only the Chief Justice or a judge of Supreme Court will be its Chairman? If you have to set up such an authority, then why not you appoint a retired person of any university or any other reputed institution or a distinguished Member of Parliament who has his own place in the society? I would like to have a clarification from the hon. Minister. The hon. Minister has rightly said and we also agree to it that you would review the working of this authority after two years. This is a good thing that you will constitute a Permanent Committee after making such review. But I would like to submit that it is a new idea of having a Temporary Committee, so special attention should be paid to it. The Hon. Minister must pay his attention towards its services also. I was

reading about it that this Committee will be a Controlling Committee. There is no doubt that there is a need of a powerful Controlling authority in our telecommunication system. There is a need of a powerful body or a Committee which could set right the telecommunication services, protect the interests of consumers, review the quality of telephone services in remote areas and review the licensing conditions to be followed in case of entry of foreign companies. I believe that this Committee will definitely work in this direction. But I want to ask as to whether this could not have been done through the present vast departmental set up? We hope that you will pay attention towards the difficulties that I have expressed about the proposed arrangement you have made for strengthening the telecom system.

I want to say in brief. The condition of rural telephones is very bad. You have started MRAM system in villages and it is very good. You have widely expanded this system. My Parliamentary Constituency Saidpur is beset with difficulties about which I want to speak something. We used to praise for making available telephone facilities in the remote areas of our country through this system. We used to praise this Government also that it is working well. About 15 to 20 telephones have been provided at Sadat, Sakhariya, Jalalpur, Muffiganj areas in Saidpur. I would like to tell you that when a report to this effect comes to us, then we too claim that it is the Government of our party and our Government has done so much good work. But when we go into its roots then our heads hang in shame. Telephones are there in four villages at Sadat but they have not yet started. When we talk to the engineers and General Manager to this effect they say that they would be started within 2-3 days but two years have elapsed and these telephones have not yet started. Such is the mismanagement prevailing there. You have done a very good work, you have provided new technology to rural people but there is no body to monitor and assess its performance. The Government employees are acting arbitrarily. Demands for various places were made and you have provided STD facility at Gaurabaspur. You have made available STD facility at Saidpur in 1991. We also had a talk about it and started work on it but today its condition is very bad.....(Interruptions). I am winding up. Sir, the hon. Minister of Communication is sitting here. He desires that telephone facilities should reach the towns, local markets and the remotest parts of the country and our communication system could get strengthened. You have got a commitment that our country could establish contact with other parts of the globe through updated communication system. But your desire would not materialise until you change the present system and if you want to change this system through this Committee and through Telecommunication Policy, then we do not have to say anything but you have to exercise control over it. This would not be possible unless and until you exercise stringent control. Just now our friend Shri Jena was talking about excess telephone bills. I want to tell you that I am an ordinary M.P. and have no friends abroad, yet I have been served the telephone bill of Rs. one lakh for international calls. I have also requested the hon. Minister in this regard and the hon. Minister told me that if nobody contracts me within 15 days in this regard then I may remind him about it. That you had said in desperation. I have given you representations atleast ten times, but till date neither any body has contracted me nor it was investigated through CID or CBI as to whether I have made any international call

or not I am a poor man and I hail from the rural area. If I do not pay this bill then my house will be auctioned. If I am living at Varanasi and my telephone remains locked even then the calls are shown against my Delhi telephone. How it happens? We are not technical persons. When we contact concerned officers, they says that we might have made calls. When I am sitting in my house, the room is locked and the key is with me then how the call can be made. Sir, such things have happened a number of times during the tenure of the present Minister. Such things were also there when Mr. Rajesh Pilot was the incharge of this Ministry. When I became an M.P. for the first time it was also there at that time. At that time the amount was Rs. 30-35 thousand and this time the bill has gone up to Rs. two lakhs. I had announced it on the floor of this House that the department may go for endless litigation or may send me to jail but I would not make any payment of the bill. Sir, this is a very serious matter and we should not take it lightly. This is happening with the people. The telephones have become showpiece in villages and small towns and even then they are getting bills. How this happens? Wherefrom such things originate? This has to be looked into. If this process of wrong bills is checked I think it would be a great achievement of the Government. Before I conclude I would like to reiterate that hon. Minister has taken into consideration the problems like false billing, misuse of telephones, making telephone facilities attractive in rural areas and extending telephone service to the remotest villages. It will prove to be the biggest achievement if proper planning is made and implemented effectively. With these words I welcome this Amendment Bill. I would like to say to the hon. Minister that his Telecommunication Policy will definitely succeed. There are 3-4 major defects in it and the hon. Minister should pay attention towards these thing. With these words I conclude.

16.00 hrs.

Shri Bhubaneshwar Prasad Mehta (Hazaribagh) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I thank that there was no need to bring the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Bill which has been presented by the Hon. Minister. This Bill is neither in the public interest nor in the national interest. But it is dangerous from security point of view as well. Under the new policy, the Ministry of Communication and the hon. Minister Sukh Ramji are trying to transfer this establishment to the private sector by winding up the public sector. They want that foreign capital should be invested. But the reality is that only the people of our country themselves can make these investments. The result of handing over it to the private sector will be that the cost of telephones and corruption will increase. It appears that though the Hon. Minister...

16.01 hrs.

(Shri Sharad Dighe *in the chair*)

repeats it time and again in the House that telephone facility would improve but the situation is quite opposite. As and when he has given assurance, the communication system deteriorated. Claims are made that telephones are being installed in the villages, whereas the reality is that installation of a telephone takes two or three years, and if at all it is installed, it does not function. The same situation is prevailing in Hazaribagh area where an Exchange had been set up and STD facility has

been made available but not even a single STD call can be made from there. Not to speak of STD call, even local call cannot be made from there and the Hon. Member Shri Rajnath Sonkar Shastriji has told about telephone bills. Excess bills amounting to thousands of rupees are received and this amount continues to increase. The need to set up an Authority as stated by him would increase corruption as well as expenditure. The suggestion to improve telephone facilities by inviting foreign companies is totally wrong. More than five lakh officials are employed in this Department. We can improve the efficiency by increasing the number of these officials but, unfortunately, it has not been done. On one hand, we could not improve this service and on the other hand, we are inviting foreign companies and transferring all to them. Do you think that this step would be appropriate?

At present the position is that you will find STD out of order everywhere and Rs. 10 to 20 thousands have to be spent for the installation of a P.C.O. I wrote a letter to the hon. Minister that the telephone exchanges of Hazaribagh and Dhanbad have burnt. I have written several times about this incident but he is too busy to reply. I think that the hon. Minister does not have time to reply the letters from Members of Parliament. Now when the Government is going to hand over the Department of Telecommunication to foreign companies, they will try to earn more and more and would exploit the economy, and workers of our country would be retrenched. Had these companies been left in the hands of our countrymen, they would have tried to make them better, but, unfortunately, this has not been done.

Lakhs of rupees have been spent by the Department of Telecommunication but the common man has not been benefited. Telephones have been installed in few villages to show off to the common man, but they are not functioning properly. There is corruption everywhere and it cannot be expressed in words. Therefore, we think that the Government has tried to transfer this Department to the foreigners by bringing this Bill. The Hon. Member has rightly said that the Government should have thought over it before presenting this Bill. It should have thought as to how the telephone services can be improved, and be made available in the remote villages?

But the hon. Minister has brought such a Bill in desperate haste. There is a saying in rural areas—"Much ado about nothing". Similarly, the hon. Minister has tried to mislead the people of this country and this House by presenting this Bill. That is why we object to this Bill. This Bill is not in the interest of our country, the people as well as in the national interest in any way. It is dangerous from security point of view also.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would, therefore, like to say that this Bill should be withdrawn by the hon. Minister and a fresh Bill should be introduced after detail discussion thereon with all the parties. If this department is handed over to the foreign companies. The instruments manufactured in our country would become useless and shall become dependant on the foreign companies. That is why, a fresh Bill should be introduced after consulting all parties. With these words, I conclude.

[English]

Shri K.T. Vandayar (Thanjavur) : Sir, I rise to support the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Bill, 1995.

After liberalisation and globalisation, the world has shrunk and the communication revolution should impress upon achieving universal service. We should also improve the quality of telecom service to the world standard; meet the requirements of customers at reasonable price and enable the private sector to provide basic service to customers in telecom field.

When the telecom activities are increased and open to private sector, naturally a regulatory authority has to be constituted to cope up with the increasing workload and to regularise its functioning. Under the proposed Bill, the scope of the "Telegraph Authority" is being widened to include any statutory or non-statutory body or an officer empowered to perform the functions under the Telegraph Authority Act. At present, these powers are being exercised by a single authority called the Director General of Telecommunications. I welcome the proposal to bring an independent regulatory authority into being which would regulate the working and activities of all telecom services both in the private sector and the public sector in the interest of the nation and the consumers. The Public Sector should set an example. When there was a recent strike, there was damage to the property of the Post and Telegraph Department. Care should be taken to see that the Government property is protected for the welfare of the people. The Post and Telegraph Department should not be a regular victim and target of the angry mob. There should be a sentinel watch to regulate and control the activities of service agencies engaged in the telecom sector in an effective manner.

Sir, in this connection, I would like to state that the hon. Minister has not specified the composition of the Telecom Regulatory Authority, that is, how many members it would consist of and its Chairman; what are their terms and conditions, tenure of service, mode of appointment etc. I want the hon. Minister to take care and work out the details in the Gazette Notification.

With these words, I conclude.

[Translation]

Prof. Rasa Singh Rawat (Ajmer) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, through you, I would like to submit that the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Bill, 1995 seems to be very concise on the face of it but it would have far reaching impact as Hindi Poet Bihari has written —

"Satsaiya ke dohre jyon navik ke teer,

. Dekhan mein chhote lagen ghav karein gambheer"

This Bill seems to be very minor and a small section is sought to be inserted in place of section 6 under article 3 of Indian Telegraph Regulation, 1885.

"Telegraph Authority" means Director General of Telecommunication. Is there any public or private authority who has been empowered by the Central Government, under this Act, to perform any or all duties of Telegraph Authority.

This Authority will have two members and a Secretary etc. It is being repeated time and again that the Chairman of this authority would be a Judge which has not been mentioned in this Bill anywhere. Therefore, the hon. Minister should make it clear and should also lay down the eligibility criteria for

members. He should also explain the recurring and non-recurring expenditure which has been stated to be Rs. 40 and 60 lakhs. And whether the Chairman of this Authority will be a Judge of the Supreme Court or his equivalent judge of the High Court.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, regarding TRAI, a mention was made in Nanda Committee meeting and it presented its report in October, 1992. In this report, ten recommendations had been made. The Government has accepted the recommendations of TRAI after the introduction of the new Telecommunication Policy, though after a very long delay but no action has been taken on other recommendations. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to why the other recommendations have been ignored. It was stated in the recommendations that the Indian Telegraph Bill, 1885 has become very obsolete and it needs to be amended. The Government had also given assurance repeatedly that a comprehensive Bill is required to be introduced. All these aspects have been over looked and in 1994 new Telecommunication Policy has been introduced but an opportunity has not been given to discuss this Bill in detail in the Parliament. Probably this thing has happened because at that time the Prime Minister had to visit America and was expected to have discussion with American companies due to which Telecommunication Policy was announced in haste. This Bill has been brought in the name of implementing this Policy and other aspects have been overlooked. What are the reasons therefor?

Mr. Chairman, Sir, one more point has raised in the Nanda Committee that the legislation of 1885 is authority oriented. In this legislation, more emphasis has been given on the right of Officers, whereas, it needs to be consumer oriented. This Bill should have been framed, keeping in view the interest of the people and all rights should have been exercised properly but all this has not been done anywhere. The Government has talked about the protection of customers' interests and world standard quality as if Telecommunication revolution is coming to India. Model slogan of the Department of Telecommunication "Aharnisham Seva Mahe", today seems to be changing into "Aharnishma Videshi Company Mahe." Foreign companies are going to dominate our economy. The Government is talking about liberalisation and open economy. We had also supported it but that does not mean that Multi-national companies should be allowed without any restriction in such a field where latest technology is already available in our country. Sam Pitroda had said that if foreign companies are allowed in C-DOT technique, they should come to help us so that we may solve the problems regarding Telecommunication and extend services to the maximum extent. But overlooking the potential and capabilities of Hindustan Teleprinters and Public Sector Telephone Industry, it has been transferred to foreign companies.

Sir, earlier it was said that only 25 percent shares will be given to the foreign companies and remaining 75 percent shares will be retained by the Government or Public sector companies. In the beginning, he also favoured this view point and stated this fact in several conferences. But now, why this percentage has been raised to 49. He has simply said that 51 percent shares will be kept by the Government and only 49 percent shares will be sold to the foreign companies but if the foreign companies are clever, they would try to play their game at the

cost of small share-holders of India and would give up priority to their own interests. I would like to quote the conclusion drawn in the report of experts :

Official logics are nothing more than a mask.....The decision of entrusting telecommunication sector to the foreign companies has been couched with such words and conditions that on its face, it looks like a normal policy. But 'gene' test is sufficient to prove it to be unwanted. The first such term used is 'foreign companies registered in India'. It has been said that such companies can enter into contract with the Reportment of telecommunications. The ground reality is that the foreign companies having 49 percent shares can share the remaining 51 percent shares in such a manner that not even a single Indian will be able to dominate in such company.

What will the Government do to avoid such a situation? As has been just said, that telecommunication system has gone out of gear. The Government has said that the quantity will be increased but nothing has been said about improving the quality. When we dial 197, it is repeatedly said that wait for a while. But after a while line becomes busy. The same is the position of 198 or 199. This is the situation in the entire country. Complaint number is given when complaint is lodged but the next day when reminded, reply comes that they had sent lineman and cable fault or some other fault has been detected. The Government has tried to expand telephone services throughout the country but there is no guarantee to maintain these services and to provide better services to the people and nothing has been clearly stated in this regard. Nanda committee had also asked to pay special attention towards this aspect, but there are only one or two lines about it.

Today, foreign companies are prepared to operate and lay cable only in cities but they do not want to do this work in villages or semi-urban areas. India lives in villages. The Government has provided telephones to the Gram Panchayats but all telephone batteries and exchanges are not functioning properly there. Telephones remain dead for several days in the panchayats and no lineman goes there to remove the fault. Foreign companies should be allowed only in semi-urban and rural areas where resources are required, more investment and technology is needed. Priority should be given to our own competent companies in cities with large net work of telephones.

Instruments used in telephones are manufactured by small scale industries in our country. If foreign companies are allowed to enter this field, our industries will close down. One or two American companies have criminal record and a lot of material about them has been published in the American newspapers. These companies have approached the Government. Therefore, the Government should be cautious enough while considering their case. These companies should not be allowed to spread their network in India

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I seek protection from you. Tenders have also been received from one or two such companies which have no experience in laying cables or providing telecom services and they do not have specific technology also, yet they intend to commence their business in India only with the power of money and capital manipulation. Such companies should not be allowed to spread their wings in India.

In this regard, I would like to add one thing more, that Indian entrepreneurs should be given full opportunity to show their potential. Their efficiency should be improved and strong and balanced network should be set up. I would like to submit that there is a need to reorganise the Telecommunication Department and the services of this Department are also required to be made more effective.

The Government is changing only one clause of this Act of 1885. My submission is that radical changes are required to be carried out in this Act so that the technique and technology available in our country may be utilised fully. There is no need to purchase foreign technology and technique. Efforts should be made to make our country self reliant.

[English]

Shri Bolla Bulli Ramaiah (Eluru) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I thank you very much for giving me an opportunity to speak on the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Bill.

It is mainly intended to give penalty for unauthorised diversions, adulteration and other smuggling. Today we can see that the expansion of the telecommunication is so fast. Whatever happens now, it is only the departmental people who are responsible for it. I also find that the system is being developed — fax system, telex system, teleprinter system and various other types of systems that are being developed with the help of microwave.

With the acquiring of satellite system, cellular phones and fibre optics, the electronic system should be able to improve substantially and they would be able to serve the people in the remote areas with better facilities along with the cities that are being served. Here, the two things that we require are these. One is the training of the people. When new technology is coming and the system is being changed, the whole system should be renewed and the people should be well-trained. Otherwise, we will have to face more problems. Today what happens is that the stability has not come. Frequently the calls are cut off; we get wrong calls and these are causing big problems.

Some of my colleagues have mentioned that they get wrong bills. Hereafter, I think, we should be able to have electronic-bill-system printed with time and the place of call without any difficulty. In that case, we will not have such complaints. This requires a lot of expansion very fastly. The requirement of finance is not a problem. In fact, that will give a lot of revenue. Today with the expansion of the private sector also in this field, it is becoming very fast. Simultaneously we should also see that it serves the proper people.

I do not know whether they are really encouraging the use of telephone system more. In the case of telephones, when the number of call is more, the rate goes up. It is very unusual. Normally, the rates should come down; when the calls are increasing. In the case of Railways, if the distance is longer, the rates will come down. Telecommunication system should also improve on those lines and utilisation of the telecommunication system should be made to the maximum extent possible. With the electronic system, a lot of things can be improved. With the help of cellular phones and other things, not only big cities, but also the rural areas should improve. You

will find that not even 15 to 20 percent of the people are using it because the supply system is not adequate. In the rural areas, we need more facilities. We have a lot of places which require immediate telephone system for medical and other purposes. They find it more difficult to communicate in such places. The road development is not up to the mark and so, at least the telephone system should be made available with overhead cables. Microwave system can also be used, radio telephone system should also be used so that these places are connected as much as possible.

I know that there is a lot of demand for the telephones. Today they may say that they will be able to fulfil the requirements of the people within a reasonable time. But the supply system is not up to the mark. In other countries, including the backward countries, the system has improved so fast; and the people are getting phones on demand; and if the phones are not working, they see to it that they work because it is in the interest of their revenue.

But here nobody seems to be much bothered about it. So, this system should also be made more practical-oriented. People's requirement are more important and the revenue earnings also simultaneously come along with that. I think, on this basis, if you can standardise it and try to improve it, the system will definitely work. If the entire staff would be able to work on these lines, then the system will be able to give better service. With better system and better development, they will be able to serve the people most of these things.

I know you may say something on this penalty system that you are actually putting in this Bill. But unless the staff of the telephone system, or the telegraph system, help, it is not possible. I am sure, today the communications require a lot of other facilities. Any wrong tapings or wrong connections will be done only with the help of the staff. If you can improve your own people and see that they should be stabilised, these things can be improved. With these words, I thank you very much.

[Translation]

Shri Hari Kishore Singh (Sheohar) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Bill brought forward by the Government apparently looks to be very simple and seek to improve our communication system. In view of the country's industrial, economic and geographical condition, the communication system is very obsolete. Last year, many reforms were carried out in it under the new Telecom Policy but, simultaneously, some apprehensions were also expressed including those about the future of the employees working in the department. They look panicky today. Under the new Telecom Policy, this sector is being entrusted to the private companies, the foreign multinational companies particularly when they will have more than 51 percent shares, the Government or the Parliament will not be able to exercise any control over it and it will also affect the services of the employees working in the department. The Government should ponder over it and inculcate a sense of security among the lakhs of employees working throughout the country. This is the reason for their panic.

Under the new Telecom Policy the multinational companies (MNCs) will get the opportunity of doing work of a sensitive

nature in the communication sector. Not only that, the foreign companies will also control by using their own equipments and tools all the information and news emanating from the offices or residences of the VIPs not only in Delhi but in other parts of the country as well. In other words, the whole communication system will be controlled by foreign companies. Official Secretary can be in jeopardy. How can we ensure secrecy of information and documents? The Government should make arrangements for preserving the secrecy of the Prime Minister's Office, the Defence Minister's Office and the Ministry of Finance and should also keep a vigil over it.

The Telecommunication Regulatory Authority has been termed as a watch-dog that will look after the whole system. I wish that this organisation should not only be constituted of the bureaucrats but also chaired by a retired judge of the Supreme Court. It should also include the representatives of the subscribers and the Members of the Parliament as in the case of Board of Directors of the Banks which are composed of the representatives of the staff and of the account-holders. Unfortunately, there are no Members of the Parliament representing there but I would like the hon. Minister to keep in mind, while replying to the debate, my suggestion that the representatives of the people should also be included in the Regulatory Authority because many anomalies arise in the absence of the representatives of the subscribers and of the Parliament.

Today, many arrangements are being made in our country and many kinds of experiments undertaken. Telecommunications has entered a new era. It has reached the villages by a new method of setting up a tower through microwave but most of the plants and equipments do not function. There is nobody to repair and maintain them. In my constituency, Sheohar, Bihar, people received whimsical bills even to the tune of Rs. 50,000.

Sir, yesternight, when I wanted to talk to one of my friends in Bombay and rang him up, I was told that this telephone service had been withdrawn. Then, I left a message for that friend on another telephone asking him to ring me back and he talked to me from Bombay on the same telephone which was said to have been withdrawn. Mr. Chairman, Sir, you also might have come across such incidents. How shall these lacunae be removed in the electronic exchanges and how can this system be strengthened under the new Telecom Policy? Everytime you ring, you are told — please check the number which you have dialled. Same thing can be heard on a telephone if you make a call from the Parliament House. You are not able to talk. The moot point is how to improve this system and how to give facilities to the subscribers?

The most important thing is that with the advent of foreign technology a sense of desperation is gripping the minds of the country's technicians because we are eager to set our feet with immediate effect in the domain of world trade and world economic order in pursuit of the new policies of liberalisation and globalisation in total ignorance of our sense of self-reliance which is not good. Today, we see which company floats the most hefty Euro-issue-whether it is Mahanagar Telephone Nigam or the Railways or any other government institution—and after floating it, they are compelled to withdraw it time and again though the Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd. has not floated

any Euro-issue so far. I would like to know the steps the Government is going to take to dispel the apprehensions arising in the country's technicians working in the field? The hon. Minister should touch upon it as well.

Lastly, I would like to ask the hon. Minister as to by what time will the subscribers get the benefits of the much publicised cellular telephones and its installation charges should not be such as will facilitate the affluent class alone to benefit by this facility. It is learnt that the Government is going to earn a revenue of Rs. 50,000 crore over a span of 10-15 years through it. This is good but the common and backward people should also get this facility. It would be in the fitness of things if the people of the hilly and the desert areas are also able to this facility. The home town of the hon. Minister, Himachal Pradesh, is also a hilly area.

With these words, I welcome the new Telecom Policy but I also condemn the policy of over looking and ignoring the competition and the principle of self-reliance involved in it.

[English]

Shri Yalma Singh Yumnam (Inner Manipur) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, though I rise to support this Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Bill, I would like to raise some points which I think are necessary for the House to consider.

In the Statement of Objects and Reasons given by the Minister incharge, it is mentioned that this Amendment Bill has been brought forward in the context of the National Telecom Policy 1994. Since he has mentioned the National Telecom Policy, which is made as the basis for his other proposals, I consider that it would be necessary for the House to discuss this National Policy and get it approved by the House before it is made a National Policy; before it is made the basis for other proposals. I strongly demand for bringing the proposals for the National Telecom Policy before this house and seek the approval of this House.

Sir, in the Statement of Objects and Reasons, it is mentioned that the amendment is for the promotion of the quality of the telecom service to the world standard. It is very good. It is encouraging and we would like to encourage it, since it would be for the promotion of the quality of the service, to make it of the international standard. So, we have to agree with this proposal. There, it is also mentioned that it is for the protection and promotion of consumers' interest. It is also very good. If it is implemented fully, then it will serve the purpose greatly.

Sir, the amendment is for making the independent Telecom Regulatory Authority under the name and style "Telecom regulatory Authority of India". But here also, the proposal is for making it only a non-statutory in character. But I would like to propose that it would be more purposeful if it is made a statutory one.

So, these are some points which I would like to propose while supporting the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Bill. In the matter of proposals I would also like to propose that there should be regional advisory committees for telecommunications for every Chief General Manager so that the effective service can be given to the consumers. The MPs, MLAs and the representatives of the consumers can be made members of

such advisory committees. Now, we are having advisory committees at the State level for the telecommunication services.

Sir, I would like to propose that the composition of such Advisory Committees should include at least the Members of Parliament representing that constituency or the region so that they could bring before this House the problems faced by the Committee in respect of the particular States concerned. Although I have written to the Minister-in-charge to include the Members of Parliament of the area—say, for Manipur I represent the whole valley including inner Manipur—yet I have not been made a member of that Committee. I also find no proposal contained in this amendment Bill regarding the problems being faced by the Advisory Committee. So, I would like to propose—for other States also—that Members of Parliament representing the area or the Constituency should be made members of the Advisory Committee so that they could discuss the problems faced by that area and by the region.

Sir, I would like propose that there should be a classification of the applicants who are in the waiting-list for telephone connections. Now there is a long waiting list for telephone connections. But the priority the connection is determined by the capacity to pay the deposit amount. It is not fair. It must be classified for advocates, for doctors, for teachers, for businessmen etc. It should be classified as per the profession. The list in priority consideration should be drawn in this way.

Lastly, I would like to propose that telephone connections with STD facilities should be provided in the areas covered under the *Nagarpalikas*, the Municipalities and the *Zila Parishads*. Otherwise, it becomes very inconvenient for the people to go and make STD and other calls from far off places. So, I would like to propose to the hon. Minister to consider this aspect seriously and provide for telephone connections with STD facility in the areas covered under the *Nagarpalikas*, the Municipalities and the *Zila Parishads*.

With these few words I support the Bill.

Shri Pawan Kumar Bansal (Chandigarh) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, rapid advancement in science and technology has reduced our once mystic and unexplored planet into a global village today. This is so particularly because of the accelerated development in the field of telecommunications, besides of course the advent of fast and even supersonic modes of transport. Today we are witnessing a veritable revolution in the field of telecommunications—triggiring, catalysing and facilitating developments in other fields of activity.

Sir, till recently India was lagging far behind and it seemed almost impossible for us to match the level of progress achieved by many other countries in the field of telecommunications. With archaic equipments, the services were mostly confined to the urban areas and those also were woefully inadequate both in reach and quality.

During the last four years the number of telephones in the country has increased many-fold and today even the remote, inaccessible villages in deserts and a top mountainous ranges are connected via Telecom satellite. You just have to dial the number and talk to the person at the other end, thousands of miles away, as if you are conversing in a close group in the

drawing room or across the dining table. Indeed, we have taken a step that is poised to become a gigantic major leap and for this I compliment the Hon. Minister.

With the state-of-the-art equipment, quality and variety of services has improved tremendously. FAX, radio paging, cellular phones, which of course, hon. Members of the other side wanted to be distributed freely amongst the Members of the public, V-SAT network including E-Mail, Hybrid Mail are the 'in-things' today and the conventional telegram seems to have lost its pride of place. To keep pace with the developments in the rest of the world and to enter the 21st century, as a country confident of its future, we obviously have to accord due to importance to the expansion of Telecom network.

Given the resource crunch and the need to step up governmental expenditure on social sectors like education and health, we have to today look for private investment in infrastructure like telecommunications, electricity and roads. The National Telecom Policy has today opened the basic services also to the private sector and I welcome this step. It is heartening to find that many foreign companies of repute have evinced interest in telecommunications here. So far, it was the Government of India which retained monopoly or exclusive privilege of establishing, maintaining and working telegraphs, which expression under the Indian Telegraph Act includes telecommunications, and in that scenario it was perfectly valid and understandable for the Government to vest powers of the Secretary to the Government, the Chairman Telecom Commission as also that of the regulatory authority, that is the Director General of Telecommunications in one person.

Today, Sir, when we have opened the telecommunications to private sector, it becomes incumbent on us that if we want to be really fair in the matter, the regulatory functions must be separated from the policy making and operational functions and I think it is quite clear that it is to achieve this objective that the present amendment to the Indian Telegraph Act is sought to be incorporated. This, as the hon. Minister has said while piloting the Bill, is essential for the healthy growth of telecommunications. This would stimulate confidence amongst all the participants. The Government — we must understand today — cannot both be a participant and a referee in the match. It is in this perspective that the decision to establish an independent and autonomous Telecom Regulatory Authority has to be viewed. So, this must be welcomed.

Sir, the main functions, I gather, that this Telecom Regulatory Authority of India would be called upon to perform include: to ensure technical compatibility and effective interconnection, revenue sharing arrangements, protection of consumer interest and national security interest, enforcement of service quality standards, compliance of licence conditions, fixation of tariffs, compliance of universal service regulations, resolution of issues between service providers, rendering service to Government on technology options, service provision aspects and other matters connected with Telecom industry.

Sir, this authority, I presume, is going to be a quasi-judicial authority vested with the power to adjudicate upon various disputes or issues relating to telecom services. The proposed authority, as the hon. Minister said, would be a watchdog for telecom sector and would monitor quality of service. Sir, a doubt

was expressed by hon. Shri Hari Kishore ji about the impact that the working of the National Telecom Policy would have on national security and matters connected with official secrecy. Sir, I, with uttermost humility would like to submit that this apprehension is misplaced. Sir, what is of importance as regards these aspects given vent to by Shri Hari Kishore ji is the question relating to the management of frequency. I think, Sir, there is no doubt that it is not proposed to give the management of frequency to the regulatory authority. There is an abundant safeguard about the maintenance of security.

Mr. Chairman : It is a one-clause Bill and the time allotted was two hours. You have already crossed the time limit. I think Members from most of the Parties have spoken. You are practically the last speaker. Please wind up.

Shri Pawan Kumar Bansal : Sir, I accept that the functions relating to the management of frequency should not vest in a regulatory authority like this and we need not really have doubts on that since that is not one of the functions that would be given to this regulatory authority immediately.

Sir, about the composition of this regulatory authority I must say that the Government has assured this House that this is going to be a high-powered authority. The Chairman would be a person who has been or is a Judge of the Supreme Court and the other members would be those who have been Secretary to the Government of India or Additional Secretary to the Government of India. I think, Sir, that should infuse confidence in the minds of all concerned. I only wish that there is a provision to ensure that one member is a technical person. We do not have to entertain any other doubt about this.

Sir, I am always for the demand that Parliamentary control over the working of the Government has to be ensured that strengthened. But I beg to differ with the hon. Members from the other side as far as this question of regulatory authority is concerned. Sir, this function would be entirely different from what you expect from the Members, the representatives of public to perform. For that purpose we have this forum here, the Parliament. We have the Consultative Committee, we have the Departmentally-related Standing Committee and we also have the Telecom Advisory Committees. But, given the functions that you expect that authority to perform, I think we have to leave it to those three members to look into those matters. However, Sir, there is one doubt which I would like the hon. Minister to clear. Going through the Statement of Objects and Reasons I find that there is a specific mention to the first proviso to Section 4 of the Indian Telegraphs Act.

It empowers the Government to delegate to the Telegraph Authority all or any of its powers under the first proviso to Sub-Section (1) which of course, deals with granting licence to run telegraph services. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether function of grant of licence is also proposed to be transferred to this regulatory Authority. In my view, Sir, I think, to begin with, this function must be retained with the Government. This function of granting license is quite different from the regulatory functions. This, for the time being — till as we say, we gain experience — or till we finally come out with a self-contained enactment to provide for a statutory authority after a few years, this power to grant licence should vest with the Government and subsequent regulatory functions, should of course, vest with that high-powered Authority.

The second question that comes to my mind with this is about the jurisdiction. Sir, at present, any act of the Director-General of Telecommunications is challengeable in the Civil Courts. Once you have a very high-powered Authority under the Chairmanship of a Judge of the Supreme Court which would be the forum where the decisions of this authority could be challenged? The act does not speak of this, meaning thereby, that the Act does not bar the matters from being taken to the Civil Courts. If the same position were to exist, it would tantamount to the decisions of a Judge of the Supreme Court — though not working as Judge of the Supreme Court — being challenged in the Civil Court. I think their jurisdiction cannot be barred by a Resolution which the hon. Minister may subsequently be bringing in, to setup this Authority. That care has to be taken. May be another Amendment — if I am not mistaken — is called for in the Act itself.

And associated with this would be the question of revocation of licence, because as far as revocation of licence is concerned, there is no provision in the Act for the Government to delegate its authority to anybody else. The Telegraph Authority cannot revoke the licence. It can grant the licence. If and when this new Authority is setup, those functions, according to the Statement of Objects and Reasons, are likely to be transferred to the Authority. I would like the hon. Minister to clear this point.

Finally, to conclude, I would say that this National Telecom Policy, which of course, is not strictly under discussion here, but about which more references have been made and are likely to be made also than the present Amendment, is indeed a step which was necessary in the present environment, if we really want to be counted amongst the countries that matter in the world.

Sir, the present initiatives of the Government are packed with job opportunities; with international Concerns vying to come to Indian markets. I think in the next two or three years, may be anything upto five lakh trained personnel in different streams, engineers, MBAs and people down the line are likely to get good and high paying jobs in telecommunications. The purpose or the ideal of any Government is to create avenues of employment for the people. It is not important for the Government to give doles; and it is not important for the Government to give jobs which perhaps, our hon. Members, who sometimes even opposed that policy, want. Sir, what is important today is for the Government to create an environment where people get the opportunity to earn.

17.00 hrs.

What is important is the generation of sources of income for them. This is one initiative which is going to create that in abundance. I am sure that in the days to come it will usher a virtual revolution in the field which would ultimately benefit the country in all spheres.

With these words, Sir, I support this Bill.

Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Bhuwan Chandra Kanduri (Garhwal) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, to start with I would like to assert that the drafting and contents of this Bill are highly confusing. As I understand, and as you have said this is one-Clause Bill for merely changing the definition of the telegraph authority and if

that is the total content of this Bill, I do not see how does this financial memorandum and how does this talk of regulatory body, statutory and non-statutory come into it? Therefore, I think what you have done here is to confuse two separate issues. One is merely changing the definition which existed in your books and thereafter what you propose to do is a separate issue. Therefore, I would like to ask the Minister as to what exactly is the aim of this Bill. If there was only a change of definition, then that would not involve Rs. 40 lakh of financial memorandum. In fact there should be no financial memorandum with this Bill as per understanding. To make things worse the other day, on the 9th of August when the Minister gave his introductory remarks he said and it is in the content of the Bill also that there is going to be a non-statutory regulatory body. He said when we want to establish a statutory body we will again come to this House. Now, this Bill in its present form does not authorise you to form a statutory body or a non-statutory body. It merely authorises you to change the definition of a particular term. Therefore, I would like the Minister to clearly state as to what does this imply and why this confusion has been created because if you just change the definition, thereafter you have the option of constituting the body and if you want to have statutory body, then you should have presented a Bill.

Next I come to the Bill itself. The Statement of Objects and Reasons as given are laudable, only if they were not laughable keeping in view the performance of this Ministry and this Department. Sir, it talks of bringing the quality of Telecom service to world standard. Number two, widest permissible range of services to meet the customer's demand and number three, promotion of consumers' interest. Now, I do not know, Sir, whether we are suddenly going to jump from bullock cart stage to rocket stage or the Minister and his Department wants to go for a 100 metres sprint before we start walking. The present state of our telecom service is so awful that I do not understand how in the Statement of Objects and Reasons he has put all these things which he wants to achieve through the National Telecom Policy, 1994. Earlier the Members had given many examples. I would not like to repeat them. But I would like to give two instances for which I have written a letter to the Minister a few days back. There is a big talk. But from my own telephone in Delhi people get a response on the other side, whether they talk from Delhi or Dehradun or from my constituency, 'please check the number you have dialled and this number has changed'. A number of people have contacted me through other channels. I have got still more wonderful examples. I have given these instances. I have got specific cases, still more interesting. Sometimes when you re-dial a number you think that you have made a mistake in re-dialling. I dial a number and then press the repeat button. First time you get a response, a recorded message, 'please check the number you have dialled'. After ten seconds when I press the repeat button, I get connection to the number I want. I do not know what sort of electronics, what sort of technology or what sort of modern methods you are using to get such replies from your telecom system. I have given the specific timings in my letter. Many of the things happen. Your MTNL has given us beautiful cards. They keep on changing the colour. Sometimes it is yellow and sometimes it is green for Members so that their agony is minimised.

Even on those telephone numbers, there is no response. When we talk of improving the quality, we talk of a quantum jump in quality. Let us talk about the reality on ground and what is happening on ground. Let us not try to go to the moon when we cannot even walk. Therefore, as I said, it is a laudable aim but in the present circumstances, Sir, it is unbelievable and I do not think that there are any chances of your achieving it.

From here I cannot get through to the Headquarters. Some Members have suggested that we should get through to the Headquarters and we have many STDs. I had written to you many number of times about this. I got your reply after eight months. You have said that some changes are taking place but those changes were not taking place on ground. From here I cannot get through to my constituency. I cannot get through to the Headquarters or to the Commissioner. For five district Headquarters, one Commissioner is sitting. I cannot get through to him. I cannot get through to many of the District Headquarters. So, I think, we need to be a little more realistic. Therefore, when we are trying to aim certain things, let us see what our capabilities are or the degree of our inefficiency or the degree of corruption that has gone into the system and thereafter we should aim for whatever we want to do.

You have used the word 'watchdog' here. If this watchdog is going to be handled like the way it is presently handled, then God only can help us and there is not going to be any change. I am sorry to say one thing. You can have an independent body but if the system is not changed, then these three human beings are not going to make much difference.

Now I come to the aspect of members. Well, I appreciate when you said that it is going to be headed by a Judge. That was in your introductory statement but it is nowhere mentioned in this Bill. Some Members have also raised the issue as to who is going to be the Chairman and the members. But on that day you have said that you are going to have a serving or a retired Judge from a Supreme Court and you are going to have the Secretary and the Additional Secretary as two members. As far as having a Judge as the Head is concerned, one can understand that probably you want to give a legal authority or something to that body. But I do not understand why the Secretary and the Additional Secretary should be there. This telecom business is a highly technical business. Why do you not have the technical people there? Are you short of the technical people? Are you going to have more avenues for the IAS people and the bureaucrats through this Bill? I strongly recommend to you that you have this body of experts. You have given a legal expert. You give a lot of technical experts and telecom experts. There are many people who are available. Only then they will be able to understand the problems, put things right and will be able to use this body properly. Otherwise it is just as having a bureaucratic body. Presently you are having all the bureaucrats but they are not working. You have all the authority. You do not need any more authority than what the Regulatory Body has. The Minister has got all the authority. Then, why is it not functioning properly? It is not functioning properly because the people who are dealing with this are the people who have no knowledge about what is happening on ground, no knowledge about the technology and no knowledge about the system and, therefore, it will not work. I strongly request you to have a technical people as members of this body.

Now, Sir, to conclude, the aim of this Bill is to have a monitoring system. You liberalise and remove the Government's stranglehold on various things. We all support it. We want things to be liberalised. But, unfortunately, your concept of liberalisation is to do what the World Bank wants you to do, what the IMF wants you to do and what the multi-nationals want you to do.

Therefore, we agree to the concept but your methodology is neither good nor is it dependable or reliable. Your intentions may be very good but the methods that you adopt are not good. We want things to be liberalised and we want that the control should be removed. But you start it from home. Charity always begins at home. You should do it beginning with yourself. Please give some freedom to our own people, who have tremendous potential and who have tremendous capability. Therefore, I request you to do something for our own entrepreneurs, technocrats and industrialists.....(Interruptions)

Shri Murli Deora (Bombay South) : What about MP's quota for telephone connections?.....(Interruptions)

Maj.Gen. (Retd.) Bhuwan Chandra Khanduri : You can take it away from us provided you reduce the waiting list. In my constituency, Dehradun, the waiting list is six years. When we go back to our constituency, people tell us, 'you give us some telephones'. This quota is eventually linked up with efficiency. The person who has deposited a sum of Rs.10,000 is supposed to get the telephone connection immediately.

The day before yesterday, at Dehradun, I pointed out a case. For three months the clearance was not given to the telephone connection. When I went to the concerned Circle, they said, 'They will give it'.

At the end, I support the concept that you are trying to do but I have doubts on your basic intentions and basic methodology. Therefore, I hope you will keep all these in mind, particularly, the first point which I had made about the drafting of the Bill. Please clarify that point.

Shri P. C. Thomas (Muvattupuzha) : Sir, I welcome the Bill in the sense a watchdog is necessary to watch the entire telecom sector where the people are getting more and more involved because telephone is now one machine or one service which is a must for all.

Now the fact that a non-statutory body is going to come, I think that needs review. It must be something which is to be discussed in Parliament and the Regulatory Authority which is going to be given so much of powers should be one with a lot of technicians as well as people who know what the real feeling of the people is. So I think that must be discussed before a finality is taken on that account.

Now I am not going into the details of the other aspects. But I would like to touch one or two aspects. Sir, one is regarding the wrong billing about which we are all afraid. I remember once Mr. Paswan was complaining that he got a bill which was for Rs. 2 lakh when he was actually not in the House. Because it was Paswan, I am sure that he could raise the matter in the House and he could get the bill reviewed and he got the remedy immediately. But what about those who are not Paswan? There are so many persons. There are so many persons who cannot afford are not getting justice. So I suggest

that something must be immediately done and I would suggest even to think of some metre for each person or to think some kind of a machinery whereby the bill can be viewed, how the bill is going to change can be viewed by the person who rings or who uses the telephone.

Now the next point I would like to submit is regarding the public booth. In fact I complement the Government for starting so many public booths and this has become a place where the common man can go in. Now it has given employment to so many persons also. So it is a very welcome step but now-a-days we find that so many very rich persons are coming into this field. Those who want to start it as a passerby job or side job are all coming into this field. Those who have all facilities are coming into this field. So the other aspect of employment is not getting due weightage and many persons who are less privileged in the society, the handicapped, are not getting jobs because of this. So I would suggest that they may be considered for these jobs and there must be something in this regard where the policy matter is being taken in this regard.

I want to bring to the notice of the Minister one aspect. There are a lot of waiting lists in all the exchanges especially in Kerala which I know personally. The waiting list is going on very very long and we are not able to cope up with the demand. Now the money which is given to the States, to the Circles is also one real problem and I find this problem on a checking up of the money which has been given to Kerala Circle which I would like to bring it specifically before the Minister's notice. I know in the other Circle also there may be complaints. But here in 1992-93, the amount granted for Kerala Telecom Development was Rs. 300 crore, whereas in 1993-94 when the total investment in this regard went up to 30 percent in Kerala Circle, the amount given was only Rs. 200 crore. That is, it went down to 30 percent. Instead of going up to 30 percent, it went down to 30 percent. Then we all went in and at last the paltry amount was increased. But in the next year, in 1994-95 also, the amount has not been considerably increased and the amount given is only Rs. 260 crore. Now I would urge upon the Minister that this is a place where a lot of revenue is being earned and a lot of new telephone lines are to be given. And they are meeting the targets. But at the same time they are unable to meet the demands because so many applications are pending. They are doing a very good job. The employees are also working well and I would suggest that more money may be given to this sector.

Lastly, I would like to make one suggestion. In my constituency there was a family problem which had ensued just because of this telephone. A husband started calling his wife again and again. The computer just showed that the line was busy. He was wondering how his wife could be so busy! Every time the computer said that the line was busy. Actually the line was not busy. It was faulty. It was always faulty. That is the problem. The computer saying something else as a result of which the work in the area is not proceeding. So, I would suggest that something should be done immediately with regard to the computerisation and the answers which are given by the computer.

As it was mentioned, we are always told to "Check the number". But when we check the number also we are getting into more difficulties. I have a personal experience. My number

has been changed. But the Department does not know about it. If 197 is dialled, they also do not give the correct number. They are unable to give the number, even of a Member of Parliament. I think something must be done in regard to 197. There is no response. The response given is not correct also.

Lastly, one aspect I would like to pose, regarding the problem caused by lightening. In many of the areas in the North-East, Bengal and Kerala, and also in many other places lightening causes problems. Wherever the electronics exchanges are there — it is a very good system — because of lightening so many problems are caused. It is very difficult to mend the parts immediately. I think the Department is thinking of a new technology of micro-wave system. That is good. The network is also growing bigger and bigger.

I would suggest that the optical fibre system which is now coming up may be used. I believe that the allotment for it has already been made. It must be expedited. We find that the amount required is already there. Optical fibre is there. The production, as we understand, is also there. Just because the jointing — I do not know exactly the technical word — the jointer is not available to connect the optical fibre from one exchange to the other, it is delayed. I learn that one machine costs Rs. 12 lakh, which is not costly. Just because that is not available the work is not going on well. We have made a study in Kerala. There optical fibre is found to be necessary in many parts. The survey made has found that it is necessary in many parts. But it is not being given because of this problem. I would suggest that this should be taken into account very seriously so that immediate possible results are ensured.

I would submit about the buildings. This Department, I must compliment, has done a great job by purchasing plots in very many areas. The Department has got many buildings for exchanges. It was a very good job done. Now the plots have become so costly that the Department will find it very difficult to buy. But the department, I would suggest, must go a long way to find ways and means to construct buildings. If the building are available, I think under the new technology which we are fortunate enough to get under the leadership of Shri Sukh Ram and the Department and also this Government, I am sure that, we will be able to make a good break through.

Lastly — I am sorry, I do not say again and again — finally, I would compliment Shri Rajiv Gandhi who, I would say, has had a very very wide range of thoughts in his mind and a very good planning which has brought India to a very good position with regard to the development of telecommunications. I compliment this Ministry and I also urge upon this Ministry to take action on some of the points which I have raised here.

Mr. Chairman : I think now that we have had sufficient discussion. Let us listen to the hon. Minister.

(Interruptions)

Mr. Chairman : It was only a one-clause Bill. The time allotted was two hours. We have already taken three hours. Most of the parties have been fairly represented in the discussion. If you spare such a long time for such a Bill, what will happen, to the other Business of the House ?

(Interruptions)

Mr. Chairman : Please cooperate. I will appeal to all the Leaders of the Parties to cooperate. Let us close this discussion now.

Shri Rupchand Pal (Hooghly) : Sir, please allow us for two minutes each....(*Interruptions*)

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Youth Affairs and Sports) and Minister of State in the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs (Shri Mukul Wasnik) : I would also like to request you that we have already taken a substantial time and there are many important items which we have to take up. I will request the Members that they may kindly cooperate with us. (*Interruptions*)

Mr. Chairman : So many subjects are there for discussion and if we take three hours on one-clause Bill, then I think we will not be doing justice to other subjects.

...(*Interruptions*)

Shri Rupchand Pal : They are bulldozing the opinion of the Members of the Opposition. (*Interruptions*)

Mr. Chairman : At great length the policy was discussed by Shrimati Suseela Gopalan. Now, I will call the hon. Minister to speak.

...(*Interruptions*)

Mr. Chairman : All the aspects have been covered.

...(*Interruptions*)

[*Translation*]

Shri Ram Kripal Yadav (Patna) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, by disallowing me to speak on this Bill you are throttling democracy (*Interruptions*)

[*English*]

Mr. Chairman : Then, I will have to allow everybody. All the Parties have participated in a big way. This is just a one-clause Bill.

...(*Interruptions*)

Shri Rupchand Pal : The Parliament is being denied the opportunity to discuss the very important Policy like the National Telecom Policy. Now, we have been asked to discuss an amendment to the Indian Telegraph Bill which is a follow-up action of the above Policy.

Mr. Chairman : You can speak on other Bills. There are several other Bills.

...(*Interruptions*)

Shri Amal Datta (Diamond Harbour) : You are not allowing the hon. Members to speak on the National Telecom Policy and you are cutting down the discussion. (*Interruptions*)

17.23 hrs.

At this stage Shri Rupchand Pal and some other hon. Members left the House.

[*Translation*]

The Minister of State of the Ministry of Communications

(Shri Sukh Ram) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am grateful to those hon. Members who have participated in this discussion. I am very happy that hon. Members have discussed not only this Bill but also the Telecom Policy. The hon. Members have also alleged that they were not given the opportunity to discuss it. I had presented it on the floor of the House the very day, that is on May 13 the Cabinet approved it. Now it is for the hon. Members to call for a discussion on it and then they could have discussed it because when a document is presented to the House, it becomes the property of the House and it was the right of hon. Members that they could have called for a discussion and then it would have been discussed. I would have felt very happy then. We have been listening for the last 8-10 years. Now the Telecom Policy has been framed under the leadership of Hon. Prime Minister for the first time and target and the objective of the Telecom Policy is to have a uniform telephone service and this must be of the international standard. It should be made available at the affordable price. There are three things about which nobody should have any objection.

Now the question arises as to how to achieve the target. How to achieve it in the real question because Telecommunications is really very capital intensive and technology intensive and the today's technology has become obsolete. The coming of technology and investment are two necessary things. Though our network is one of the biggest networks but so far as density is concerned, we are far behind. We are far behind Pakistan, China and other developing countries also. Now we have reached upto one percent only. In today's world, communication is one of the criteria whereby the economic prosperity of a nation and its social standards are adjudged. We must have an improvement systems. When I took charge of this Ministry, wherever a new proposal came, we said that we do not have money, so this is not possible. If we cannot do it because of paucity of funds, our country will lag behind. So we adopted several innovative methods, which included leasing, deferred payment and equipment purchase. Ever since the Telecommunications Policy was launched, I could say that the work that has been done during this five year plan, is more than what was done during the last seven five year plans. Earlier we were not in a position to give more than five or 6 lakh telephone connections and now we give more than sixteen and half lakh connections and the target set for this year is 30 lakh. Extension is also a point.

We have to bring in the most up-to-date technology because without this neither we can compete with the world nor we can give good system. How the technology will come in? We talk of C-DOT. There is no doubt that C-DOT is a good technology but this is not enough. Can you deliver message to the entire country through C-DOT? We have got 6-7 technologies in India which are the latest ones. These include the ISDN facility, delta transmission facility etc. All the facilities that are available in today's world, is available in our country.

I do appreciate the question raised by the hon. Members that our country mainly consists of villages and facilities are really needed in villages. I do believe that there are so many shortcomings in it. I will talk about it later on but what I notice is that the achievements that we have made during these years, were not achieved during any of the previous years. In our country, people hesitate in talking about telecommunications

because the old concept of telecommunications is for industries or for those engaged in Commerce or Government Services. I say that if telecommunications is needed in today's world, it is needed in the areas where there are no roads and areas which are inaccessible. Our North East and the state from which I hail, are such regions where people live beneath snow for eight months. While there is a 15,000 feet high mountain covered with snow on one side, there is a 14,000 feet high mountain on the other side. The entire world is cut off from this place. Nothing becomes clear as to what is the condition there. We manage to know through telephone as to what condition is there. We may talk to entire India. Today, the need of the hour is that cordless telephone should be provided in villages because as hon. Members have pointed out thefts also occur there. Today, people steal the copper wire. How to protect them is a problem. This is spread over thousands of kilometers. So, the latest technologies like MARR, UHF etc. are reaching people through satellite. We are introducing the entire system throughout the country. If we have to connect our Panchayats through telephones, we need at least Rs. 4000 crore. We have to provide such a system to all the people in 6 lakh villages, this is not just the question of one Panchayat only.

I come from hilly and rural area. I do understand the problems of villages. The hon. Prime Minister has given the directive that first priority will be given to villages. Now, we have talked of privatisation in which we have seen so many big things at our own level. Perhaps, no Minister looks to conditions stipulated in the tenders, but I have given importance to the fact that if private sector gives for more telephone connections to the villages, we will give it more weightage. This was opposed also, but I did not agree to it so that they could pay their attention towards villages. Telephones are not remunerative in villages as in urban centres. That is why they have come to villages. But wherefrom Rs. 4000 crore will come? We talk of villages but wherefrom we will get Rs. 4000 crore and technologies? When we allow the Private Sector, hon. Members say that these are foreign companies and we are selling out the country to foreign companies. I do believe that there was a big pressure that foreign companies should be given major share, but Hon. Prime Minister's stand was that foreign companies should not be given major shares, our Indian companies should be given priority. But the question is why the question of bringing in foreign technologies arose? There are two reasons for this.

You should mobilise the funds available in the domestic sector. Funds are needed for creating infrastructures not only for telecommunications, but also for power, surface transport etc. Internal resources would not be sufficient for all these purposes. Foreign investment is needed in order to meet these requirements. Today, China provides 7 to 10 million telephone connections each year. China attracts more foreign investment than us. None could exploit China. Then how could anyone exploit India, when it has such a huge watch dog (Parliament) and a vibrant democracy? We have allowed them to have a minimum equity participation of 10 percent and a maximum of 49 percent only. We have told the foreign companies that they can have 15 percent, 25 percent of equity participation but not more than 49 percent. Thus the majority shareholding will remain with us. We will get foreign capital and technology. Then, what is the problem? You have a complaint regarding monopoly,

be it in the private sector or public sector. The evils of monopoly are to be found here also. D.O.T. has done a very good work. Today, telephone facility is available in all parts of the country. The world is progressing by leaps and bounds. We will also have to keep pace with other countries else, we would lag behind. This would result in social and economic loss. Therefore, competition was necessary. Competition against whom?

Who is to compete against D.O.T.? The private sector. Private sector as well as D.O.T. will co-exist. There are complaints against it as well as against its work culture. They do not listen to our complaints and take umbrage. Sometimes they tamper with the lines. All this is due to their monopoly. Because there is no competition. When private sector becomes a competitor, their work culture will also change. You have seen how things changed with competition, in civil aviation. It will happen here also. There will be a change in the work culture. We will also have to provide technology and training to them. For this also, we have made arrangements.

I was talking of villages. Now we have opened the cellular mobile telephone tenders. You should be proud of the fact that India does not lag behind any developed nation in the field of telecommunications. Telephone facility will be made available in the trains. This was available in the aeroplanes last year. Within one year Cellular mobile telephones would be available in all the cities. It would be available in the villages also. My estimate was, we would earn between Rs. 18,000 to Rs. 20,000 crores as licence fee for cellular mobile telephones. But we have earned Rs. 20,000 crores. The resulting traffic would bring in thousands of crores of rupees. Offer of Rs. 20,000 crores have already been received. Tenders regarding basic telephone services would be opened within one month. It is estimated that we would earn about Rs. 70,000 to Rs. 80,000 crores through this. In this way the total earning would be about 100,000 crores. I can claim with certainty that it is only in India that tenders of such a magnitude have been invited. I do not know in which sector of the world such a huge investment has taken place. Everyone is talking of the policies of the Prime Minister. It is the result of these policies that an investment of around Rs. 100,000 crore has been made possible. Investment of such a huge amount in telecommunications is not a joke. I hope Shri Manmohan Singhji would not keep the entire amount in reserve. I was talking to the officials of my Ministry regarding your complaint that the lines remain busy. We have given a concession in tariff from 10 to....(Interruptions)....I dialled at 9 a.m. We only talk of deficiencies. Say a few words regarding our achievements. Major Khanoria praised me. He belongs to Himachal Pradesh. He is aware of the achievements that have been made in that area. He should not praise me. We should have a large heart and be magnanimous to praise one's rival. It would be to your credit to praise where it is due. One should not be a miser in praising others. Now, Sushilaji spoke of victimisation. Who is being victimised? I can claim with certainty that not once in 35 years of my political life have I mixed development with politics. Not even a single opposition Member can say that developmental work did not take place in their constituency.

There can be ideological difference. But, regarding development in any honourable Member's constituency, difference of opinion is possible. Yes, omission and

commission can take place. Our's is a vast country. This matter concerns lakhs and crores of people. Therefore, it is not possible for a person to satisfy each and every one. But always, I try to see to it that extensive developmental work takes place every where. The Prime Minister has asked me to provide more facilities to the villages. I am working on a package for this. For the backward areas, a call upto a distance of 20 km would be treated as a local call. In the tribal and hilly area for a distance of 30 km, the rates per call was Rs. 5 and Rs. 8 respectively. Now in such areas, only 80 paise per call would be charged. Not every one can afford a telephone in villages.

Shri Umrao Singh (Jalandhar) : Now you have made it tehsil-wise. Regarding the talk of 20 Km...*(Interruptions)*

Shri Sukh Ram : In plains also, it is 20 Km. In hilly and tribal areas it is 30 Km. But instead of charging Rs. 5 and Rs. 8 respectively per call, now it is 80 Paise. Every one need a phone in villages. For Panchayat telephones, 40 paise per call will be charged. For STD calls 50 per cent concession will be given so that this facility can be used by every one in the villages. We would also bring down the rental rates. And for villages, the service would almost be free.

If a person makes 2-3 calls each day, he will not have to pay anything. At present the number of free calls are 150. But in villages I will increase the number of free calls. This will be made known in the coming days. This has to be done for the villages. Secondly, the MARR system has proved in appropriate regarding technology. It is a new system. It would be operated. Shortcomings are but natural. I concede there can be shortcoming in technology...*(Interruptions)*

Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Bhuwan Chandra Khanduri (Garhwal) : Your intention is good. But 80-90 percent of telephones are not working in Panchyats....*(Interruptions)*

Shri Mrutyunjaya Nayak (Phulbani) : We concede, infrastructure has been developed....*(Interruptions)*

Shri Sukh Ram : Regarding maintenance, it is being done automatically. There is no need of any manual work in exchanges.

Honourable Member, Sushilaji perhaps said I was indulging in victimisation. I can claim with certainty that during the two recent big strikes you did not face any inconvenience. Perhaps the postal and telecommunications Strikes were over in four days. Had the strike continued for longer, you would have faced immense difficulties in telecommunications and other fields. There was resentment among the people where ever strike took place. There were no losers and so gainers in the strike. They were far sighted. Tell me even a single case of victimisation. As I said before, in my political career spanning 35 years, I never mixed development with politics. And I never resorted to victimisation. Differences do occur. But victimisation did not occur. Harsh steps may have been taken due to administrative reasons. That is a different thing. Everything was settled amicably.

You now talked of over billing. I concede there are problems. Four crore bills are issued annually. The complaint rate is only 0.44 per cent. There is a particular complaint mentioned by Shastriji. The complainant had received billing for overseas

calls. Though such calls were not made.....*(Interruptions)*

Shri Surya Narayan Yadav (Saharasa) : The billing amount is Rs. 900,000....*(Interruptions)*

Shri Sukh Ram : I agree with you. In all the meetings attended by me at the international fora, I enquired if there was any technology to detect and prevent such cases. I was told there was no such technology. In big cities we have posted CBI personnel. Recently a three member committee has been constituted. Mr. Chairman, Sir, you are the Chairman of this committee. Two members of this committee are from the Lok Sabha and one from Rajya Sabha. One of its member will be from the Opposition party. You kindly give suggestions in order to check over billing. I know, on one hand there are people in DOT who have achievements to their credit.

On the other hand there are unscrupulous persons who are responsible for overbilling. The problem of overbilling can be solved by installing electronic exchanges. Through dynamic locking system or some other means the problem will be solved to a great extent. About 30 percent of our exchanges are non-electronic. We have the finance. Previously, it was our policy that non-electronic exchanges would continue to be used as per their life. But now we have decided to provide dynamic-locking-system in all cities and villages, within two years. All the non-electronic exchanges would be done away with, irrespective of whether their life is over or not. Even if it was two years old. But manipulation is still possible. If there is any remedy, suggest it, I am ready to implement it. To check this we are enacting a legislation. Under the present law we can only suspend those responsible for such manipulation. Under the new law such unscrupulous persons would be sentenced to two years of imprisonment.

[English]

Shri P. C. Thomas : Is there any technology to give separate meter to the subscribers, as in the case of electricity?

Shri Sukh Ram : We are considering that also.

Shri P. C. Thomas : That must be considered.

Shri Sukh Ram : I am told that this also does not solve the problems.

Shri P. C. Thomas : If separate meters are given, much of the problem can be solved.

Shri Sukh Ram : If it is the solution, we will try it also.

Shri P. C. Thomas : Yes.

Shri Sukh Ram : I would like to assure the hon. Member that whatever be the technology and whatever be the expenditure, if there is some technology, we will do that.....*(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

Bansalji has raised 1-2 questions. He is a very successful lawyer. As far as it is concerned, he can challenge its validity in the High Court. An honourable Member made a mention of statutory and non-statutory. Give us a chance. It is our first experience. We have made a commitment. Give us a year or

two. This, we have decided in the resolution, which will be passed after the introduction of this Bill. In that we have mentioned :

[English]

"Whereas Government is satisfied that it is necessary to pass a comprehensive legislation for setting up of a statutory apex body to promote orderly and healthy growth of telecommunications infrastructure and for promotion and protection of the consumer interest and ensuring fair competition."

[Translation]

An honourable Member has perhaps introduced an Amendment for replacing non-statutory with statutory. If you want it to be statutory, then a comprehensive legislation is needed. And we are committed to do so. I give this assurance. Give us a chance for 1-2 years. Rules would be framed. Earlier also we had said this.....(Interruptions).....Your doubts are removed.

First, the consumer's interest should be protected and there should not be injustice to the investors. That is non-statutory at present. But it would be made statutory. For that a comprehensive legislation would be introduced. A serving or a retired Supreme Court Judge and the serving or a retired Chief Justice of High Court would be appointed and of the two, one would be a financial expert and the other expert in technology. Another member would be of the secretary level, who has been additional secretary for three years. A secretariat would also be constructed. We have given it full protection also.....(Interruptions)

Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Bhuwan Chandra Khanduri : What is the need to say secretary level?.....(Interruption)

[English]

You say about the financial man or the technologist. Why do you insist on a Secretary level person?.....(Interruptions)

[Translation]

Shri Sukh Ram : We are giving them a good status, so that the people would not doubt their decisions. Their actions can not be over ruled. And they can not be removed.....(Interruptions) Through this Amendment, we seek your permission to set up this Telecom Authority. And when the time comes it would be made statutory so that everyone has faith in it. I have full hope that the honourable Member would co-operate by withdrawing his Amendment and getting the Bill passed.....(Interruptions)

[English]

Mr. Chairman : The question is :

"That the Bill further to amend the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, be taken into consideration."

The motion was adopted.

Mr. Chairman : The House shall now take up clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill.

Mr. Chairman : There are no amendments to Clause 2.

The question is :

"That Clause 2 stand part of the Bill."

The motion was adopted.

Clause 2 was added to the Bill.

Mr. Chairman : The question is :

"Clause 1, the Enacting Formula and the Long Title stand part of the Bill."

The motion was adopted.

Clause 1, the Enacting Formula and the Long Title were added to the Bill.

Mr. Chairman : The Minister may now move that the Bill be passed.

Shri Sukh Ram : Sir, I beg to move:

"That the Bill be passed."

Mr. Chairman : Motion moved :

"That the Bill be passed."

[Translation]

Prof. Rasa Singh Rawat (Ajmer) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I want to ask a question regarding the Nanda Committee, set up by the Government in 1992. It had made 10 recommendations. The recommendation regarding TRAI was accepted. What is the Government going to do regarding the other nine recommendations.

One thing more I would like to know. Whether it is a fact that there was immense controversy among the senior officials of the Communication Ministry and the members and experts of the Telecom Commission, regarding the issuing of directives for the participation of multinationals. And that they were in favour of implementing the Joshi Committee's recommendations which was constituted by the Ministry. The participation of the multinational companies was restricted to 25 per cent, as per the recommendation of the Joshi Committee. But under the new directive this has been raised to 49 per cent. The Minister should clarify this. What is the Government going to do regarding those issues on which the Joshi Committee and the Telecom Commission members were unanimous?

Shri Sukh Ram : Mr. Chairman, Sir, had there been enough time I would have explained every thing. We have gone ahead of the Nanda Committee's recommendations regarding our restructuring policy. The point raised by the honourable Member concerning the Nanda Committee is very old. He should acquaint himself with new developments. On several points, we have gone farther than the recommendations of the Nanda Committee.

[English]

Mr. Chairman : The question is :

"That the Bill be passed."

The motion was adopted.