

15.05 hrs.

**APPROPRIATION (RAILWAYS) NO. 4  
BILL, 1986\***

[English]

**THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA):** Sir, I beg to move for leave to introduce a Bill to authorise payment and appropriation of certain further sums from and out of the Consolidated Fund of India for the services of the financial year 1986-87.

**MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is :

"That leave be granted to introduce a Bill to authorise payment and appropriation of certain further sums from and out of the Consolidated Fund of India for the services of the financial year 1986-87."

The motion was adopted.

**SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA:** Sir, I introduce\*\* the Bill. I beg to move\*\* :

"That the Bill to authorise payment and appropriation of certain further sums from and out of the Consolidated Fund of India for the services of the financial year 1986-87, be taken into consideration."

**MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is :

"That the Bill to authorise payment and appropriation of certain further sums from and out of the Consolidated Fund of India for the services of the financial year 1986-87, be taken into consideration."

The motion was adopted.

**MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The House will now take up clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill.

The question is :

"That Clauses 2 and 3 and the Schedule stand part of the Bill."

The motion was adopted.

Clauses 2 and 3 and the Schedule were added to the Bill.

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

**SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA:** Sir, I beg to move :

"That the Bill be passed."

**MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is,.....

**PROF. N.G. RANGA (Guntur):** Sir, I wish to congratulate our hon. colleague and the Minister for his very lucid, eloquent and effective performance today on behalf of the Railways and in support of the railwaymen. I am sure my hon. friends in the Opposition also would join me in congratulating the railwaymen from the lowest man to the highest for their excellent performance.

**MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is :

"That the Bill be passed."

The motion was adopted.

15.08 hrs.

**INDIAN POST OFFICE (AMENDMENT)  
BILL, 1986—Contd.**

[English]

**MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The House will now take up further consideration of the following motion moved by Shri Sontosh Mohan Dev on the 14th November, 1986, namely :

"That the Bill further to amend the Indian Post Office Act, 1898, be taken into consideration."

Shri Suresh Kurup.

\*Published in Gazette of India Extraordinary Part II Section 2 dated 17.11.86,

\*\*Introduced/moved with the recommendation of the President,

**SHRI SURESH KURUP (Kottayam) :** Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Bill is supposed to be a modification of the 1898 Act. No doubt, a law nearing one century needs modification. But in this case this Bill reasserts some of the anti-democratic measures of the British Raj. This is what it does by again reaffirming section 26 of the Act. This provision may be necessary for the British Government ruling over another country, but I fail to understand why the Government of India relied on this provision all these years in independent India. Some of my friends were pointing out the terrorist menace. But, ever since independence, our Government has been using this against whomsoever it dislikes. Every one knows that letters and even telephonic conversations of Members belonging to the Opposition political parties are regularly being intercepted. We have the experience of all those black laws. All those black laws were used against organized political parties in this country which opposed the Government. No doubt, Government of India has been misusing this provision and again it is going to misuse. So, I oppose this Bill.

Anyhow, this gives us a chance to discuss about the functioning of the Postal Department. As you know, the postal service is a common man's communication method. In such a vast country like ours, the only and major medium of communication for the common people is the postal service. The volume of postal traffic is growing year by year. That is what the statistics show. But unfortunately our Government is trying to minimise the expenditure on this vital department which is giving very valuable service to the common people—probably on the instructions of the IMF, I don't know. No new post offices are sanctioned while there are thousands of villages in our country where there is no single post office. The first thing the Government should understand is that it is a system which renders service to the poor people of this country.

If the current reports are correct, the Government is thinking of increasing the postal charges again. Reports are also there about the so-called expert committee which the Government constituted to study about the functioning of the postal department and also I think about the ED

employees of the department. Sir, some unofficial reports say that it has already recommended that 35000 of the existing post offices should be closed down. That means, it is going to affect hundreds of villages in our country.

In this connection I would like to mention about the ED employees of the P and T Department. It is a shame that such naked exploitation is going on under the auspices of the Government of India. I can understand a private entrepreneur exploiting his labourers; but by taking advantage of the unemployment situation in our country, thousands of unemployed youth are being exploited by your Department, Mr. Minister. All over Kerala and throughout the country also regularly I am getting letters from these unfortunate victims of your Department. This is a shame. They are bonded labourers, slavery system is existing in your Department. Sir, I request the Minister through you that he should take initiative and use his good office to put an end to this made of slavery which going on in his Department.

I would like to mention another important point regarding private courier services that are thriving on in our country. Already our country business houses and nationalised banks are making use of the courier services. Big courier services like Sky are there and small courier services are also functioning in small little towns all over the country. Government departments are vying with each other for making use of their services. Already Vayudoot has arranged some facilities for these private courier services for taking their mail and distributing it all over India. In this field only Government of India is supposed to operate. There are specific limitations for the private courier services to taking mail. I would like to know whether any inquiry or search has been conducted as to what sort of mail they are taking and what sort of communications they are passing over. Why don't you intercept their mail?

**THE MINISTER OF STATE, IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV) :** For the information of the hon. Member I may say that in this Bill there is a clause that we can intercept the mail of those private couriers,

**SHRI SURESH KURUP :** I mean why don't you carry a search as to what sort of mail they are carrying. They are functioning against the Postal Act of India. There are specific limitations in the Act itself that private courier services can carry such and such letters and postal matters but they are carrying all sort of postal articles and delivering to the concerned persons. Government should clarify the position regarding that. These are some of the important points connected with the Postal Department that I wanted to mention. Once again I make clear my opinion regarding this Act. Re-affirmation of Section 26 is going to be used against the Opposition political parties and their members as usual and, as such, I once again oppose this Bill.

**SHRI SHARAD DIGHE (Bombay North Central) :** Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir while supporting the Bill I will make a few observations as far as this Bill is concerned. It is, of course, gratifying to note that this hundred year old Act which was originally passed in 1898 is being belatedly amended. Surprisingly I do not know why some of the obvious amendments were not carried out earlier. For example the word 'Indian' in the Indian Post Office Act. The word 'Indian' had been dropped in several Acts several years ago whereas in this case it is being done now.

Similarly, the obvious expressions which were to be deleted, namely, Her Majesty's Government or the Government of any British possession or foreign country are being deleted now. I want to know why were they not deleted earlier. Then the obvious reference to the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898 which has been there at several places is being replaced by the Code of Criminal Procedure 1973 whereas CrPC was replaced long back in 1973.

Sir, I agree with some of the observations made by the hon. Member who spoke just now regarding privatisation of the postal services. I am surprised to see that very openly and by giving advertisements several courier services are existing in this country in spite of the exclusive privilege of conveying post by the Government which has been already there in the Act. It is further clarified by adding (ba) and (bb) to section 4 but I would urge upon the Minister that

it is time to take action because it is leakage of revenue also. When we have got the exclusive privilege of these services, how can we allow openly those who are carrying on this business of couriers very openly before the eyes of the Government. A very serious consideration should be given to stop all these things so that a lot of leakage can be stopped. At the same time, it must be understood that the people are going to these private couriers because there has been a lot of delay in our postal services everywhere. Therefore, the people feel that instead of sending a letter through the post office, it is better and advantageous to send it through private couriers. When we try to plug these loopholes and try to take action, we must also see and improve our postal services in the country also.

I have come to know from the reports in the newspapers that instead of adding to these services throughout the country, we have been closing several post offices. Nearly three to four thousand post offices in the country have been closed according to the reports in the newspapers. These services are really used by the rural people; the poor people in the rural areas are the main people to use these services. Now-a-days people in cities and towns have got the services of telephones, trunk calls, STD, telex messages etc. Therefore, the post office services in the villages are very important and if we go on closing post offices everywhere, under the guise of economy, then it will cause a great hardship to the poor people.

Then, I understand that there has been bifurcation of postal services and telegraph services and two separate Directorates are being established. These services which were available at one and the same place are being bifurcated and the people would be greatly inconvenienced. In the same place, we had the post services, telegraph services and the telephone facilities. When we bifurcate these two Directorates, there is a tendency to separate all these services and the people would be greatly inconvenienced. That is to be thought over when bifurcation is being done.

While I am on the general subject, I would also like to ventilate my grievances about the recently reported decision of the

[Shri Sharad Dighe]

Government to have a steep rise not only in the telephone rentals, but postal rates also. It has been reported in the press that a proposal for a steep rise in various telecommunication and postal services has been approved at the highest level; the cost of the envelopes and the inland letters is being increased. I would like to know from the Minister whether the report which appeared in a section of the press is true or not. Has the Government taken any decision to have a steep rise in telephone rentals, postal and telecommunication charges.

I would also like to mention that there are some sections, some amendments which you are introducing now, but which are not necessary and these will create complications. For example, in clause 13, you are introducing the power to inspect and seize stamping machines. You have unnecessary added this proviso :

“Provided that before entering such premises, such officer shall give a notice in writing of his intention to do so to the occupier of such premises.”

Clause 13 introduces a new Section 16A giving power to the Government to inspect and seize machines when they suspect that leakage of revenue is being caused as a result of stamping machine being used illegally. This power is good enough and it should be exercised by the Government. But that power is neutralised by adding this proviso that it will not be done unless the officer gives a notice in writing to the person concerned. The whole purpose is defeated by this proviso. Once a notice is given to the person concerned, every thing will be manipulated and you will not be able to find out what the leakage is, how they are deceiving the Government and how they are depriving the Governments of its revenues. Therefore, my suggestion is that this proviso which neutralises the whole section will have to be deleted from this new Section 16A.

Similarly, for destroying certain postal article also, you have provided under Clause 15 that notice in writing before destroying all these things is necessary. I

think that that will add to the work and also, it will not serve the purpose that you intend to achieve.

As far as Clause 16 which substitutes old Section 26 is concerned, there has been a lot of criticism from the Opposition that the letters would be now intercepted. I read both the original Section 26 and the new Section 26 and I find that there is no difference at all. Old Section 26 already had given this right to Government. This right is already existing and it is not as if some new thing is added. The new section in the amended form, merely adds to the new requirements and really speaking, the right or power which has already been there for a number of years is the same. From this point of view, the criticism of the opposition leaders is, I think, unwarranted. If you carefully read the original section and the amended section, you will find that the power is not extended at all. The power is the same and it is merely redrafted in a better way in order to make the whole thing more clear. There is no danger of any more powers being added. With these words, I support this Bill and I urge upon the Minister to consider the suggestions that I have made as far as the 2 sections are concerned.

[*Translation*]

SHRI MOOL CHAND DAGA (Pali) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Postal services are deteriorating day by day. A letter takes 6 to 7 days in reaching its destination. During the Rakhee festival, a rakhee sent by a sister to her brother is not delivered in time. When would this condition be improved ?

There is already section 13, to which you have added a proviso. Why are you adding it ? You should delete it. You have not been able to make any improvement in the Postal Services. Your system is not functioning properly. You have 1,40,000 Post Offices with 1,11,000 Branch Post Offices. There are 25,000 Sub-post Offices in which 6,50,000 employees are working. Even then, you are not able to provide a satisfactory service. Our new hon. Minister should improve these services. When Telegraph and Telephone services were separated from the Postal Services, it was said that the Post Offices which were

economically not viable would be closed. But you know that no other means of communication are available in the rural area. The employees engaged in rural post offices are not educated and belong to old feudal families, whereas the other educated people as also educated youths belonging to the scheduled castes and other communities are available there. But your district officers appoint only such persons who offer them presents every month. They do not distribute the letters and keep them with themselves and whenever any villager happens to come there, they handover all the letters to him. If anyone makes a complaint, no action is taken on such a complaint.....

(Interruptions) Now they are getting an amount of Rs. 150, but virtually they do no work at all. Therefore, I want that you should employ educated people in rural post offices. You have yourself admitted that :

[English]

In 1982-83, the total amount paid against bogus money orders during each year was Rs. 1,09,762.70 p.

In 1983-84, it was Rs. 3,00,826.00.

In 1984-85, it was Rs. 2,48,839.50 p.

[Translation]

Who is responsible for payment against these bogus money orders in your Post Offices? Will you please tell me the number of the persons who have been dismissed from the service or punished during the last three or four years? I do not know as to how many enquiries are pending with you to date and for how long these are pending? An M.P. writes that so and so person is not good and is not working properly, but your officers do not initiate any enquiry against him and allow him to continue in the job. You have appointed useless people in public services who shirk work. These people also demand some money from the payees of the money orders in the rural areas. When you came to know that the Telephones and the telegraph departments are incurring profits and the postal department is running at a loss, you separated both the services. In telephones also how many calls actually mature. In my opinion, there are hardly any honest operators. They

have some mutual understanding and get their bonus at the Holi and Dipawali festivals. In my view the Angadiya system is a good system, but people on the opposite side opposed it. What was wrong with you that you opposed it. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, if you want to send something to your home, it will take four days to reach there under the present Government system, but in this system that will reach very early. They are providing very good service; what else do you want? Legal action should be taken against Shri Kurup, your letters, parcels and other things are delivered at right time... (Interruptions) As regards transportation, many private buses are operated and when other facilities are not available, these are put to use. I would like to ask you as to why you have added this proviso. If you want to do research, then where is the necessity to give a notice. I want to submit that you should make facilities more effective. Do not close the small post offices. Even if these are running at a loss. You should continue to run the rural post offices even in loss, and you should not close them.

\*SHRI A.C. SHANMUGAM (Vellore) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the A.I.A.D.M.K., I welcome the Government's measure of bringing forward the Indian Post Office (Amendment) Bill, 1986, in this august House. Sir, the Government has brought before this House the present Amendment Bill after a lapse of about 90 years of the Indian Post Office Act, 1898. After the Bill is enacted into law, the Government will have the right to intercept or detain or dispose of any postal articles in the course of their transmission. This is a welcome measure. The Government will have the right to intercept the secret documents or the secret letters sent to the foreign countries by any individual or party which are likely to be against the interests of the country. Under the garb of postal parcels, some anti-social elements and trouble-mongers send bombs and poisonous materials. Now, the Government would be empowered with doing with such acts.

Sir, the Government is granting rebate to those who use the stamping machines in place of postage stamps in respect of postal articles. But there are some unscrupulous elements who abuse this facility thus putting

\*The speech was originally delivered in Tamil.

[Shri A.C. Shanmugam]

the Government into revenue loss. Now, the Government would be armed with powers of search and seizure of such machines suspected to be used fraudulently leading to leakage of Government revenue. Apart from this, if any person or the organisation tampers with the machine and if it is proved, then those persons should be awarded punishment. This provision should also be included in this Clause.

Sir, it is understood that the rates of post-cards, postal envelopes and the parcel charges would be raised very soon. In this connection, I would vehemently point out that this action by the Government will directly hit the poor and weaker sections of people. I do not understand how much money Government can earn in this way by hitting the poor and ordinary public of the country. The rich people will not be affected by this measure. Sir, a good Government is known by its deeds and help the poor in the country. It should not bring measures which will hit the poor people very hard. There are so many ways of collecting taxes and stamp fees from the rich people and the Government can adopt those measures. The people of our country has been fortunate enough and they have been extremely happy and indebted to the hon. Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi, for leading the country very successfully in all respects. The big powers are feeling jealous of his good work done for the country and also trying to bring the country to the forefront of the world. I would therefore request the Government not to resort to raising the postal rates and parcel charges. There are other sources by which government can collect taxes and fees.

Sir, there has been inordinate delay involved in the delivery of postal articles and the letters. Some time back, Shri Selvendran, M.P. was in Kashmir in connection with the visit of the Study Group of the Estimates Committee. From there he wrote a letter to his house. After a lapse of 13 days, the letter was received by Shri Selvendran himself, after his return to his home in his native place. This is the state of affairs of the postal delivery. In August last, on the death of Mr. Le Duan, the hon. Prime Minister sent a condolence message to the concerned Embassy here. But that

message was received very late at the Embassy. When this fact came to light, some 3 or 4 officials concerned were suspended. Now, Sir, action has been taken against the erring officials because the Prime Minister's matter is involved. But there are so many lakhs of people who have been affected because of postal delays happening every day. Therefore, Sir, if any report is received from any citizen regarding postal delays, action should immediately be taken against postal authorities.

In Tamil Nadu, Pongal Greetings, Deepawali Greetings and Christmas Greetings are received long after the celebrations are over. Sometimes, the Greetings do not reach at all because they are all thrown away or the stamps are removed and thrown away or destroyed by the people at the lower level. The Government should see to it that such malpractice is stopped forthwith. I would request the Government to engage extra hands during this peak period so that the Greetings and other postal articles are received and delivered well in time.

Another important point which I would like to bring to the notice of the hon. Minister is that in Tamil Nadu, Railway Mail Sorting Service has been done away with. This action discourages employment potential and also leads to inordinate delay in the postal deliveries. Therefore, I would request the hon. Minister kindly to restore the R.M.S. Service immediately.

Sir, I would like to point out here that even after 40 years of independence, a huge number of villages in our country do not have post office. People in the villages have to walk many miles for getting the postal services. I am sorry to point out the Government's attitude towards opening of a Post Office in a village. They should not take into account the number of people living in a particular village for considering provision of Post Office facility. The Government should not work out profit and loss before considering for a Post Office facility in a particular place. Sir, in the United Kingdom, 2/3rds of the area is served by private parties in so far as postal services are concerned. There the private postal services are rendered most successfully. You are introducing private

parties in this service. It is a welcome measure. But at the same time, I would like to point out that these private post offices can be run by the handicapped, Trust and Cooperative institutions and also by the educated unemployed persons. I understand that that the Government is going to start this service on an experimental basis. I feel that they can do it on permanent basis, of course, after gaining some experience.

You are giving 5 paise as commission. The private people would be able to serve the public for more than 12 to 15 hours instead of limited hours of service being rendered by the staff in the postal department. Moreover, there are people working in the postal department for a paltry sum of Rs. 200 or Rs 300 per month. This is a very meagre amount paid to them and the Government should immediately increase their salary. I also understand that these people are working on temporary basis for the last 8 or 10 years. I would plead with the hon. Minister that these people should be made permanent with immediate effect.

Sir, I also welcome the introduction of computerisation in the postal department.

In India, the M.L.As. and the M.Ps. are not paid adequately. Whenever they visit the various places and areas of their constituency, they receive a lot of representations, petitions, applications, etc. from the public for onward transmission of the same. The M.Ps. and the M.L.As. may have to send letters and replies to the public in their constituencies. Since this would involve quite a good amount by way of postal charges, I would request the Government to distribute stamps free of cost, like the Service Stamps so that the M.Ps. and the M.L.As. could render services to the public very efficiently.

Sir, in the Seventh Plan, an outlay of Rs. 4000 crores has been made for the Ministry of Communications and out of this amount, a sum of Rs. 607 crores has been allotted for the Postal Department. This is a very small amount compared to the services to be rendered by the Department in the vast expanse of the country. I would rather expect the Government to increase this allocation of Rs. 607 crores keeping in

mind the necessity and importance of this service to the general public. Sir, in the end, I request the hon. Minister to consider all the points brought out by me and I am thankful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me this opportunity of taking part in the discussion. Thank you.

[English]

SHRI SHANTARAM NAIK (Panaji): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, the Postman that appears before us today, it must be said, undoubtedly, is a pleasant man. I have hardly found any Postman who is rude. In any case, the fact remains that the letters he delivers are the ones which are delivered say after eight or ten days and which could have been easily come a week days before. But the basic fact is this that even today a Postman is a simple man with a pleasant face and is very humble. Hence, it appears that it is not because of the fault of this man that postal delays are there, but it is basically the entire postal system in the country which is at fault. Therefore, in no circumstances, I would like to lay this blame on the poor postman.

I have read two or three days back. The Indian Post Office Act, 1898 in which I did not find any definition of the postman. The poor fellow does not find any mention in the Act. Even if it is there, I suppose, the definition will be there in some corner. But what is mentioned throughout is Post-Master General.

You must have seen the Malgudi days TV serial, Postman of that standard, of course, we do not find in the country—the postman who is worried about problems of a village, of a family, of a man and he goes all the way to take them out of woods they are in. That postman depicted in the novel of Mr. Moolgaonkar we do not see these days. But the fact remains that there are inordinate delays in getting letters etc. Recently, no less a person than our hon. Prime Minister himself was the victim of postal delays. Whereas a letter written by him to nearby Shanti Niketan should have reached there next day, it was delivered after 20 or 25 days. This is the state of affairs today. But in spite of this, I do not

[Shri Shantaram Naik]

know why we have abolished so many delivery centres. In my territory, Goa alone, last year, more than 20 centres were abruptly stopped. I was told that it was done because of the efficient delivery of letters. Till today I do not find any rationale behind this closure.

The controversial section with respect to this Act is section 26, which has been harshly criticised by our hon. friends. But I think, they must give some sort of a latitude to the security, and integrity of India. The fact does not lie in the section alone. If this section is misused, certainly, I will be one with them to voice against it. But whether the section as it is and the purpose behind it are bad or what is the question. But if some excesses are done, certainly no right thinking man will support it. Supposing, there is a letter or a postal article and the postal authority finds that there is a bomb in it, may I ask Mr. Narayan Choubey whether he would like that letter containing a bomb to be delivered by the post office to him at his residence or anywhere else? Or would you like it to be intercepted and found out whether was anything in that? So, there is some angle through which these interceptions should be seen. To what extent these interceptions should be there is the question. If somebody does it off and on, then it has to be considered by the hon. Minister.

We have to decide the distances and the days equation. You have to evolve a formula to decide the days within which a particular postal article for a particular distance is to be delivered. If you chalk out a postal policy in which this is laid down, then there will be some standard. I do not know so far what is the equation between a postal article and the distance. I do not know whether they have evolved and prescribed any formula with respect to letters, insured articles and other postal articles. If you lay down this thing, then we can lay a specific blame on the delivery centres as to why this postal article was not delivered within a particular date. I do not know whether there is any prescribed time limit for each of the articles vis-a-vis the distance. If it is not there, then I think this is the first thing to be done by evolving a postal policy whereby these aspects are

clearly laid down, namely, the nature of the article, distance and the delivery time. If these things are laid down, I suppose we will be doing fairly enough in the matter of postal services.

Other things I will be saying when I move my amendments.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Before calling the next persons, I want to make one suggestion to the House. At four O'clock I have to attend a meeting on the Private Members' Bills. Since no Chairman is available, one of our senior Members Daga Ji can take the Chair. Can I make a request to him?

SOME HON. MEMBERS : Yes, yes.

AN HON. MEMBER : Next speaker will be very lucky.

15.57 hrs.

[SHRI MOOL CHAND DAGA *in the Chair*]

MR. CHAIRMAN : Shri Ram Singh Yadav.

SHRI RAM SINGH YADAV (Alwar) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am very much thankful to you for giving me the time. I support the Indian Post Office (Amendment) Bill, 1986. The history of the Indian Post Office is that it has always served the nation at all times, at the time of war and peace. The history relates to the ancient times when the pigeons were the carriers of post and later on also. At the international level, the motto of the post office or the postal services is to serve and to serve happily. I am thankful to the hon. Minister that on 16 November 1986, the Pink City of Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan State has been linked with the speedier postal service. It has been linked with the international postal service so far as the speedier work of the postal service is concerned. I also congratulate the Minister and his department also that in the State of Rajasthan, the Rajasthan Circle has earned Rs. 143 crores as revenue by way of sale of postage stamps and by way of collecting deposits in the year 1985-86, while the target was

only Rs. 140 crores. Thus, the Rajasthan Circle of the postal services has earned a revenue over and above the target fixed.

The main objection from the Opposition Benches is that section 26 has been amended in contravention of the Constitution and in contravention of the existing Indian Post Office Act, 1898. But that is totally wrong because already in the Indian Post Office Act, 1898, the provision exists in section 26. Section 26 reads like this :

"On the occurrence of any public emergency, or in the interest of the public safety or tranquility, the Central Government, or a State Government, or any officer specially authorised in this behalf (by the Central or the State Government) may, by order in writing, direct that any postal article or class or description of postal articles in course of transmission by post shall be intercepted or detained, or (shall be disposed of in such manner as the authority issuing the order may direct)."

Similar are the provisions which have been incorporated in the present Act, the question of interception and detention of the Postal Article as was provided for in the Act 1898.

The existing provision is :

"The Central Government or the State Government or any officer specially authorised in this behalf by the Central or the State Government, may, if satisfied that it is necessary or expedient so to do in the interests of public safety or tranquility, the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any offence, or on the occurrence of any public emergency, by order in writing, direct that any postal article or class or description of postal articles in the course of transmission by post, shall be intercepted or detained or shall be disposed of in such manner as the authority issuing the order, may direct."

The words are "public safety, tranquility and sovereignty and integrity of the country". These are considerations for allowing discretionary powers to the officer or the State Government or the Central Government to intercept or detain the postal articles. There is nothing illegal in the Act. It was also provided in the 38th Report of the Law Commission. This point was considered at length and it has been considered by the Law Commission at length and the Law Commission have come to this conclusion. These lines—the recommendation—have been provided by the Law Commission and these lines have been incorporated. Therefore, there is nothing wrong, nothing against the provisions of the Constitution and this Section, providing for interception of Article, deals with the existing provisions, that is quite in harmony and in conformity with the existing provisions of the Constitution and of the Act itself.

I also wish to remind the hon. Minister that one Committee was appointed by his Department in November 1984 under Shri R.R. Savor. It was one man Committee. A reference to the Committee was the working of the post offices with special reference to the rural areas. I object that—why this sort of Committee was appointed by Government because in every way of life—whether it is distribution of the controlled articles or it is question of medical facilities, question of educational facilities, all facilities are enjoyed by the urban people at the cost of subsidy and taxation revenue being collected from them. Simply because you are incurring loss in the Post Office or E.D.B.os work in the rural areas, should not be closed. Reference to the Committee was specially working of EDBOs and the Post Offices in the rural areas. The Committee has given its report which is under the consideration of the Government. The wording of the Committee are :

"Visits to E.D. Post Offices display a scenario which at once depicts far too many people being engaged in these offices with far too little work being performed by them."

This is the Report of the Committee.

I take a very strong objection to it because I represent the rural area, As a

[Shri Ram Singh Yadav]

matter of fact the person who was prepared this Report is born in the city, served the city. He has not got the experience of the life of the people in the rural areas. How a person who is living in a village, his son expects a job. Then he is waiting for a call of interview from the Public Service Commission—whether it is Subordinate Service Commission or State Public Service Commission or the Union Public Service Commission. When her husband is serving in the Army, then she is waiting for the money order from her husband. When her son is serving in the Army, then she is expecting money order from her son; whether he is living happily or not in the Army she wants to know. But no communication, no telephone, no telex and no other system is available.

I have read the Report of R.R. Savor Committee. This is under your consideration. Various arguments have been advanced by Mr. Savor in his Report. He has compared the benefits or the incomes of the post offices in England, Canada, Australia and other developed countries. But I may remind you, Mr. Minister, that there are so many postal and communication facilities in rural areas in those countries. In the rural areas of this country the telephone system is not as efficacious as in other countries.

**THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI SHEILA DIKSHIT) :** In Calcutta.

**SHRI RAM SINGH YADAV :** Madam is very correct that the telephones in Calcutta are in a hopeless state.

So, my submission is this. You are a very practical man and your senior colleague, Mr. Arjun Singh, also comes from rural area. I think he will not take any action on this Report and I think you will allow all these post offices which are working in the rural areas to continue. I just met some persons from my constituency, the persons who are working in the EDPOs. They came to me stating that their services were terminated as they were told that 'your performance is very low, therefore, your services are not needed.'

You have not given them time. You provide the required quantum of work stating that 'this is the work assigned to you'. As a matter of fact, you should have streamlined the working of the post offices. You have not streamlined their working, rather your Department has not streamlined the working. Moreover any officer of your Department whether he is an Inspector or whether he is an Assistant Superintendent of Post Offices, does not like to go to the village. The officers are in favour of abolishing the post offices in the rural areas as they need not have to go there for inspection and so on. So, we strongly oppose the Report of the Savor Committee. The Report of the R.R. Savor Committee is anti-rural people and it should not be implemented. No action should be taken by the Government on the recommendations of this Committee.

**MR. CHAIRMAN :** Our hon. Minister will certainly consider this aspect.

**SHRI RAM SINGH YADAV :** With the observation of the hon. Chairman, I think the Minister will make an announcement in this regard at the time of replying to this debate.

I now come to the next point. The next point is that last year I was in the Seminar of the employees of EDPOs in my constituency and their demands are very genuine. They are paid only a very little amount of Rs. 115 or Rs. 150 per month and they have to work almost 24 hours because of the distance aspect in Rajasthan. The localities in Rajasthan are at long distances. They have to travel a long way for the delivery of postal articles to the addressees. But their remuneration is very low. You should think over this aspect seriously and give them regular employment so that they will work better because the postal services are so essential that no one can be dispensed with especially in rural areas. This is the only service which can keep the village in constant touch with other parts of the country. There is no telephone service there.

Lastly I would suggest that according to your programme and policy which was announced in the Seventh Lok Sabha by the concerned Minister, all the gram

panchayat headquarters should have post offices. Now you have changed your programme and changed your policy. Now you do not say that all the gram panchayat headquarters will have the post office facilities. In my State, Rajasthan, there are so many panchayat headquarters which do not have post offices and when we approached the P.M.G. Rajasthan Circle in a formal meeting with M.Ps., he said that 'no funds were available for opening new post offices at panchayat headquarters. We cannot give any employment'. Therefore, you should think over it and that policy which was the correct policy, which was the sound policy, namely every Panchayat headquarters should have the post office in the rural areas, should be revived and that should be adhered to.

With these words, I support the Bill.

**SHRI ATAUR RAHMAN (Barpeta):**  
Mr. Chairman, Sir, the word "posthaste" was derived from the Postal Department in the good old days, when the Department had been running very efficiently. People thought that anything that move faster should be always linked up with the Postal Department. So, this word "posthaste" was coined. That is how the Postal Department was praised by Kipling. He said :

"Is torrent in spate, He must ford it or swim... He must climb by the cliff."

Taking about ifs and buts, he said :

"The Service and with not a but nor an if, while the breath is in his mouth. He must bear without fail, in the name of the Emperor—of course, there is no question of Emperor now-a-days—the Overland Mail."

Well, that was the sort of reputation the Postal Department built up in the good old days. But I am afraid, as many of the speakers who have preceded me have said, the reputation has gone down now. But I must say that this has come to a pass because population has increased, the volume of work has increased

and we must take into account these two factors. And the Bill which has been brought in is a good Bill but lacks certain very important administrative aspects. This is a Bill which should have gone to the Select Committee for further scrutiny. Through this Bill, the Postal Department could have reorganised itself into an efficient machinery. But not even in the Consultative Committee, this sort of thing was discussed. So, it is a pity, I say. Although I support the various aspects of the Bill, even interception which is mentioned in clause 26—I had done that sort of "crime" myself in the past. The interception of postal articles was done, but with the best of intention under the circumstances. Yes I was made to do so. But then, I can assure you, although I belong to the left side of the House, the interception was not a blanket thing which was allowed by the Government. In very very selective cases this was done because the fundamental rights were to be preserved.

Talking about administrative deficiencies, we have not taken into account his peak of Hour work. The Postal Department has a Peak of Hour work and if they had taken care of the Peak of Hour work, the Postal services would have been as efficient as Kipling had described it.

But they somehow took up a pennywise pound-foolish attitude, ignored the very important aspect of the running of the administration and brought bad name to the Postal Department. For example, when Peak of Hour work is built up, specially in the matter of sorting of letters, the department would have been wiser to engage part-time workers to sort out the letters, by engaging students, by engaging even old people, giving them the extra that they could earn, the extra that would not have normally given to the Postal employees. That was not done and sorting was done in a Centralised way. If they had done it in a decentralised way at the very first Post Office, I think the load of the volume of work would have been distributed equally. I hope it will be done.

Talking about the next point which is about private courier, I would wholeheartedly support this system because the Postal Department is just not able to cope with the increase of traffic, the volume of

[Shri Ataur Rahman]

traffic. So, when somebody else is taking their responsibility, they should not come down on them and say "Nothing doing. We would not allow you to do it as our revenue is falling." We do not want any increase in revenue. We want service in the country and Postal Department should wake up even now and they should render service as expected of them.

Talking about rural services, I have seen even cities in foreign countries. They have well-known shops, where a letter can be delivered, where stamps can be purchased or money order can be sent. But here we are not trusting anybody. We only trust P and T. The abolition of rural Post Offices has been a crime on the people. They should not have abolished. If we can run ration shops through these reliable Government agencies, why cannot Postal services be routed through them also? Give them the agency. They can receive letters. They can sell postage stamps. They can send and receive money order also. They can send back the revenues and the letters back to the Central Post Office. These are very minor things. I do not know whether somebody has thought of it because of it is good for other countries, it is good for India also.

We have been unnecessarily very fussy about the little advantage that the press gets by sending a few papers in their parcels. Let the Press take a little advantage. Let P and T take pride in sending letters, money and telegrams promptly as expected of them. Then, people will appreciate. The Press will appreciate. That is what I have felt. I will not take further time of the House. I would certainly focus on one particular aspect of the Trade Unionism in the Postal Department. I would ask the Trade Union Leadership to improve the quality of Postal Services and then come up with their demands, maintaining their leadership through honourable quality of work.

The Postal employees under Article 51 (a), Clause (f) have a responsibility towards the people. If they can carry out that responsibility, they will earn the good name

of the Postal Department. They will deserve all the praises heaped on them by the great man Kipling.

[*Translation*]

\*DR. PHULRENU GUHA (Contai): Respected Chairman, Sir, I wholeheartedly support this Indian Post Office (Amendment) Bill, 1986 which is under discussion. After long experience of working, this department has brought forth certain amendments, certain changes before us which they have thought are very necessary for their better working and service. That is why they have brought forth their amendments. Perhaps in their future working also they will face some other difficulties in implementing the provisions of this Bill and will come before us with further amendments. We will surely support those amendments also.

But, Sir, while supporting this Bill I cannot help saying a few things here. We have to get postal stamps from the post offices. In the villages at many post offices stamps are not available. Sir, you will be surprised to hear that in Calcutta, in the Ballyganj post office, in the Gariahat post office, we do not get stamps or post cards many times. I am telling these things to the hon. Minister from my personal experience. The number of post offices have remained stagnant. No new post offices are being opened. Often demands for new post offices are received from the rural areas. When we write to the hon. Minister voicing these genuine demands, we receive the stock reply that 'no new post offices be provided, it is against the rules.' But Sir, our country is moving towards more and more progress day by day. The population is increasing, people are becoming more and more conscious and enlightened yet we are denying them modern facilities. Perhaps it will not be proper to connect the post offices with modern needs and facilities because the postal service is the minimum need of our rural folk. Letters do not reach their destination in right time, all of us have this experience. Mr. Chairman, Sir, I am placing this letter before you. This letter was posted at Delhi for an invitation on the 6th October. You will be surprised to hear that I received this letter on the 12th of Novem-

ber ! for an invitation on the 6th October, just imagine ! Not only that Sir. I was in Calcutta on Saturday and Sunday last. There I received 3 letters in the evening dak of the 15th November. These were invitations to certain functions on the 14th and 15th morning. So, inspite of being in Calcutta at that time, I could not attend any of these functions due to postal delay. There is mention of money orders and parcels also. I am not talking of the urban areas, but in the rural areas money orders and parcels are not delivered quite often. People like us may recover them after complaints and correspondence with the authorities. But I know in my area some rikshaw-pullers live who have not received their money orders and parcels. They came to me and I drafted some letters for them, I know at least 3 such cases. To many people Rs. 400/500 may not mean much. But in the life of such poor rickshaw-pullers, Rs. 400/500 are of great value and they mean much. When they do not get these money orders, they can never recover them. Postal orders are not available in villages post offices. If some body wants to apply for some jobs, he is greatly handicapped on this account. They have to come to the district headquarters to obtain them. This postal department handles telegrams also. Sir, I want to say that if you send a telegram somewhere informing about your visit to that place, the telegram will reach there 5/6 days after your arrival ! No body will ever be able to come to receive you because telegrams never reach in time. This is the condition.

Recently, the Chairman of the Central Social Welfare Board was due to visit Calcutta. He sent a telegram saying that he will not be able to go. The telegram did not reach there. They came to know from her letter that he will not be able to come. In this context I have to say something about telephones also. What is the miserable condition of telephones in West Bengal and particularly in Calcutta, that is too well known to the people living there. We come from that State. Frequently enquiries are really made over the phone to ask whether our telephone is working properly or not. But I am sorry to state that on Saturday and Sunday last I was in Calcutta and my phone remained out of order. I had to phone from my neighbour's house. When this is the condition in Calcutta, you can

well understand the condition in the villages. I come from a village from my constituency viz., Cantai. I have been able to phone to Calcutta only twice during the last two years and I have not been able to phone to Delhi even once during that period. One more thing Sir, I have read in the newspapers that the postal charges and telephone charges are going to be raised. I will request the hon. Minister not to raise any charges without improving the quality of service provided in return. Postal service is the only means of communication and link for the village people. They keep looking to the post offices for news of their near and dear ones. They do not have the means to visit the cities. Letters are the only link among husbands, wives, mother, sons, brothers and sisters. There is no other link. But they face great difficulty in receiving these letters in time. Here I am placing a special demand before the hon. Minister that one post office may be provided for each 'Panchayat' under the current plan. Post office is the life-centre of a village. Sir, not in our country alone but in many foreign countries also many stories and literature have been written on village post offices. But to what a pass our post offices have come today ! I will urge upon the hon. Minister to sense and realise it. Without making a long speech, I will only say that steps must be taken immediately to improve our postal system and the working of our post offices. The two hon. Minister looking after this Ministry today are both very hard working and experienced persons. I will humbly request them to make every effort to improve the working of the whole system. It is not fair and proper to increase the postal rates without improving the service. This should not be done. You have to constantly think how to improve the system. You have of course to think about the postal workers, but at the same time you have to think about the consumers also. You cannot ignore them. Therefore I will reiterate that efforts must be made to improve the whole system.

Sir, many questions have been raised here particularly about Section 16 (earlier section 26) of this Bill. I agree that unless this section is implemented Judiciously and cautiously, it may give rise to various difficulties and problems. I will hope that this section 16 will be used after due consideration and proper judgement. This

[Dr. Phulrenu Guha]

should not be used thoughtlessly and indiscriminately.

In the end I once again extend my full support to this amendment and demand that the standard of postal services should be improved so that the common people may be benefited. The decision that no new post offices will be opened, must immediately be revoked by the Ministry. Development of the villages is a must and for that new post offices are very necessary. No development or progress in the villages is possible without post offices. Unless our villages develop and prosper, India can never prosper. This has been said by Mahatma Gandhi. The Government also says the same thing. But merely saying so is not enough. This has to be translated into action. This to be made a reality. I again demand that this decision not to open new post offices must be revoked forthwith and new post offices must be opened in every village. If the Government is not able to provide full time post offices, let them start with part-time post offices. The villages are experiencing great hardship for want of post offices. Let them live in a village for 5 days and they will realise it themselves too. Only those who live in villages, realises the difficulties. The Government should take immediate steps to open post offices in the rural areas.

**SHRI RAMASHRAY PRASAD SINGH (Jahanabad)** : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, before speaking on this amending Bill I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister to a news item. From the press reports we have learnt that you are going to increase the postal rates and the telephone charges would be doubled. If it is so, then the decision is totally unjustified because you have not improved the telephone services and also there is no marked improvement in the Postal Services. The decision with regard to increase in the rates of stamps and envelopes must be revoked. Today, our country is entering the computer era and it is the subject matter of discussion in the House and outside the House. The postal service was first started with the help of a bird called pigeon. We are entering a modern era and there are no two opinions that the postal services have expanded tremendously. But

you could have carried on this work without bringing this amendment. You sense danger in everything. Since you have majority, you can amend anything you like. If you want to expand this service to the maximum by bringing this amendment and run it properly, you might not succeed in your efforts. You will have to explain to the House after a year how you are running this service and how much profit have you earned ?

You had laid down a policy that one post office each will be opened in every Panchayat headquarter in the rural areas. But still there are a number of Panchayat headquarters where Post Offices have not so far been opened. Besides, on the basis of some report you are going to close down post offices where they have already been functioning.

The rich people have got a number of facilities with the help of which they can get information within a second. But the middle class and the poor people have to bank upon this service only. A person, who lives in the society, desires to know about the welfare of his family and other members who live abroad. This desire is natural. But you are going to curtail even this service in the villages. Everyone talks of the development of the rural areas. But no one is doing anything to further develop the rural areas. You are developing the cities and this has already taken place also, but it is dangerous to neglect the rural areas.

There are three lakh extra departmental employees working in your department. They get only seven rupees per day. You can well imagine how they can make both ends meet with this meagre amount of seven rupees. I had drawn your attention in this House towards this under Rule 377 also. We got the reply, but we are not satisfied. The employee has to do so much work in three hours that after doing this work, he is too tired to take up another work. If someone employs a labourer and relieves him in the afternoon, that labourer cannot get another work for the rest of the day. In this way his whole day is wasted. You should take this point into account. These extra departmental employees should be given wages according to the rules made

for daily allowance. You should grant the same recognition to these three lakh employees which you have granted to regular employees of the Department so that they may also be able to make both ends meet.

You are going to curtail R.M.S. services also. Jahanabad, which was a sub-division has been converted into a district now. Being a district, Jahanabad must have R.M.S. services there. But what is happening there is that the number of nineteen bags has been reduced to fourteen bags. As a result, the letters are reaching the villages in 20 to 22 days whereas earlier these used to reach within one week. You declare that postal service will be made available in the rural areas, but I would like to know whether the postal services are being made available there. On the other hand the standard of postal services has deteriorated there.

You are saying that the Government is carrying on the experiment to effect savings. But it is not the question of effecting savings that matters. If you cannot improve the postal services in the villages, it will not be proper to do away with the R.M.S. services in the name of improving the postal services. This is harming the interest of the villages. People are not getting their letters in time there. Many people send their applications for employment, but they do not reach in time. I would, therefore, submit that the R.M.S. services in Jahanabad should be restored and should be allowed to function as hitherto. We had suggested earlier also that the P and T Department in Jahanabad should be expanded. The delivery of mail through R.M.S. in the villages of Nalanda of Bihar may be routed through the Post Office of Jahanabad and thus its area may be expanded. In villages, people are facing great inconvenience. People are migrating to cities from there and are constructing their houses in the cities. But those who cannot leave the villages, should be provided the facilities of postal services. This can happen only when you drop the idea of closing down Post Offices. There should be a post office in every Panchayat Head-quarter. You should stick to your earlier stand. The services of R.M.S. in Jahanabad, which had been curtailed must be restored so that the people may get mail in time and they may be able to lead their life properly.

With these words, I conclude.

[*English*]

SHRI AMAR ROYPRADHAN (Cooch Behar) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, it has been our long standing demand that the Government should bring forward a full-fledged Bill, a comprehensive Bill covering the postal services as a whole. It is not only our demand, if you go through the record, you will find that it has been your demand also when you were in the opposition in 1977-79. You had also at that time demanded for a comprehensive Bill. But now you have come up with an amending Bill for the 1898 Act.

Before, I come to the Bill, may I say a few words about the postal efficiency. In the last budget speech, your Department had assured this august House that there would be no price rise for the post card, inland letters or the envelopes, telegrams or telephone calls, but a few days ago there was a press report that there would be price rise in the case of inland letters, envelopes, telegrams and telephone calls. The telephone call which costs now 50 paise will go upto Re. 1. On the one hand, the telephones are not working, on the other, you are going to double the rates.

As regards this amending Bill, who objects to the small amendments. There are some very simple things like in place of

16.44 hrs.

[SHRI SHARAD DIGHE *in the Chair*]

His Majesty, you would like to put India. Who has stood in your way for the last 38 years? I do not think there would be anybody who would object to the substitution of these words. But you will find that even today, there are some people on the Government side who have got soft corner for the Britishers.

Regarding postal services, so many things have been said. Shri Shantaram Naik and Shrimati Renu Guha have stated how the letters were delivered after a long long time. Shrimati Phulrenu Guha said that an invitation card reached only after one month and Shri Shantaram Naik

[Shri Amar Roypradhan]

referred to the letter of hon. Prime Minister to the Vice-Chancellor of Vishwa Bharati University, which reached only after 24 days. What is the distance from here to Shanti Niketan? It is only 1300 KM. But it takes 24 days for a letter to reach there.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV): Sir, each and every one is referring to the Prime Minister's letter. But the factual thing is not what the papers had published. I do not want to drag the Prime Minister's name here. We have made subsequent enquiries as to when the letter was posted, when it was delivered and when it was given to the press. There are a lot of anomalies in it. I do not want to discuss it, but I can assure that whatever came in the press is not a correct picture.

SHRI AMAR ROYPRADHAN: If that is so, let it be off then. But what about Shrimati Guha's allegation about the invitation card? Not only that. We all face similar problems many a time. And what would be the condition of ordinary people who would like to send letters to their nearest and dearest? Sometimes, when I think over the functioning of the Postal Department, I feel like going back to the system of ancient days. Though our hon. Prime Minister is stating that he is taking us to the 21st century with satellites, electronics and what not, we are thinking of going back to the ancient days when man used to send his messages through birds. I think, we have to say, "Oh bird, carry this message to my nearest and dearest one!" Mr. Chairman, Sir, if we had been in Kalidasa's time, then we would have called the clouds and said, "Oh white clouds, please carry this message to my sweet one, my dearest one; my kisses to her and my best wishes to her." Do you like to have such a system in this 21st century? When you are talking about this 21st century, really speaking, where are we going? We should really be ashamed of how the Postal Department is functioning, especially when the poor rural people are not getting even the minimum of facility from it.

While you are not able to do any good,

you can do some harm to the people. So many things have been said about Section 26. May I know one thing? If it was originally there already, then why did you put it here also again? If you go through the lines, you will find many phrases such as, integrity of India, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign States or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any offence, and so on. The scope is vast and wide. And I think that it is against our fundamental rights and against Indian citizenship rights. It is against our Constitution. If you read it carefully, finally you will find that this clause is meant for harassing political workers, particularly those in the opposition parties. Only with that purpose in mind, this clause is put there, in the Bill.

Mr. Chairman Sir, only the first reading is going on now and if the hon. young and energetic Minister really wants to improve the functioning of the Postal Department, I would like to draw his attention to the plight of the extra-departmental staff. How many people are there, working as extra-departmental staff? They are working at least for 18 or more hours, day and night. But against that, they are getting only Rs. 100 or Rs. 120. Can you not make them permanent? Can you not regularise them? If the Postal Departments want to run properly, then it should be done immediately.

Sir, there is some ban on the recruitment of staff. The ban on recruitment should be withdrawn immediately from the Postal Services. I think, the time has now come when the Postal Services are deteriorating, I request that you should make a proposal here so that the ban on recruitment is immediately withdrawn; otherwise you cannot proceed further.

The private courier service should be stopped immediately. Wherever these private couriers are used should be stopped immediately. You will be astonished to know that even the banking service, insurance service, public sector undertakings and other services, are using these private couriers. Why? For the sake of maintenance of postal services, you are simply privatising them. Do you want to privatise

the communication services? If you like to do that, then you come boldly and do that. Then, you can also bring a Bill here, saying that, we would like to privatise the communication system; but if it is not so, then please stop it, because, it is creating so many problems.

So, Sir, I hope this young and energetic Minister will come forward and accept my suggestion.

**SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE** (Panskura) : Before, you call for the next speaker, will the Communications Minister kindly look into this matter that CPI office at Calcutta, where there are five telephones, including two telephones of MPs remain totally inactive month after month? We are practically cut off from the world.

Sir, through you, I request the Minister to kindly see that these telephones, one belonging to me and the other of Mr. Dasgupta may kindly be set right.

[*Translation*]

**SHRI DHARAM PAL SINGH MALIK** (Sonepat) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I rise to support the Indian Post Office (Amendment) Bill, 1986. The views expressed by the hon. Members from both the sides show that they consider this amendment a right step and every Member has demanded more facilities of the Postal Services. Hon. Members have either demanded improvement in Postal facilities in their States or in their respective Constituencies.

Sir, it is a good thing that the provision regarding interception of parcel packets in particular has been made in the present amending Bill. Through it the power of checking a parcel is proposed to be delegated to the Central Government or the State Government or the authorised officer. This is not wrong, but it is a good thing. It will help in avoiding mishaps. After the amendment is adopted, the copy of the rules framed thereunder will be laid on the Table of the House so that the hon. Members may get an opportunity to express their views on them. Besides, bungling committed by the Press and the businessmen in respect of pre-postage will be checked and the Govern-

ment will get much revenue and this system will be run in a proper way.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, an amendment has been brought in this Act to check the bungling committed by the people in regard to the stamping machine. In this way the system will be run in a proper way.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would also like to submit two or three more points. Although there is nothing much to say about the clauses included in the amendment, yet there is need to include some more things in this Act.

The mail service occupies an important place since the ancient times because communication is the best method to link the countries together. The necessity of this service has been felt since those ancient times when monarchy was in vogue. Earlier pigeons and horses were used for it, but in the modern age telegraph and vehicles are used. What we want is that the Post Offices should take minimum time in the delivery of the post. A number of Members have suggested that there is much scope for improvement in the Postal Services.

There is a provision of keeping fixed deposit in the Post Offices and they pay half per cent extra interest in comparison to other Banks etc., but in spite of it, people prefer the commercial banks. The hon. Minister should clarify its reasons. In my opinion the behaviour of the employees of the Postal departments is not better than that of the employees of Banks. There are also chances of mis-appropriation of deposits in the Post Offices. There is a village named Sisana in my Constituency where there was a Sub-Post Office. The incharge of that Post Office misappropriated the entire amount of Rs. 4 lakhs (approximately) which was deposited by 85 depositors in that post office. I had also written a letter in this respect and the depositors also sent representations claiming their deposits. But three years have elapsed and hardly 16 cases have been disposed of. I have received a letter in which I have been asked to send representation of other people also so that their cases may also be disposed of. What I want to say is that your department should have taken action *sue moto* and cleared the cases of those people whose deposits have

[Shri Dharam Pal Singh Malik]

been kept with your department. That man has neither been arrested to date nor any legal action has been taken against him and only departmental action has been taken against him. Stringent action should be taken in such cases so as to motivate the people to open accounts in the Post Offices.

Earlier, Haryana, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh constituted one circle. Five-six months back, some of the divisional post offices and sub-divisional post offices have been abolished. Due to this, Haryana has been put to loss. The divisional post office in Jind and another sub-divisional post office at Gohana was also abolished. It resulted in hardship to the people of a number of villages. That Post Office should be restored and we should be provided more postal facilities. Other departments are making progress, but the facilities provided by the post offices are being curtailed. My submission is that those post offices which have been closed should be restored. We find ourselves helpless to face those people in our Constituencies who have elected us to this House. A separate circle should be constituted in Haryana and the Divisional Post Office in Jind should be established again. Similarly, Sub-divisional Post Office in Gohana should also be established again.

Besides, I want to point out one more thing. There are many villages which have large population. But there are Government rules which do not permit two post offices in villages within a distance of three miles. I think that instead of the distance, you should take into account the population of villages as a basis to open post offices. If within a distance of three miles, there is a village with a population of 20 or 25 thousand, then the villagers will face great difficulty. We have seen that letters are not distributed for days together in villages. Thus we have not been able to provide full facilities to the villagers. I would like to submit that post offices should be opened in villages on the basis of population.

Today, we are not providing proper postal facilities to the people because of inadequate salaries of the post office employees. In my view the wages of the employees of this department are lower than those of the other departments. The

temporary post-masters engaged in villages are paid Rs. 100 or Rs. 150 only. That is why they take to some other part-time job and do not take interest in this work. I suggest that they should be paid adequate wages. It would lead to more efficiency and better work will be done in less time.

With these words I support this Bill.

[*English*]

SHRI SOMNATH RATH (Aska) : I rise to support the Indian Post Office (Amendment) Bill. The Indian Post Office Act was enacted in 1898. It is an essential service in the country. We know that a post man is well-known even in villages; he is a friend of villagers; not only he delivers letters but also reads out letters to them. Even telegrams are read out to them. Under these circumstances, when there is a growth of population villages and some semi-urban places have already been identified where there should be sub-post office or branch post office and so on. On account of the ban, these sub-post offices or the branch post offices are not able to function. May be due to the constraint of fund. The Planning Commission has not given that much of fund which was asked for by the Postal Department; that is why it has come out in the paper that the postal charges are going to be enhanced, even 100 per cent in some cases.

It is alleged in villages that certain post offices, after a particular number of post-cards being despatched, other post-cards are being destroyed. Even telegrams are sent by post. Generally, the poor people send post-cards, not covers. If it is a fact, if it is true that the post-cards are destroyed in some places because beyond a particular limit they cannot send post-cards, then certainly it is a matter of great concern. You will be surprised to know that sometimes even telegrams sent by us from this Parliament House never reach destination. Even complaints are lodged which are never attended to.

So these matters require the kind attention of the hon. Minister and he should see that the efficiency should increase, and the prestige of the Department which was existing for long time should continue.

In this Act, Section 26 has been criticised. Section 26 says :

"26. The Central Government or the State Government or any officer specially authorised in this behalf by the Central or the State Government, may, if satisfied that it is necessary or expedient so to do in the interests of public safety or tranquillity, the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any offence, or on the occurrence of any public emergency, by order in writing, direct that any postal article or class or description of postal articles in the course of transmission by post, shall be intercepted or detained or shall be disposed of in such manner as the authority issuing the order, may direct."

Under this section power has been given to Central Government as well as to the State Governments. And the conditions under which the such interception should take place also is fare stated. So, there is nothing much to argue, for the sake of argument. Since in different States different parties are in power, and are functioning. This is applicable to those Governments also and they are also empowered by this Section. That is the very reason why while framing the rules the Government should be very very careful that this power is not mis-utilised. It may be in the interest of the country, it may be for any other reasons as has been stated in Section 26, but since wide power has been given, the power, I am reading the last sentence again.

"...shall be intercepted or detained or shall be disposed of in such manner as the authority issuing the order, may direct."

Should not be mis-utilised. We do not know who will issue the direction, in what circumstances. All kind of letters or communications fall under the garb of this power, the letters may be intercepted or interfered and there may be misuse of power given to the persons either by the State Government or the Central Government. So, care is

necessary while framing the rules. The hon. Minister should think about it, how best this power is not mis-utilised though it is necessary.

Many hon. Members have said that the postal bags containing cash or important articles are being looted on the way and it is also stated that some employees have got a hand in it. And the punishment that is stated in section 57.

'If any person :

- (a) commits theft in respect of—
- (i) a mail bag, or
  - (ii) any postal article in the course of transmission by post, or
  - (iii) any movable property out of a postal article in course of transmission by post, or
- (b) Stops a mail with intent to search. his mail, he shall be punishable with imprisonment for life or for a term which may extend to ten years with fine or with imprisonment and fine.

This is really welcome, and it should be added that a person who abets the above offer should be punished accordingly. That would be better. It may be incorporated in the rules.

Again under Clause 32, in respect of Section 60A, I want to invite the attention of the hon. Minister to Clause 32, which says :

"32. After section 60 of the principal Act, the following section shall be inserted, namely :

"60A. Whoever contravenes any rule made under section 16, sub-section (3), clause (da), leading to leakage of revenue, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years or with fine or with both."

What is the amount of fine, it is not mentioned in this section. I want the hon. Minister to look into it.

SHRI H.A. DORA (Srikakulam) : They are not attentive to you.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Mr. Chairman, please pull him up.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Ministers, I would like you to listen to the hon. Member.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Ministers are very much disinterested.

SHRI SOMNATH RATH : With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I will repeat, if you so like.

With your permission I am again repeating for the information of the hon. Minister. I was inviting his attention through you to clause 32. The amendment is for insertion of a new section 60A wherein it has been said :

“60A. Whoever contravenes any rule made under section 16, sub-section (3) clause (da), leading to leakage of revenue, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years or with fine or with both.”

The amount of fine has not been mentioned here. I think, the imprisonment for three years is also not sufficient. It must be exemplary punishment, because it is a punishment for misappropriation of revenue. I think, the hon. Minister will give due attention to these facts.

[*Translation*]

SHRI MOHD. MAHFOOZ ALI KHAN (Etah) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, the discussion on the Indian Post Offices (Amendment) Bill has been going on for the last two days. The hon. Members from both the sides have expressed their views at length on this issue. There is no doubt that earlier the employees of this department were very honest and committed, but some problems have generated corruption in this department also. It has been due to lack of facilities, inadequate of salaries and non-availability of accommodation. No arrangements were made for their safety and naturally they also took to the methods adopted by employees in other departments.

I am sorry to say that the practice obtaining during the British regime in continuing even now in every district and nothing substantial has changed. You have not been able to acquire your own the buildings to date and hire accommodation for opening post-offices. If you go and see the houses in which post offices are functioning, you will find that roofs leak during the rains and all the records are scattered here and there. Why were such houses hired? They were hired only because the superintendent of post offices had accepted money from the landlord and had never tried to ask the owners for the repairs of the buildings. You have not been able to construct your own departmental buildings upto now and the same old practice of the British period is continuing. And here you talk of the 21st century. You visit the foreign countries and see for yourself as to what type of new equipments have been provided there. In the same way every department is in a shambles. You will introduce an amendment, make new law and do everything, but I would like to submit that it is not implemented.

Now you listen to my problem. My Constituency Etah (U.P.) is a rural and very backward area. The people ask me there that they have elected and sent me to Parliament and what was I doing for them? I tell them that I am not an M.L.A. and so they could ask me about the subjects coming under the Centre. I tell them that they can ask me about the railways and the post offices. Then they ask me about the post offices only and ask as to why there are no post offices in the big villages. I explain to them that I had written to the Government, but it had replied that a ban on opening new post offices has been imposed. They then ask me as to what is this ban. I told them that their post offices had been sanctioned, but had not been opened due to some restrictions imposed by the Government. They consider that they have wasted their votes by voting in my favour. When we take up this issue here the Hon. Speaker does not grant permission on the plea that it is a State subject and hence, it should not be raised here. Now only you can tell as to where should we appeal? You change the system itself. The voters who elect us elect an M.L.A. too, The villagers ask...

**SHRI HARISH RAWAT (Almora) :** Our grievances are redressed neither here nor there.

**SHRI MOHD. MAHFOOZ ALI KHAN :** You have a look on the deteriorating condition of the country. You notice the condition of postal services and distribution of mail. You are doing something in the cities at least, but I am talking about the rural areas. The situation in villages is such that the mail is handed over to any person of village or some school boy and no one bothers whether it is actually distributed or not. Most of the time the post is destroyed or burnt. Now you come to the price factor. Will there be a time when the increasing postage rates would be lowered. Shri Scindia also increased fares in the morning today and you have also done the same thing. I would like to know if the prices will come down at any time... (Interruptions) What are the farmers getting? The price of sugarcane is very low. He is not getting electricity and water for irrigation. There is no end to these complaints.

By chance I am also a member of the Uttar Pradesh Dak Samiti and that is why I have come across so many things. The Committee meetings are held twice a year, while it should meet after every three months. Even the Superintendent of post offices never bothers to ascertain the views of the M.Ps. Shri Rawat is also present here and you can ascertain this fact from him. It is a Central department and they have their say. No one listens to us. No one cares for us and only they remain important. When this is the situation, then what is the use of being elected here and what is the use of this department? They do whatever they like and they never reply to any letter. I want to bring to your notice one thing more, that mail-bags are torn everyday and there is no safety at all. Such type of incidents are happening almost every day. You should pay attention to it.

I want to submit one more thing regarding private vehicles which are used for transportation of mail to the post offices from the railway stations. Private vehicles are used, and money is also accepted from

their owners in lieu thereof. The owner has to pay the money to remain in business, otherwise the postal department will buy its own vehicles and it may cause loss to them. I want to inform you that under R.T.O. Agra, private vehicles are transporting the mail and you also extort money from them. So I would like to submit that the condition of your department is deplorable. The employees retire, but do not receive pension. People approach us to get their pensions. I am a member of the committee and so applications are sent to me for getting their pensions and other claims settled. Neither the claim nor the pension is released and the same old practice of pre-1947 British period is still continuing. Your buildings are in a dilapidated condition and you are not augmenting the staff. Letters and mail are distributed twice a week only. You do not increase the number of postmen nor provide them any facilities. I honestly say that earlier this department was very kind and honest. There was dis-honesty in this department. The department had silent workers, but now they are helpless and all these wrong things have crept in there also. You have appointed local people in the village post offices. There is groupism in every village and thus mail is not distributed. Hon. Minister, the mail distribution is hampered by this groupism. The postmaster, being a local person, is involved in the party politics and thus the mail of some persons does not reach them and complaints about it are made everyday. So I ask you to improve this situation, otherwise it is a good department. This amendment and all other amendments are correct and justified. I some parcel contains a bomb, then what is wrong in intercepting that parcel. There is nothing wrong in it, but it should not be done on the party lines. It should not be so that the mail of the Opposition Party Members is checked and that of the Ruling Party Members is not intercepted. It should be avoided, otherwise there is nothing wrong with this Amendment. The new Section 16 and the old Section 26 are absolutely correct.

Without taking more time I thank Mr. Chairman for granting me so much time to speak. In the end, I request you to improve the condition of this department. If a committed Minister like you cannot

[Shri Mohd. Mahfooz Ali Khan] improve it, then who else will do it. You lift this ban which you have imposed so that our dignity in public eye is not towered. After removing the ban, conduct a survey to identify big villages. Just now Shri Malik had told that there are villages with a population of 1500 to 2000 which are without post offices. This restriction of three mile should be removed.

With these words, I conclude.

**SHRI HARISH RAWAT (Almora) :**  
Mr. Chairman, Sir, first of all I would like to congratulate Shri Sontosh Mohan Dev, through whose efforts the junior engineers and technicians of the telephone department have called off their strike and an agreement has been reached, which some people were thwarting in various ways. He, through negotiations persuaded the bureaucracy to accept the reasonable demands of junior engineers and technicians. He himself deserves congratulations for this settlement. Hon. Shri Arjun Singh also took great interest in it and he also deserves congratulations. I would like to express my gratitude to hon. Prime Minister also as this agreement became possible because of his intervention and good offices.

I would like to make a very reasonable demand during this discussion on this Bill and I would like to support the cause of the people living in remote hill areas and tribal areas of the country. The present criterion for opening sub-post offices and branch post offices is totally impracticables in case of the hill areas of the country. You have fixed two factors—one is population and the second is income—for the purpose of opening new post offices. It is a known fact and the Planning Commission has also agreed to it that in the remote and mountainous regions, people have a very low income. When their income is low, then how can they deposit money in savings bank accounts. So savings should not be a basis for opening new Branch offices and Sub post offices. Distance also should not be a basis. There is a post office in some village and a branch post office may be needed at a distance of even a kilometre or two because of some very big river

flowing in between the two villages and it may not be possible to cross it. There the mail has to be brought from the other side of the river. So this criterion of distance also needs to be changed. I have seen that when someone writes a letter to the Planning Minister, Shri Sukhram or to Shri Thungan, then he is told that it is not possible to open a post office because it is not possible as per the norms laid down for the purpose. And, the norms are based on income and population. I want that the geographical location of an area should also be considered. If you talk of opening post offices on the basis of these two factors only, then post offices cannot be opened in the hill areas. I want you to relax the norms for opening post offices in the mountainous regions.

It is argued that contractors etc. are not available there. I would like to submit that it is difficult for anyone to open post offices in remote and inaccessible areas of mountainous regions. Keeping in view the hardships, no one will be prepared to accept the contract. So, I request you to open post offices there by relaxing the criteria of income and population. Post offices have not been opened in the hill areas due to the imposition of ban. You should remove this ban in respect of the mountainous regions.

Secondly, you are paying the E.D. employees such a low salary that they can hardly make their both ends meet. Some hon. Member had said that some post office employees destroy the mail by burning it. There might be some such employees, but generally the post office employees are honest and despite such low salaries are working in villages and in remote areas. They deserve our congratulations for it. This supreme legislative body of our country has also a duty to look into their difficulties. They are paid very low wages which should be increased. The post masters at small places are also paid very low wages. Their emoluments are also required to be increased.

You have been achieving rapid results in this department. Our hon. Shri Arjun Singh has now assumed charge of this department and he is a every efficient person. He will also streamline the work

of this department. Through this Bill you are going to get the right to censor the mail which is a step in the right direction, but care must be taken to check its misuse.

**\*SHRI P. APPALANARASIMHAM** (Anakapalli) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, hon. Members on both sides while taking part in discussion have criticised the performance of postal department. Many malpractices are taking place in branch and sub-post offices. There are many instances where the money orders are not being delivered properly and are being swallowed by the postmen at these levels. The Postmasters at these levels are not invested with the powers to take action against the erring post men. The power to take action against such dishonest men lies only with the district Superintendents or Post Master General. This is the reason why such incidents of misappropriation of MO's are taking place in such a large number every day. Sir, I am sorry to tell you that the Government has failed to take steps to set things right. No step was initiated so far to tone up the postal administration. Very recently the post master general in Andhra Pradesh issued a press statement saying that the department was introducing a new scheme through which telegrams and registered parcels will be delivered within 24 hours. Sir, on 1st November, 1986 our party leaders sent a letter and a telegram which were delivered after two days. If this is the situation prevailing in towns and cities you can well imagine the position in rural areas. The postal services are at their worst in our rural areas. Sir, it takes not less than a week for a post card to reach a neighbouring village which is hardly 20 Kms. away.

Sir, I take this opportunity to request the hon. Minister to instal a post box for every village or within a radius of 5 Kms. in tribal areas in our country. It contributes immensely for the development of our tribal belts.

Sir, a word about the performance of our telephone department. I represented this issue earlier also when Shri H.N. Bahuguna was the Minister for Telecommunications. I had requested him to make our telephones work. I had told him that

many of our telephones were dead and that only a handful of telephones worked. Even their performance was far from satisfactory. I had also mentioned that crores and crores of rupees were being collected because of wrong calls. Not ten years have gone by. The situation remains the same. The functioning of telephones have not improved in any way. So a concerted effort must be made, at least now, to make our telephone system to function properly. I hope the hon. Minister would respond favourably and take measures to tone up administration of telephone department.

The sub-exchanges of telephones are established in our rural areas but none of these exchanges functions properly. Hence the Government should see to it that these exchanges work properly. It is essential that these rural telephones work smoothly and efficiently, if our communication system in our rural areas is to be sound.

I thank you very much for giving me an opportunity to speak and conclude.

[English]

**MR. CHAIRMAN** : Now, there is one Member remaining to speak on this Bill. If the House agrees, we will give him three minutes and then we will take half-an-hour discussion. The Minister will reply tomorrow.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS** : All right.

**SHRI BHADRESWAR TANTI** (Kaliabor) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, from the deliberations of all the sides of the House, it is clear that the postal services are worse in the country. I am coming from the State of Assam to which the Minister of State for Communications also belongs. In Assam, people have to go 10 to 12 miles for purchasing postal articles like postcards and money order forms. Delivery system in the country is bad. But in Assam, it is worse. If a letter is posted today, it will never reach the Addressee in Assam in time. Sometimes it takes months together. The mail service is still worse. There is no authority or person to look into it. About the postman who carries letters and other mail, we do not know whether he actually

[Shri Bhadreswar Tanti]

delivers the letter or throws it to the dust bin. There is no authority to oversee him. There are some post offices where the service is found to be worse.

In every State, there is a Post-master General. But in Assam, there is no Post-master General, as yet. One post-master General is posted at Shillong for the entire Northeastern States and he has to control the entire Northeastern States. Even after 39 years of our independence, you could not create a separate post of Post-master General for Assam. May I ask the Communication Minister why this has not been done. The people have been denied their rights. We have demanded a separate Post-master General and his offices in the State of Assam but that has been turned down.

In my constituency, at Golaghat, the population is 50,000. But there is no post office yet. The post office located at Golaghat had been shifted 10 years back to the outskirts for the purpose of construction of the old building. But it has been deserted today. In the present post office, which is located outskirts the town, a dacoity was also committed because of its insecurity. People are getting a lot of difficulties in the absence of permanent post office in the heart of the town. What for the post office has been shifted to the outskirts, may I know from the hon. Minister? The fund for construction has also been allotted but it has been diverted to some other place.

There is a village called Kamala Miri which is named after the freedom fighter Kamala Miri who was a martyr of the freedom movement in 1942. But suprisingly enough, there is no post office even today, after 39 years of independence. People have to go 12 miles across two rivers, for purchasing postal articles such as postcards etc. There is no communication in the village. May I request the Minister to reply to the point and also see that the post office is opened there immediately? The hon. Minister of Communication also belongs to the States of Assam.

My suggestion would be that Government should not create the laws alone and it should not go on amending the laws. That will not help unless the Government

implements the law. It should be implemented properly and under proper supervision. Then only proper things will come out. Otherwise not.

17.36 hrs.

#### HALF-AN-HOUR DISCUSSION

[*English*]

#### Package deal for the Setting up of Various Projects in West Bengal

MR. CHAIRMAN : We now take up the Half-An-Hour discussion. Shri Somnath Chatterjee.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (Bolpur) : Mr. Chairman, like the words "21st century", recently a figure namely, Rs. 684 crores has become a very publicised figure in this country and also somewhat mysterious. To resolve this mystery, I had put a question which was mutilated and changed, to suit probably the Minister's convenience and wishes and the reply was given on the 5th November, 1986 about the details and the break-up of the figure Rs. 684 crores which was announced by the Prime Minister at Calcutta to be given as assistance to the State Government or to the State. The reply having made the matter more mysterious, I gave notice of this discussion. At last, the ballot has now favoured me.

From the way the publicity is being given and an attempt is being made to propagate, it appears that the Central Government for the first time since independence of this country has shown its grave concern for a State Government and has showered its largesse so far as the people of the State of West Bengal are concerned and that the Prime Minister has not only very widely opened the purse strings of the Central funds but he has himself gone with the entire array of Ministers and Officers—I do not know who were there and who were not—to deal with the problems which have been pending.

There was some similar situation in the history, of course, during the pre-Moghul