

an average during the past few months. Power is often restricted by D.V.C. to West Bengal State Electricity Board far below the allocated level, due to low generation.

The Chief Minister of West Bengal has already written to the Prime Minister in this connection, asking for the restoration of the position as was prevailing in October 1977. Recently, the Chairman of the D.V.C. has alleged that D.V.C. has no obligation to supply power to West Bengal State Electricity Board. It is clear that to embarrass the Government of West Bengal and create further difficulties such an unilateral and discriminatory attitude has been taken by the D.V.C. I call upon the Government to take immediate steps so that adequate power is made available from D.V.C. to West Bengal which has always been, and still is, the largest contributor in the investments of D.V.C.

(ix) CLOSURE OF SOME SMALL RAILWAY STATIONS ON WESTERN RAILWAY FOR BOOKING GOODS TRAFFIC.

SHRI DIGVIJAY SINH (Suren-dranagar): From the 10th April 1982, the Western Railway have closed down 122 small railway stations for booking goods traffic in wagons. This has paralyzed all trading and economic activities. It has caused congestion in large stations, and considerably raised the cost of production of small industries and agricultural produce. Immediate redress is sought.

13.34 hrs.

DEMANDS\* FOR GRANTS,  
1982-83—*Contd.*

(i) MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS —  
*Contd.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: We now take up further discussion and

voting on the Demands for Grants under the control of the Ministry of Communications.

The Minister of Communications will reply. (*Interruptions*)

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI C. M. STEPHEN): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir: For the second year in succession, after a long period when this matter was never discussed, the affairs concerning the Ministry of Communications have come up for discussion before the House.

Last year when I replied I had with me my very valued colleague, the late Mr. Kartik Oraon. I cannot help placing on record the great dedication with which he worked in the Ministry, during the period he was working as Minister of State.

I am thankful to the many Members who participated in this discussion, for the suggestions they made, for the criticism they advanced, for the demands they put across, for the expectations they gave expression to, and also for the compliments they paid, in acknowledging that the Ministry is doing what best it can possibly do, under the circumstances. No Minister in charge of Communications can ever expect to be above criticism. I came across very recently a journal by name *Electronics and Power* published from Britain. The recent quotation which I thought I must place here is as follows: "It is a curious fact that telephone administrations are unpopular all the world over." (*Interruptions*) "Whether or not, we would now-a-days think the fact curious. It undoubtedly does seem to be the case that telephone administrations,

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whether large or small, well managed or badly managed, private sector or public sector, all attract a degree of criticism from their customers." That is unparalleled even in the case of utility organisations. Whatever the reason for this curious fact, there is no doubt that the general unpopularity of telephone throughout the world applies in very full measure to the British Post Office. All those who involved in the British telecom operations must now be used to this unpopularity and must have long ago come to the conclusion that they just cannot win it over. (Interruptions) This is a fact which I have always stated because for every person who has got a telephone, when the telephone goes out of order or something happens, as a person who paid for it, he will certainly feel pained over it. His anger will come up. As a person who was a subscriber for over 40 years, before becoming a Minister in charge of Communications, I remember occasions when I expressed anger much more furious than the anger my colleagues are expressing to me. Therefore, we have now become adjusted to that. But on the other hand, I am thankful that there was acknowledgment from all members on the other side and this side that they are satisfied that we in the Ministry are doing our best. I am receiving quite a number of compliments and I asked my officer to pile up the whole thing. Occasionally, I am receiving compliments giving thanks for the work we are doing.

Recently, there was a cyclone in Gujarat. Everything went out of order; everything collapsed. The telecommunication in the city was kept working and I had acknowledgment from the Council of Ministers and the Corporation, everybody saying that the real work was done. When there was a train accident in Andhra Pradesh, we set up our organisation there and I had umpteen letters

acknowledging the services done. The Lions Club in Nagpur had an opinion poll; they made a check up as to which service the people are satisfied with comparatively. It showed that the public expressed themselves as saying that the telecommunications and the communication system compared to many others are really good. There are occasional things coming and this is refreshing to me, refreshing to the colleagues in the Directorate and refreshing to our colleagues who are working from one end of the country to the other.

But, still we in the Ministry, don't approach this either with the spirit of complacency nor with the spirit of fatalism; that our lot is to take criticism and only criticism. We have been doing our best to improve the service and do what best we can.

Well, I came yesterday with a large number of statistics ready in answer to criticisms, but my friend, Mr. Rathod, put me on notice that it is better you do not come out with any statistics. I can assure him that I have put all the papers away in my office and I have come completely empty handed. There is sense in what he said. He said, "When you lost in Delhi, that was the end of it." In the same manner, if the telephone collapses for the subscriber, that is the end of it. But I would also say that I would have been a fool if I thought that because I lost in Delhi, everybody of my party throughout the country lost. Others also have won. In the same manner, even if a telephone is going out of order, it does not mean all the telephones are going out of order. In Delhi we have got about two lakhs of telephones and we get complaints to the tune of 6,000 per day, which means about 1,94,000 telephones are working without complaint and the subscriber does not have to make a complaint.

(Interruptions)

AN HON. MEMBER : Oh! No!  
We have to complain. (*Interruptions*)

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN  
THE MINISTRY OF COMMU-  
NICATIONS (SHRI VIJAY N.  
PATIL) : This statistical inference  
you have to agree.

SHRI C.M. STEPHEN : This is  
not to say.....(*Interruptions*)

SHRI RAJESH PILOT : You  
have to carry Post Offices also with  
them.

SHRI C. M. STEPHEN : I am  
coming to that.

I can assure the House, we  
have got a very intensive monitoring  
system to find out how far we are  
bettering. Not that we have be-  
come the best, but to find out whe-  
ther we are bettering or worsening.  
For example, take the Postal Service.  
We have got two or three systems.  
One is, we send out thousands of  
test letters, throughout the country  
to many people, we collect back our  
information. A second system which  
I have introduced was, I directed all  
offices under our establishment, when  
the letters come, to stamp, to take  
the envelope out, make a note how  
long it takes for the letter to travel.  
This is being done regularly and I  
am getting statistics to show how far  
things are bad, or how far things are  
good. There are certain States  
where things are bad : there are cer-  
tain States where things are good.  
We have got our statistics in the  
Directorate. It is only to satisfy  
myself to see how far things have  
bettered. I am only saying that  
there is a monitoring system and  
wherever things are bad we concen-  
trate our attention on that, to find  
out where the bottle necks are. But  
you will kindly appreciate where we  
have got a huge system like ours,  
whether it may be the tele-communi-  
cation or the Postal service, which  
is being run by lakhs of people,

going through different agencies, there  
can be a slip between the cup and lip  
and there may be a delay in this case  
or in another case. I explained it last  
time

In the same manner, we compare  
trunk efficiency. Trunk efficiency,  
one year back—I am not  
quoting statistics — was about  
60 per cent. It has now im-  
proved, upto 70.5 per cent. This  
is the present position. Every year  
it is coming up. Again, there are  
certain methods by which we meas-  
ure for different areas, as to whether  
improvement is there. I can only  
conscientiously assure the House that  
my assessment is that over this period  
things have, whether in the tele-  
communication area, trunk area,  
whether in the local complaints area,  
Postal transmission area, in all these  
areas, conditions have improved and  
results are bettering. I am not say-  
ing that things are absolutely okay.  
But they is a situation that can never  
be. It will always be, human error  
or technological, it will certainly be  
there. We recognise that things have  
got to be improved and therefore we  
appointed a committee — which is  
now known as the Sarin Committee.  
Unless I was satisfied that the state  
of affairs was not good enough and  
had to be looked into, I would not  
have appointed that Committee. A  
very high powered committee was  
appointed. They have submitted  
their report. They gave something  
like 460 recommendations. It is not  
a case of my saying that the recom-  
mendations are under consideration.  
No. We have analysed them. I had  
a series of meetings with our officers.  
I had a round with all officers, with  
the Consultative Committee of Parliam-  
ent, with the trade union leaders.  
On the basis of these, we analysed it;  
a large number of recommendations  
we accepted, some recommendations  
we had to reject, which were about  
20 to 23 which were not very mate-  
rial. A large number of recommen-  
dations, we have accepted. We have

[Shri C. M. Stephen]

divided all those recommendations into those which are to be implemented in the Ministry itself; and those recommendations which can be implemented only on an inter-ministerial basis. There are a few recommendations which are of a fundamental nature on which a decision can be taken only after discussion with certain colleagues of mine in the Cabinet and further, in the light of that a decision will have to be taken. Bifurcation of the postal and telegraph service is one of that, into which a deeper look is necessary. So, a few of them have been kept apart. On the others, for the purpose of implementation we have already constituted a cell. The implementation of those recommendations which have been accepted, has started in full earnest. I also inform the House that periodical reports are being sent to the Secretary to the Prime Minister as to what action is being taken on different recommendations that have been given. That would show that this is not a case of a matter being under consideration, but this is a case of a matter under implementation. We are implementing the recommendations with full force. Certain very valuable recommendations have been made. They will enable bettering of the service.

Quite a number of individual constituency requests were made on which, as the Members know, we will be replying to them individually after examining them. I do not want to take the time of the House for that purpose.

I would like to deal with some of the general points. I was really surprised that on the tariff increase, there was not much of criticism. And they have taken it on. Incidentally, a mention was made. But I would like to make one of the points clear.

One criticism was raised that before Parliament met, I notified and I faced the Parliament with a *fait accompli*. This is a misunderstanding which I want to clear. On the 2nd of February, we made an announcement saying that with respect to such and such items, we propose to issue a notification. On the 11th of February, we issued a notification saying that these rates would come into force on 1st of March. On the 18th February, we placed the notification on the Table of the House. So, it was not a case of coming to the House with a *fait accompli*, but it is a case of our coming to the House with a notice that we propose to implement it on the 1st of March, 1982. There were full 10 days available to the House under the Act to make a motion saying that this House disapproves of these propositions. Well, the proposals made by the Finance Minister came into effect on the 27th February whereas the proposals made by me came into effect only on the 1st of March, that is, later than the proposals he made. I gave an advance notice, a notification notice and then the matter was placed on the Table of the House. Anybody could have moved a motion and discussed it so that the House could have expressed either for or against it. My friends on the opposition were kind enough and imaginative enough to realise that it would not be serving the public if they move a motion to dis-favour this because they know that for the expansion of this, it is absolutely necessary. I must certainly thank them for this imaginative approach to this matter.

SHRI SURAJ BHAN (Ambala) : It is only a technical justification of the matter.

SHRI C. M. STEPHEN : Very very constructive approach to this matter.

There is a very fundamental question which the House has to consider. Some people get the telephone



service. We are 70 crores in this country. 25 lakh are getting the telephone service and whether they must pay for what they are getting? People are sending letters here and there. Whether the general exchequer must pay for that or they must pay for that? Nobody will say that the employees in the P&T Department are the highest paid in the country. I am one of those who feel pained that conditions are not such that I can pay them higher although they deserve to be paid higher. Therefore, at the lowest level they are being paid. And for the cost that accrues whether the persons who avail of the service must pay for it or not is the fundamental question which you will have to take into consideration. We have to look after more important services. I am not saying that this is not an importance service. For example, the core sector, the power sector, irrigation, all these have got to be looked after at the national level. Whatever little resources are available, are we to use them for this, or are we to use them for subsidising the postal and tele-communication services? Demands are coming up for more and more post offices in the villages, more and more telephones in the villages. Any exchange in the village means additional cost for us. A small exchange in a village is a losing proposition. An additional post office means Rs. 4,000 or Rs. 5,000 of sheer expenditure without any additional income, or not much of additional income. But the demands are coming like that. Whether that must be paid for is a matter of principle that I would like the Hon. Members to give their thought to.

It is a matter, which was gone into by what was known as the Tyagi Committee. To what extent this has to be subsidised is a matter which was gone into by that Committee. In a very detailed analysis

they agreed that the postal services should procure revenue equal, or near equal, to the operational cost of the postal branch. The Committee felt that the tariffs for these services, registration, insurance etc. should be fixed in such a way so as to provide a small margin, not exceeding 20 per cent. Different items were examined and their finding was that over a period this must be a self-sufficient service. They have identified certain items, which must be subsidized.

For example, they said that the newspapers must be subsidized. But; they said, it must not be limitless; the subsidy must not exceed 66 $\frac{2}{3}$  per cent of the cost. If you look at the services that are new being rendered, a very heavy subsidy is being given.

Our cost of operation is increasing. Last year the cost went up very much, not because of any unnecessary expenditure, but because of the additional expenditure that we had to incur on account of the dearness allowance, on account of the additional allowances that we had to give to the ED employees; on account of these factors, there was an increase in expenditure. For instance, the Indian Airlines, who carry our mail, increased their tariffs; the railways also increased their tariffs. Everyone of these services, through which we pass, imposed an increased levy on us. The net result was that the postal services became more costly.

It is but legitimate that a part of the cost will have to be met by those who avail of it. There is no escape from that. The country must be prepared for that. The House must also concur in that. The postal and telecommunication services must see their way through, rather than going on to the general revenue to collect their subsidy. It must be possible, and it is in that spirit that certain

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items of tariff were increased. I can assure the House that this will not be the last increase in the tariffs... (Interruptions) For the year, it is. But, subsequently, it will have to be realised that, in a very painless manner, tariffs will have to be increased so that expansion may not suffer. This is the only point that I want to make on this.

Then some Hon. Members said : you have increased the tariff, but what about the Plan performance ? Two Hon. Members specifically enquired why the Plan allocation was not fully utilized. So far as the postal side is concerned, that has been more than utilized. In the telecommunication side, in 1980-81 it was not fully utilized, because of non-availability of equipment, because of lack of time to streamline the department, as far as I am concerned. But I can assure the House that in 1981-82 the position is that the entire money that has been given has been utilized. In 1982-83 the entire allocations will be utilized and the allocations will fall short of our requirements. This is the position. In 1981-82 the total allocation was Rs. 452 crores; the whole amount will be utilized. For 1982-83 the allocation is Rs. 477 crores. This will fall short of the real requirements. There will be an over-utilisation of the entire funds, because expansion is taking place in such a heavy manner, and utilisation does and will take place.

Sir, the third point raised was about the staff shortage. That is from the staff point of view. I am told that this has been a complaint all along. I can assure the House that this is one of the main points I took up after assuming charge. There was a heavy staff shortage. Now the position has been completely rectified. On the postal side there is absolutely no staff shortage at all. On the tele-communication side we have recruited the people completely, they are going on to training, they

will be joining in July, by July on the tele communication side the staff shortage will have been completely wiped out. We have already recruited people.

There is a terrific absenteeism. To meet that absenteeism and to avoid the contingency of vacancies remaining unfilled, we have introduced a new system of trained reserve pool. I have directed that they must estimate our requirements for the next five-year period and subject to the limit of our requirement up to the next five-year period, the staff required must be recruited. There is a leave reserve of 10 per cent. I have suggested that 25 per cent leave reserve must be taken into account and that number of staff must be recruited, recruited not for permanent service. They will be recruited and given training, they will be kept as reserve pool and whenever there is a requirement, they will be put into service and this pool must be kept, which means that at any time vacancies are occurring, vacancies will continue to be filled up and the reserve pool also will be kept completely trained up. Many people will drop out, it does not matter. We are spending a certain amount for giving them training, they may drop out and take up some other employment, they come in irrespective of the age; the moment they are taken into the reserve pool, they will be notionally taken as recruited and even if at the time of their regular recruitment they have crossed their age limit, that will be condoned and they will be taken into service. This is the situation we have created to ensure that there shall never be another complaint about the staff shortage. The staff shortage problem has been tackled and has been settled. This is the present position which I wish to place before the House.

The fourth point raised was about extra departmental staff. We have got a number of extra departmental people, as you know. We have got about two-and-a-half lakhs of extra

departmental people. Out of 1,40,000 post offices that we have, about 1,26,000 are extra departmental post offices. That is the backbone of our postal service. Our problem is, in the far away villages where there are not enough of transactions to keep a regular post office, that postal transmission has got to take place. This extra departmental system was, therefore, introduced long long back not only in our country, but elsewhere also. It has got to work on the basis of an agency system and agency system means persons who have got other avocations or other sources of employment alone must be given the agency. This is the fundamental condition because we just cannot afford to give them enough, a full-time job. They have got to work for 2 to 3 hours or 4 hours. The rest of the day they must have regular employment. But this aspect was overlooked in the meanwhile. We are now insisting that unless a person has got a regular source of revenue he cannot be taken on an extra departmental basis. It was stated that nothing has been done for such people. I have only to say that there are different categories. On 1-9-70, for example, the extra departmental sub-postmasters and sorters, their minimum was Rs. 140 and their maximum was Rs. 170. Today their minimum is 188 and their maximum is 233. About extra departmental branch post masters, their minimum was 100 and their maximum was 120. Today their minimum is 131 and their maximum is 165. For every section of them the allowances have gone up. I am not saying that this is enough of an allowance.

14.00 hrs.

But you will have to take into account that if one rupee is added on to extra-departmental person, the total amount comes to what? If Rs. 10/- is added on, the total amount comes to what? Can the service

carry that sort of a burden? But in spite of that this was being increased. Allowances were being increased. They were having certain problems and we had been negotiating and talking to them. Unilaterally we have taken up certain matters. For example, there is a provision which says that an extra-departmental person, if he takes up a post office he will be given an allowance of Rs. 10/- and a number of them, only 2,000 or 3,000 of them, have got this allowance, others have not got. They have got to keep an office, run it and all that. Something has got to be done about it. This matter was considered. I take this opportunity to inform the House that orders are being issued to give all the extra-departmental branch postmasters Rs. 10/- each as office allowance. These orders are being issued.

Delivery, agents have to wait at bus stand, wait for some time. Mails do not come. It may be for one hour or two hours. We cannot particularly pay them and all that. Taking that into account, we have decided to pay them—Rs. 5/- to every one of them. Orders are being passed to pay all extra-departmental delivery agents. In addition to this....

SHRI HARISH RAWAT : Why not Rs. 10/- ?

SHRI C. M. STEPHEN : This is for waiting and all that. The other one is for office expenses, office rent and all that. We realise there was a case. We realise the value of the services they are rendering. We realise that they realise that we have our limitations. And we have got our limitations and we do it on our own and we have been doing on our own from year to year to increase their allowances. This is all I have got to say as far as the extra departmental people are concerned.

[Shri C. M. Stephen]

The other point was about the extension of the communication service into the rural area—postal or the other. That was the point raised. I have only to say that out of the post offices 1,40,000 which we have, in the urban area the number is 14,000. 1,26,000 post offices are in the rural areas, may be branch post offices; sub post offices. In this Five Year Plan there will be another 8,000 post offices opened in the rural area. But there need not be any rigid rule about this. That was a suggestion that was made. I do agree. Conditions vary from area to area. The conditions that may apply to Kerala may not be and cannot be the same elsewhere. Therefore, that standard cannot apply to a hilly area—say Himachal Pradesh. This may be the case for areas of Uttar Pradesh or the hilly part of it, the north eastern belt, Mizoram. There the conditions differ. I have, therefore, instructed our office to make an evaluation from State to State to determine as to what extent the criterion has got to be changed and the exercise is under way to evaluate the needs from area to area depending upon the conditions there. The only thing that we have to take care of is that there must be the real need about it. People ask for Branch Post Office more for the purpose of getting an allowance and starting an office there than for meeting the postal needs. This is a matter which has got to be taken into account and the financial aspect also is matter to be taken care of. Any way, I do agree that there cannot be a national standard applicable everywhere. It has got to change in accordance with the conditions obtaining from area to area, taking into account the fact that our country is practically a continent where conditions differ from place to place and the needs have got to be met like that. And that suggestion is, therefore, will taken care of.

I come to rural telecommunication. This is the major problem which we have been facing. Well, I have only to inform the House that in 1980, we had set up a Task Force under one of our officers, Dr. Hajela. He made a very detailed study and submitted a report on giving effective telecommunication service in the rural areas. The Sarin Committee had examined it and completely approved all the proposals that have been made therein. Now, what we see is, we started a small exchange of 10 or 25 lines and we put a line man there. If a telephone goes out of order, there is no means to inform the exchange. Only one line man would be there. He cannot go and collect the whole thing. So, a sort of mess is there. Therefore, the telecommunication system in the rural areas does happen to be at times, very much cut down. This is a technical problem and a technical difficulty.

The proposition put forth is that there is what we call, Integrated Digital Telecommunication Service. Under that, we take one districts as a compact district. In that district, there may be small exchanges. Under the proposal, the small exchanges, manual or other one, must be replaced by the digital small exchanges. This must be connected with each other by a chain of line, that is, radio line. There must be a compact line, completely compact not depending on overhead-wires necessarily. This sort of system must be connected with the rest of the country. It is a phased programme. Under the Sixth Five Year Plan, 18 districts have been taken up for this programme. This has been accepted and during this year, we propose to take up 4 districts. This is what subject to the availability of the equipments. I am only saying that this rural telecommunication system and service to the rural areas, is a problem. We are aware of that and we have already addressed ourselves to it. A detailed plan has



been prepared and we hope that on the basis of the proposal, by 1995, all the districts throughout the country can be covered by this Digital Transmission System.

**SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA (Guna) :** What are the 18 districts ?

**SHRI C.M. STEPHEN :** The 18 districts are :

For the year — 4 districts. Agra, 1982-83 Mathura, Alleppey and Kolaba.

For 1983-84 — 6 districts. Barmer, Bhopal-Sehore, Jalpaiguri, Kohima, Nadiad & Belgaum.

For 1984-85 — 8 districts. Krishna, North Lakhimpur, Mehsana, Murshidabad, Koraput, South Arcot-Pondy, Sangrur, Katihar-Purnea.

*(Interruptions)*

I did not want to read it. These are the proposals. I am only saying that this can be increased if our production capacity comes up. I am only saying that the telecommunication in the rural area is a major challenge that we are meeting and facing. We have got into that area because the rural area is becoming economically active.

**SHRI NAWAL KISHORE SHARMA (Dausa) :** What about the efficacy of the system ? Is it well proved ?

**SHRI C.M. STEPHEN :** This will be the most efficient system because it is digital and the transmission is done by the radio line and V.H.F. system. This will certainly be the most efficient system. That is how it has been evaluated. This is not the last word about it. I am

only saying that the rural telecommunication problem was gone into by us in 1980. A committee was appointed ; a complete report has been collected and action is being taken. The Sarin Committee also went into the report. There is nothing to differ on the proposal. We accept it and proceed with it subject to the availability of the equipments for which we are expanding our factories. This is all I wanted to say, Sir.

Even in 1981-82, we opened 625 small exchanges in the rural areas against the targeted number of 510. But, as I said, these small exchanges cannot be the real best because there are so many difficulties for these small exchanges to keep communication with one another.

Another point which was made much of was about wrong calls. Wrong calls are there. I do get wrong connections. Recently, I inaugurated an STD service from some place in Andhra Pradesh. I put across the call. The inauguration was by talking to the Chief Minister of Karnataka. I dialled and I landed in Madras. But then the person who stood by me said, "You put your finger on the wrong number." The Minister of Communication dialled a number before a huge public with all the officers watching, I dialled wrongly and I landed in Madras rather than in Bangalore. Then, when they said number by number, carefully I dialled and I landed in Karnataka, on the table of the Chief Minister of Karnataka, and I talked to him.

Here, I wish only to emphasize that it so happens with subscribers also. This is not an exaggeration I am saying. For example, in Japan, they say, their system is absolutely perfect. But only 80 per cent of the calls come through and the rest of them land wrongly. They say, this is because of the fault of subscribers.

[Shri C.M. Stephen]

It does happen. We have got a system; we evaluate. For example, in Delhi, our officers in the course of a month have got to put through 30,000 calls and the report has to be given as to how many calls have landed on the wrong number. In Calcutta, it is being done. In Calcutta, it is 0.48 per cent—I am sorry, I am again giving the percentages—of the calls that landed on the wrong number; Bombay—5.5 per cent and so on. On an average, it is 3 calls out of every 1000 calls that land on wrong number. Wrong calls are there. This is because of the equipment failure.

The Estimates Committee stated, and somebody quoted it, that we are making a profit of Rs. 25 lakhs by wrong calls. I would only submit this. I have just made an analysis of it. Rs. 25 lakhs I am making profit which means about 50 lakh calls. I have got 25 lakhs of telephones in the country. 50 lakhs of wrong calls on 25 lakh telephones means 2 wrong calls per telephone, per year. It has been said that this is something for which compensation must be given. That comes to Re. 1/-. The Estimates Committee has stated that for this I must give compensation. It comes to Re. 1/-. This is what it comes to. Let us not take it to an absurd limit.

It does happen; in the system, it happens. We cannot help it. I am only saying that we are monitoring as to how many of the calls are landing in the wrong manner. Even the Estimates Committee's estimate was Rs. 25 lakhs which when computed comes to 2 wrong calls per year, per telephone. This means that on certain telephones, the wrong calls may be more and on certain telephones, there may be no wrong calls at all. Otherwise, this average cannot be struck that way.

SHRI M. RAM GOPAL REDDY:  
Has it got any connection with the wrong person?

SHRI C. M. STEPHEN: Telepathically, it may be so.

Another point was made about the telegraph delays. There are telegraph delays. I must not claim that it has been brought completely under control. But I must say that we have brought it under some control. We have got telegraph offices. This is a point which the House will realise. We have got regular departmental offices. D.T.O. CTO 427 in number. We have got combined Offices 30,322 in number. These combined Offices are working in the village areas. These are Branch Post Offices. They are small offices which are working only for a limited time. If a telegram lands up there when that office is not working, during its non-working time, it will not be received. That will just be stopped there.

If a telegram goes from one Departmental office to the other, it can go fast.

But if it is not covered by one of these 30,000 and odd combined offices, delay is unavoidable.

There are so many other factors which come into the picture.

This delay may become very acute or there may be artificial delays created. Sometimes a telegram may be given but the staff may not be sending it out or the staff may send it in a circuitous manner. All those things are there.

We are streamlining the whole thing. An Order was issued last year that a telegram which was delivered at a particular office, if it stays there for more than 3 hours, it must be collected back immediately and must be sent by the next available plane to the next metropolitan area where it has got to go. It cannot be kept pending there. For a few weeks, this was done. We have got our aeroplanes connecting the different

cities in a large number. The result was that the telegrams were being removed and were being shunted out to Bombay, to Madras and to different stations and distribution took place. Now, as a result of this, we are able to pay full attention and the telegrams started moving out on the wire and today I could say that the heavy transmission by postal service and by the aeroplane is fast fading out. According to the latest figures available, in many of the stations there is no postal transmission of the telegraph service. It is going on wire. The quantum of the telegrams that go by postal service and by aeroplane has come down drastically and this trend is being kept up.

There is another mechanical device which is being in use today. We are now trying it in Madras. The device is this. Telegram is given. This is known as Store and Forward System. This device was manufactured by the Electronics Corporation of India, our own Company, not a communication factory, but Government of India's company (ECIL). They manufacture it. If a telegram is given, it is pushed across and if the channel is not available. That would be stored up. No human agency is necessary. The entire message would be stored up in the next station. The message is pushed automatically across to the next area as and when the channel is available and it will reach the next area. I have received reports that this system is fairly successful. It is working fairly satisfactorily. If that is so, then, it will be produced in larger numbers and that alone would be the most effective solution to the problem of delays. The system of sending telegrams through the telegraph service is being wound up to a great extent.

About 630 lakh telegrams are being booked and are being sent across throughout the country and out of

this, 40% are sent through the combined post offices. You may kindly understand this point also.

The most vigorous attack was made from the other side on our so-called censoring. We do not do any censoring. We are a very innocent Department. We do not interfere in anybody's affairs. We do not poke our nose into the affairs of anybody. The letters and parcels etc. are received in trust and safely passed on to the people.

There are certain statutory provisions. This matter came up. Shri Bhogendra Jha moved a Bill and on that I have put across whatever argument I had to.

Another Bill is coming from Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. I would reserve whatever I have to say on that.

I do not like to restate the arguments I already stated. I would rather leave it at that. It is the Act passed by this Parliament which is today in force. This particular provision was amended in 1972. Upto that, anybody could censor to any extent. In 1972 it was amended to make it justiciable, to make it compulsory that if any specified officer wants to tap a telephone or if he wants to intervene with respect to the correspondence of anybody, there must be a written order giving the reasons why he wants to come into the picture which means, my friends will agree, it has been made justiciable. If anybody has got any doubt as to whether his telegram or letter is being interfered with, any court can ask me to produce that order and to examine whether that order has been well based and whether it can be sustained. I cannot just go in and pick up a letter that way. If I do that, it is punishable under the Postal Act, it is punishable under the Telegraphs Act. Anybody who interferes with the secrecy of this is liable

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to be punished with imprisonment, unless it be that an order is issued by the Home Ministry in the Central Government or in the different State Governments, a written order, giving the reasons as to why a particular person's telegram or letter will have to be interfered with; only then, we are entitled to go into that. This was amended in 1972 after we came into power. It is not the British Government's law which is there today; it is the law that was passed by Parliament in 1972 which is in force today. I do not want to add anything more than that.

It was aired that the Scheduled Castes, Federation must be recognised.....

AN HON. MEMBER : Union.

SHRI C. M. STEPHEN :...Union must be recognised.

There is a standing instruction—not exactly recognition because that is not the trade union concept—that, if this Federation has anything to say they must be received, their letters must be received; there is a standing instruction to that effect not only in my Ministry but also in the Ministry of Railways.

As far as the interests of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are concerned, I think, my Ministry is second to none in taking solicitous care about their rights. In many cases I have taken the stand that, if a particular number of posts are reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and if those persons are available, then they must be taken. I put this argument to some of my officers: "Suppose we want a certain set of people and they are not found to be qualified enough; are we going abroad to collect those persons? We collect our own people and carry on with them. In the same manner, if a particular segment or percentage is

reserved, then the effort must be to ensure that they get those posts if persons are available, not to find reasons to deny but to take them in." The result is that, in my Department, in 1980 the total number of posts de-reserved was 139 and in 1981 it has come down to 120. That trend will be kept up. As far as 'C' and 'D' posts are concerned, much more than 15 per cent, they are already having. As far as 'B' is concerned, twelve per cent is there; there is a shortfall of three per cent. As far as Group 'B' is concerned, this has got to be given to us by the UPSC and that does not take place, not because of any wrong on the part of the UPSC, but it is because proper recruitment had not taken place in the basic cadre so much so that number cannot be recruited by the UPSC. This position is being rectified. We are extremely solicitous about the rights of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people in our Ministry. Every file of ours will bear out that we are much more solicitous than anybody else in implementing the spirit of the provisions of the Constitution and in implementing the spirit of the policy enunciated by the Parliament; it is being done fully, to the extent possible.

The next one is, they want information about the Asian Games, what all we are doing. Everything is being done. The Asian Games will get the best of communication service when they start. I do not want to go into the details.

The next information asked was about the INSAT which is now in the orbit. This comes under the Space Department. I do not want to go into that. All I want to say is that, as far as our Ministry is concerned, 28 earth stations are ready.

The work is over and they are absolutely ready and ready to be commissioned. Only the INSAT



must be in position properly. There is some snag about the INSAT which let us hope and pray, will be overcome because one antenna has not opened up yet. They are struggling to open it up as was reported in the papers. We have put a lot of money in it and we have calculated the whole thing on the basis of this communication service and it is my hope and prayer that nothing will go wrong with respect to that. Results will be known in two or three days.

Finally, staff matters were mentioned very much. There are two types. I would like to enunciate my policy as far as this is concerned. My friends are saying that I am a trade unionist and there need be no worry, that I am a trade unionist and that a trade unionist must behave in such a manner and all those observations were made. There are two types of issues. One is the general issue and the other is the individual issue. The individual issues, the Unions are not entitled to take up and I am enforcing that very vigorously and very rigorously. I have also instituted what is known as the Grievance Cell throughout the country and everywhere. The staff members can go to that and it must be attended to. If there is a delay, then they can go to the Grievance Cell and that must be attended to and a report has to come to the Directorate regularly as to how many grievances are pending. This is our policy. I have told them that if a staff member brings up a grievance, to the extent possible bend backwards to meet his demand unless it is absolutely illegitimate. This has got to be attended to and this is being attended to. This is a new arrangement we have brought about.

As far as the general issues are concerned, there is a standing arrangement by which the Joint Consultative Machinery is there. Discussions are taking place and it

is my proud privilege to claim that my Ministry, whatever be the conditions in other Ministries, do vigorously and very very punctually see to it that the Department Council meetings are being held and things are being discussed and whenever there is a difference of opinion, there is an outlet of the thing going to arbitration and the moment the arbitration award is given, we are implementing it even if it affects our services very badly. But then there is a difference between the interests of the staff and the interests of the persons in charge of the Unions. We proceed on the basis of co-operation. I have been expecting that co-operation would be forthcoming. I have held meetings with the Unions but it is my disappointment that either the co-operation is not forthcoming or the writ of the Union to cooperate for increasing efficiency does not run through the rank and file and this is the unfortunate situation in which we are to-day. I am entrusted with this Department and I have got to serve the people. Therefore, wherever the co-operation of the Union is coming, it is my job to see that the things are running and steps have got to be taken. On that I am absolutely firm and we are going on that.

Now certain matters were mentioned—the strike of the 19th. I have got the figures here. For the strike on the 19th we have to take certain steps only in certain areas. No union went on strike and some people became over-clever in certain stations to go on strike and to demonstrate that they were going on strike. Calcutta—3452 did not turn up for work. Calcutta, you know, has got a large number of people. But only 3452 people did not turn up for work. They say, breakdown in transport. Breakdown in transport did not affect the people. They came and a huge majority came. Only 3452 people stayed away. GMT, Madras—13. PMG, Madras 2; PMG, Bhubaneswar—

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only 3 people stayed away. PMG, Trivandrum—163. ... (*Interruptions*). What I am saying is that it is this small number of people who chose to stay away. In spite of the Union saying that there shall be no strike, they chose to stay away.

They chose to stay away. I ordered that their pay would not be given. I also ordered that the break in service would be imposed. But, I have said that if they write a letter saying that they were not striking work, then, they would be taken at their face value and the break in service would be lifted. But, the salary cut would remain. This is nothing against trade unionism. The trade unions do not go on strike; but, some people became very clever and they became a union themselves and went on strike. How do you think, I must treat them?—The treatment would only be in the manner in which it has been directed—the break in service must be lifted if they say that they were not striking work.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Did they write to the department that they were not participating or something like that?

SHRI C.M. STEPHEN : They did not write. It was an illegal strike.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : I was asking you—did they write to your department saying that they were not going on strike? How can you then take action against them?

SHRI C.M. STEPHEN : Because we have taken it as a collective action. I had stated that if everybody writes saying that it is not a collective action, then the break in service will not be imposed. We will not go further into that. We will take them on their words. The break in service will not be

imposed—no work, no pay—and the pay will not be given. No allowance or pay will be given.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : It had led to dismissals also.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : You come to the point.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (Jadavpur) : It is an illegal action and we have got a stay also. We know all these things. (*Interruptions*) What do you know about the trade union rules and regulations or about the trade union rights?

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Order, please.

SHRI C. M. STEPHEN : Well, Sir, there is no point of dispute here. If anybody says that he was not on strike, the break in service will not be imposed. If anybody did not turn up for the work, I shall not pay him. This is a simple thing. That will remain.

Now, Sir, mention was made about the rotational transfers from this side as well as from that side saying that the people have got their link up with the merchants and they have got their vested interests and so the people are suffering. I may say here that the service transfers are an absolute must. These rotational transfers have, therefore, been revived. But, it has been made very very mild. What is the instruction? We have stated that if a person is there in his tenure for a four year period, then, he becomes liable to be transferred which means thousands of them will have to be transferred. There would be a large number of them. But, I have stated by my order that if an officer is satisfied that the retention of that employee in that station will not affect the services, he is free to keep him in service and he need not be transferred. It is expected that only

a limited number of people will be affected. Already, some people have been transferred. About 100 people were transferred in Kerala. Only such a small number of them had to be transferred. Now, it is for this House to tell me whether, if an officer who is in charge of this says or feels that here is a particular operator, who has got a link with certain people, is manipulating, whose retention will affect the subscribers, is it that I should keep him there should I not have the freedom to transfer such a person? Is it highly discriminatory? (*Interruptions*) Anyway, the point is that transfer liability is there. There are certain people who are transferred within the district; certain persons within the State and certain others all over the country. A small number of lowpaid employees will be transferred only within the district or the division—from one exchange to the other. Sir, I must make it clear that the rotation transfer orders which have been issued will stay, come what may and they will be implemented. They cannot be altered. If they are going to be altered then the whole system will collapse and the service will suffer. Therefore, I would beseech the approval of the House for that; otherwise I will not be able to make the service better. (*Interruptions*) We do not want blood of anybody. Instead of suspending him we give him another station to work and show his efficiency.

Sir, a word about the meetings. There are certain wrong tendencies developing. Posters are being pasted on the walls of the offices. Union flags are being flown in the offices. The whole atmosphere is being vitiated. These unions hold their meetings in the premises. Sir, I was myself a trade unionist. Many trade unions are there. I am sure they can find a little place where they can hold their working committee or other meetings. What is the necessity that these should be held in the premises of the establish-

ment. We have sixty-four trade unions. If I am to allow all the sixty-four trade unions to hold their meetings in the Exchange buildings or the Post Office buildings then there will not be a single day free of these meetings.

Sir, P&T Service is an essential service and it is treated as out of bounds for extraneous elements. It has got to be kept like that. I have said earlier that it must be kept very much like a temple. It is a Government of India establishment and the only flag which is entitled to fly there is the national flag of India and no other flag is allowed to fly in the establishments of P&T. If anybody wants to fly their flag they may do it on the offices of INIUC or AITUC but as far as Government of India establishments are concerned the only flag which can fly there is the national flag. Also you cannot deface it. In the Postal Act there is provision that it shall not be defaced. I am coming before the House for incorporating the same provision in the Telegraph Act also prohibiting the defacing of walls with all sorts of things. Every union has got its own Notice Board. They can put it there. If there are demands the same can be met. Negotiations are taking place. We are making our best efforts to look after the interests of the staff but I must make it clear that demands in a considered manner can be talked across but if an attempt is made to hold the people to ransom and to ask me to bend to a demand then I will not be prepared to bend to the demand. The whole thing has been handed over to us to serve the people.

Nobody can enter the establishment and block the service of the establishment. Unless we do this the proper functioning of this Department will become difficult. I will request the Hon. Members that this cooperation must be given to me. I do not want to take more

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time of the House. We have already taken certain steps and certain steps are in the offing. In the coming year certain important developments are going to take place. In the coming year we will be providing three lakhs lines of exchange capacity and 6 lakhs of additional telephone connections. Four telex exchanges of electronic type will be installed. We are going to introduce a new innovation known as the multi-axial radio system. For example, in Mizoram or some other hilly area, you just cannot get across by the overhead lines, and this is a new system which will be very helpful. We have imported the first system, which is working on the radio system. By this system, telephone subscribers will be connected to the main exchange within 25 kms. area. This is the only answer for the problems of the hilly areas. Twelve such systems have been imported and will be introduced in the coming year. An electronic telex exchange is also being opened up in Bombay this month. We are going on to the digital electronic age.

Our expansion programme is going ahead. Work on the Rae Bareilly factory expansion for 2 lakh lines is going ahead on schedule, and the production also, I suppose, will start ahead of schedule. We have tendered for the Palghat factory expansion and it is being processed. Tenders have also been floated for launching out production programme for one million electronic lines per year. Factories will have to be started for that. We wanted to start one factory first and the second next; but the Sarin Committee has recommended that both the factories must start together. We are making an effort for this purpose. Anyway, we are on the threshold of great expansion, because the demands are going up and we are determined to meet them. We are trying to meet the demands by importing the required equipment during the interreg-

num. We have a definite programme to make ourself self-sufficient in the field of transmission system, switching system and other systems and we are trying our best in that regard.

That is all that I have got to say. As I said in the coming year, there will be a tremendous expansion in the telecommunication system.

I would like to conclude here with my thanks for all the comments that have been made by the Hon. Members. I can assure all the Hon. Members who have participated in the debate and even those who have given notices of cut motions, that we will write to them from the Department and tell them as to what exactly the position is with regard to the various points.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : I shall now put all the cut motions moved to the Demands for grants relating to the Ministry of Communications to the vote of the House together unless any Hon. Member desires that any of his cut motions be put separately.

*All the cut motions were put and negatived.*

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : I shall now put the Demands for Grants relating to the Ministry of Communications to the vote of the House : The question is :

"That the respective sums not exceeding the amounts on Revenue Account and Capital Account shown in the fourth column of the Order Paper be granted to the President out of the Consolidated Fund of India to complete the sums necessary to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending the 31st day of March, 1983, in respect of the heads of demands entered in the second column thereof against Demands No. 14 to 18 relating to the Ministry of Communications."

*The motion was adopted.*



