

SHRI V. SOBHANADREESWARA RAO : With the exploration in Krishna and Godavari basin apart from the availability of oil there is availability of huge quantity of natural gas which has already been proved. I would like to know what steps the ONGC or the Government is proposing to make available this gas for the domestic cooking purpose to the towns and cities located near the Krishna Godavari basin where these explorations are going on ?

SHRI BRAHMA DUTT : I came back from that basin three days back. It is a very prospective basin but first of all we have to lay the pipelines to connect the sources of oil and gas. On on-land we have located oil in Bhimanapalli and gas in Kaza, 2 wells of gas in Narsapur and one well of gas in Pasarapudi, 3 wells of gas in Rozole and two wells in Tatipaka and one oil and one gas in Kaikalur. At present we are connecting them by the pipe lines and our main difficulty is crossing the river Vashishta. We have given 50 per cent of the total cost of the bridge over the river Vashishta to the Andhra Pradesh Government and the foundation stone has been laid. Now we are trying to cross Vashishta by boring a tunnel under it.

We have already identified consumers and entered into agreement with eight firms and ten other firms have also come up. Regarding supply of cooking gas to the towns it is a very costly affair, we can supply at one point then the whole infra-structure has to be laid down by the State Government. We offered to Ferozabad one ABJ pipeline. Ferozabad is a glass industry area like Venice of Italy. Our cost will be only Rs. 32 crores but the infrastructure has to be there. We made a similar offer to Bombay. As and when gas is available and as and when Andhra Pradesh Government is able to put up the infra-structure we will consider it.

SHRI R. P. Das : The Minister has already said that South of Calcutta has been identified as one of the spots for drilling of oil. I think the Minister is aware of the fact that Bay of Bengal is a

big big bag stretching from Naokhali to Car Nicobar. So I would like to know the exact place that has been identified and also whether any agency has been selected for drilling the oil ? I would particularly like to know the agency that has been entrusted with the Job of drilling in Bay of Bengal, South of Calcutta.

SHRI BRAHMA DUTT : As regards South of Calcutta the drilling and survey will be done by the Soviet Union experts. As regards off-shore we ourselves are doing the drilling. We are drilling one well off-shore.

Speed post service

*107. **SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN :** Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether there is any private sector involvement in the functioning of the speed post service;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the details of private courier services functioning in the country ?

THE MINISTER OF ENERGY AND MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI VASANT SATHE) : (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise in view of reply to (a) above.

(c) This Ministry has no direct information about the details of private courier services functioning in the country. The Reserve Bank of India have however, intimated through the Ministry of Finance that 13 courier companies have been given permission to operate International Courier Services. Only 9 courier companies are however, actually operating International Courier Services under this permission.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : Sir, the Indian postal service is renowned the world over for

its efficiency and excellent service. Whatever may the Minister state in reply to my question, it is sad to say that the Indian postal system has been totally over-shadowed by certain private courier services as if our postal system cannot deliver goods at the same grade of service as the private courier system like Skypak or the Bluedart.

Why does the Ministry not take steps to ban the parallel postal system which is eating up the revenue of the postal department? If the hon. Minister expresses his helplessness in banning the private courier system, will he come forward and ensure this august House that the postal system puts up a stiff competition by joining Vayudoot, Indian Airlines and also Air India in offering better services to the service-conscious people of this country.

MR. SPEAKER : Why should it not do ?

SHRI VASANT SATHE : As the law stands today we can't ban these private courier services who carry documents other than letters. Under the postal law, we can only deal with letters. There is a ban on others for carrying letters. Therefore, the courier services, like Skypak, are operating.

I do not agree that they are operating more efficiently than the postal services. In fact, our speed post service is doing the best in the country. But as far as private couriers are concerned, who deal only with business people and carry their documents or packages, they are able to do it better because they are restricting only to big metropolitan houses and financial deals. Therefore, to compare postal service, which serves the remotest man in the village, with these few services, which are commercially run, will not be fair. We are doing a better job.

I agree that we must improve the efficiency. This competition will help us to improve our efficiency. I hope our services will be able to improve our efficiency.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : I understand that the Indian Banks Association is running a parallel courier service of its own and the IBA has given specific instructions to its member-banks to fully utilise the service. In fact, even before the courier system came into vogue in the banking sector, the IBA directed its member-banks to prefer the private courier service to the speed post.

I would like to know from the hon. Minister why our banks, which were nationalised to help the public sector reach the commanding heights of our economy, are indulging in activities which are detrimental to the interests of the postal department.

I would also like to know from the hon. Minister what action the Ministry proposes to take against the courier system which is prevalent in the banking sector.

SHRI VASANT SATHE : To be very honest, I cannot blame the banks—which are also public sector undertakings—if they were to prefer someone who gives better service. You see, ultimately in this country—this is my personal view—unless there is an element of competition and we go in for excellence, we will not improve our efficiency. Unless you are efficient, even public sector undertakings will not achieve commanding heights. Public sector undertaking must try to be efficient. That is the only way of achieving the commanding heights there. I would very much wish that all our public sector undertakings, like Indian Airlines, should cooperate with the postal services. For example, the night air mail was doing very well at one time, coming to one place and taking the posts to all other corners of the country. This cooperation must grow among the public sectors but ultimately their service must be competitive and efficient. That is the only answer.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : They are helping the private sector.

SHRI VASANT SATHE : Where is the private sector here? Banks are public sectors.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : It is competing with the postal service.

(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : No discussion.

SHRI VASANT SATHE : Ultimately the banks have to decide. Can I force the banks?

SHRI SURESH KURUP : I never expected such a reply from the hon. Minister. Probably, it is his famous love for the private sector.

MR. SPEAKER : No question of private or public sector. They must excel in everything.

SHRI SURESH KURUP : Private agencies are eating into the revenue of postal departments.

MR. SPEAKER : If they excel, automatically the people will come to them. You cannot monopolise with inefficiency.

SHRI SURESH KURUP : According to the Postal Act, as the Minister himself has pointed out, it is the exclusive privilege of the Government of India to carry letters inside India. This private courier service are carrying documents and all that but everyday thousands of letters are being carried across the country by these private courier service. Even the Minister himself and the officials of the Department of Posts are receiving letters from the private courier service. I would like to know what action the Government intend to take against those people when they carry letters violating the Indian Postal Act.

SHRI VASANT SATHE : When violation comes to our notice, under the Act, we can take action. We are therefore trying to amend the Act. The Bill has already been passed and it is pending for

the President's assent. Many things are there. As far as search and all powers are concerned, it is much more than that. Unless we have many more powers to prevent it, we are helpless. I am on a larger issue. I do not mind having a discussion in this House as to whether you should try to achieve efficiency and excellence in public sector or not. If you want them to have a commanding height—this is the issue which I want to discuss.

SHRI SURESH KURUP : What is the use of the Act?

(Interruptions)

SHRI VASANT SATHE : Where is the lacuna?

PROF. N.G. RANGA : I do not wish to go into the debate of the private sector or the public sector of the postal service. I am all in favour of only public sector so far as the public management and ownership and servicing of posts is concerned. What is happening today? Postal service itself is becoming more and more inefficient. I do not know why. There is something wrong with the Government's management. May I know whether Government has taken any steps in order to avoid delayed deliveries. They say now that they have got speed post service. There is no speed at all in the present service. The letter which used to reach from Simla to my village within three or four days in the past, now takes six to seven days and from Delhi it takes five to six days now. I would like my hon. friend, who has become in-charge Minister of this and is a very efficient Minister to assure us that he would pay special attention in order to see that the efficiency of the postal service is improved, at least it is to be brought back as it was previously.

MR. SPEAKER : Can monopoly be the licence for incompetence?

SHRI VASANT SATHE : I agree with you. I entirely agree with our most revered hon. Member but inefficient department does not help me. It is our utmost anxiety that our public sector services, in crucial areas, like postal

service, telephone service should become very efficient and give consumer satisfaction. We are trying to do our best and our employees and workers in the services are willing to cooperate and we can do our best. I can assure you to improve our efficiency. But as you said, there are certain inherent requirements if you want to achieve excellence. Even in running when does a man achieve excellence? It is only when there is a target and competition with someone else. Unless there is a mark to be reached, the excellence will not be achieved. I want to introduce this element of competition in our country so that we can achieve excellence. That is our effort.

Implementation of the Consumer Protection Act

*108. SHRI BANWARI LAL PUROHIT : Will the Minister of FOOD AND CIVIL SUPPLIES be pleased to state :

(a) whether the attention of Government has been drawn to the news item captioned "Government going slow on consumer protection" appearing in the Hindustan Times of 9 December 1987;

(b) if so, the reaction of Government thereon; and

(c) what concrete steps are contemplated by Union Government to secure effective implementation of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF FOOD AND CIVIL SUPPLIES (SHRI SUKH RAM) :
(a) to (c) A statement is given below.

Statement

(a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Government accords a high priority to the programme of consumer protection. To provide better protection to consumers and for speedy and inexpensive redressal of consumer grievances, the Government has brought into force the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

Several steps have been taken to ensure that the statutory institutions envisaged in the Act are set up on priority basis. In this connection, meetings have been held with the Food Ministers and senior officers of States and UTs. Matter has been pursued vigorously through several letters, telex, telegrams, etc. The Central Government has constituted the Central Consumer Protection Council and is in process of setting up the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission. Most of the States have already set up State level Consumer Protection Councils. Some States have already finalised actions for establishing the redressal machinery under the Act. The implementation is being closely pursued, co-ordinated and monitored.

[Translation]

SHRI BANWARI LAL PUROHIT :
Mr. Speaker, Sir, the consumers are being badly exploited continuously in various ways in India. In view of that, the consumer Protection Act was passed in 1986. Two years have passed since then, but it seems as if Government has not taken any effective step in this regard. I want to know from the hon. Minister in how many States and in how many districts has the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, which was to be constituted in three tiers, been set up so far? According to the proposal, the entire network should have been completed within two years. I would like the hon. Minister to kindly enlighten us about this matter.

SHRI SUKH RAM : Mr. Speaker, Sir, it will not be appropriate to say that the Government has not taken any suitable step for implementing this law. After this Act was passed, rules were framed on 15-4-87 and thereafter the Central Consumers Protection Council was constituted on 1-6-87. It held its first meeting in Sept. and will hold its second meeting on 16th March. The Food Ministers of different States met in February, 1987 and thereafter in July 1987. Later sent several letters, telex messages etc to the States to set up Consumer Protection Councils at the earliest. So far, these councils