

LOK SABHA DEBATES

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LOK SABHA

Thursday, November 23, 1978/Agra-
hayana 2, 1900 (Saka)

The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of the
Clock

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

OBITUARY REFERENCE

MR. SPEAKER: I have to inform the House of the sad demise of one of our former colleagues, Shri S. Balasubramaniam, who was a Member of the First Lok Sabha during the years 1952—57 representing Madurai constituency of the erstwhile Madras State.

Shri Balasubramaniam was closely associated with the Adult Education Programme and served as General Secretary, District Adult Education Committee, Madurai. A devoted social worker, he worked tirelessly for the uplift of Harijans and was a Member of the Central Advisory Board of Harijan Welfare. He served the people of his State in various capacities such as Vice-President, Shri Thyaga Brahma Bhakta Jana Sabha, Madurai, in 1947, and President of Agricultural Cooperative Bank. He passed away at Madurai on 18th November, 1978.

We deeply mourn the loss of this friend and I am sure the House will join me in conveying our condolences to the bereaved family. The House may stand in silence for a short while to express its sorrow.
The Members then stood in silence for a short while.

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ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Breakdown of Telephonic Communi- cations in Calcutta

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*61. SHRI RUDOLPH RODRIGUES:
PROF. SAMAR GUHA:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICA-
TIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether he is aware of the breakdown in telephonic communications in several parts of Calcutta as a result of the recent floods in the city; and

(b) what steps have been taken to restore the same?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN
THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICA-
TIONS (SHRI NARHARI PRASAD
SUKHDEO SAI): (a) Yes, Sir, approxi-
mately 33,000 local lines went out of
order during the floods.

(b) (1) Repair to external plants which were damaged due to floods was undertaken immediately after the floods, on a very urgent basis.

(2) A separate task force was set up for tackling the faults in Calcutta East—“35”/“36” exchanges where flooding of cable chambers caused break-down of primary cables affecting the entire telephone net-work.

(3) In all the areas, priority for restoration was given to all the essential services like Ministers, senior government officers, Police, fire-brigade, Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation, Calcutta Suburban Transport Corporation, State Electricity Board, Railways, Ambulance, Press etc.

(4) Restoration of all inter-exchange junction cables and distribution cables affected, were taken up simultaneously by deploying available cable maintenance staff.

(5) Control rooms for monitoring the progress of restoration of breakdown have been opened in offices of the Area Managers and centrally at Telephone Bhavan.

(6) At present about 7,000 lines are still to be repaired.

SHRI RUDOLPH RODRIGUES: From the answer given it appears that they have restored approximately 3200 lines per week. This is about 1 cable or 1½ cables a day. In view of the fact that there are between 3000 and 5000 lines per week in Calcutta which are normally restored, this is no progress. I am asking by way of clarification, how long will it take to restore all the telephones so damaged. Secondly, is it not possible by stepping up the change to ducts, gas pressurisation and micro-wave links to do away with the present system of faults altogether in two or three years?

श्री नरहरि प्रसाद मुखर्जी साह : यह तो फ्लड के समय जो स्थिति थी, उस के बारे बतलाया गया है, दूसरे की स्थिति के बारे में नहीं बतलाया गया है।

MR. SPEAKER: How long will it take to put them in order?

श्री नरहरि प्रसाद मुखर्जी साह : यह 15 दिसम्बर तक हो जायगा।

SHRI RUDOLPH RODRIGUES: In view of the fact that for more than one month and in some cases two months, telephone subscribers have not been able to use their phones. Will the hon. Minister be gracious enough to consider the proposal for rebate or refund at least of the rental for this period for those who are affected?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BRIJLAL VERMA): It is a national calamity that we are suffering for the present. It is none of our fault. So I think for that purpose everybody is suffering, the

whole nation is suffering and the Department is also suffering.

PROF. SAMAR GUHA: My friend, the hon. Minister is trying to take shelter under national calamity. The condition that is prevailing in Calcutta regarding Calcutta Telephone—if a word is suitable to describe it—chaotic condition is prevailing in regard to Calcutta Telephone not only during the floods, but even before that. You will remember, Sir, that I raised this question earlier a year before. The human failure and the instrument failure is so massive that the whole section of the press is critical of it. Thousands of complaints are there, 199 and 187, all kinds of telephone lines are often found dead. There is no response. There is wrong connection and wrong billing. What a horrible condition is existing in Calcutta telephones, it is really difficult to describe it.

You will remember that last year I made a humble suggestion to the hon. Minister, "Why do you take all the blame on yourself? You appoint a Parliamentary Committee, let them understand the problem, let them find out to what extent this is due to human fault or due to instrument fault. I made a fervent appeal to him. But in reply to that question, the hon. Minister has said "An official team would investigate into the causes of failure of Calcutta telephone." But there has been no improvement whatsoever. Calcutta people, Calcutta subscribers and Calcutta press, everybody is so vehement in their criticism.

MR. SPEAKER: Please come to the question.

PROF. SAMAR GUHA: This is only a plea. Flood calamity is no doubt there. But this problem was there even earlier and it continues to remain. I will request the Government again, whether the Government will set up a Committee of a few chosen Members of Parliament, who will go into the problems relating to either human or instrument failure and to

suggest means for its improvement. Will the hon. Minister accept this suggestion?

SHRI BRIJLAL VARMA: I have no hesitation in considering this proposal.

SHRI SAUGATA ROY: I would like to know from the Minister (a) whether he or the Minister of State visited Calcutta after the floods to supervise the repairing of telephones and, if not, when he is due to visit the place; and (b) whether he has considered the setting up of micro-wave links between the different Exchanges in Calcutta so that they will not be affected by floods, and whether he is going to set up a Telephone Advisory Committee immediately in Calcutta to look after the problems of subscribers.

SHRI BRIJLAL VARMA: It is already there.

SHRI SAUGATA ROY: The Telephone Advisory Committee is not there.

SHRI BRIJLAL VARMA: It is there.

SHRI SAUGATA ROY: No, there is no Telephone Advisory Committee.

SHRI BRIJLAL VARMA: I can assure the House that there is a Telephone Advisory Committee. I can put the names of all the Members on the Table of the House. It is there.

As far as other things are concerned, I am taking special care in regard to Calcutta because I know there is a very bad situation prevailing there—not only because of the flood conditions, but otherwise also, there are bad conditions there. So, for that purpose, I have installed an internal micro-wave system there on an experimental basis and that system is working properly. Five to six more micro-wave systems to work internally within Calcutta are going to be installed at a cost of Rs. 3 crores so that the telephone system can work properly there.

As regards pressurisation of cables, I am doing that also. This year I

have done about 250 kilometres and next year I am going to do 500 kilometres. So, pressurisation of cables is also being implemented.

SHRI SAUGATA ROY: I had asked the Hon. Minister whether he has visited Calcutta; he has not replied to that.

MR. SPEAKER: Have you visited Calcutta?

SHRI SAUGATA ROY: After the floods, has he visited the place? (*Interruptions*)

PROF. DILIP CHAKRAVARTY: It is my privilege to draw the attention of the Hon. Minister to the fact that he gave a similar assurance last year that by 15th December, 1977 all the telephone lines in Calcutta and the services would be brought to a particular level. Was that commitment honoured? I remember....

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE): No year was specified.

PROF. DILIP CHAKRAVARTY: This was the commitment given to the Hon. Members on the Floor of this House—that by 15th December, 1977 everything would be in order. The same commitment was repeated in Raj Bhavan last year in a Conference of Members of Parliament. I would like the Minister to tell us specifically whether that commitment was honoured by the Management of the Calcutta Telephons in Calcutta.

SHRI BRIJLAL VARMA: First of all, there was no assurance at that time.

Secondly, so far as improving the conditions is concerned, I can assure the House that, as compared to the previous year, this year it was much better, but for the floods. (*Interruptions*)