

LOK SABHA DEBATES

LOK SABHA

Tuesday, November 11, 1986/Kartika 20,
1908 (Saka)

*The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of
the Clock.*

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

Working of Telephone System in Rural Areas

*104. SHRI VIRDHI CHANDER
JAIN† :

SHRI MULLAPPALLY
RAMACHANDRAN :

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

(a) whether the telephone system in most of the places in the country, particularly in rural areas, remains out of order due to old equipment and technical faults in telephone exchanges and dereliction of duty by officers and employees;

(b) if so, whether the Department proposes to chalk out any programme to bring about substantial improvement in the system; and

(c) if so, the outlines thereof and the States likely to be covered thereunder ?

[*English*]

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE
MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS

(SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV) : (a) (i) No, Sir. It is not correct to say that most of the systems remain out of order. However, the service rendered by a few of the systems is not very satisfactory due to old and worn out exchange equipment.

(ii) In rural areas the telephone is affected adversely due to frequent and prolonged power failures.

(b) and (c). Steps taken to improve the telephone services are given in the statement below. All States are covered in the above programme.

Statement

The following steps have been taken to improve the telephone service.

1. Introduction progressively of electronic telephone exchanges to avoid problems inherent with electromagnetic switching equipment used hitherto.
2. Replacement of life expired equipment.
3. Special testing of exchange equipment particularly inter-exchange junctions is being undertaken to improve inter-exchange working.
4. Working of air-conditioning plants in various exchanges is being regularly monitored to ensure proper working.
5. Laying of new junction, primary and secondary cables in ducts to protect them from external damages.
6. Pressurisation of primary, secondary and junction cables to minimise cable break-down faults.

7. Use of jelly filled cables in the distribution network to prevent entry of water in the cables to avoid faults.
8. Cable trenches are being flooded before being closed so as to detect any damage during trenching or laying of the cables. The public is being asked to inform Telephone Department before they take up digging on 'dial before dig' service so as to keep liaison with other agencies who are engaged in digging.
9. Extensive patrolling of cable routes to detect any digging operations and to take precautionary measures to avoid damage to cables.
10. Provision of high grade junction circuits on Pulse Code Modulation, Coaxial and microwave media to provide better quality and more dependable service.
11. Rehabilitation of subscribers' fittings and the D.P. Boxes to minimise faults on the line.
12. Replacement of overhead wires by insulated drop wires to avoid faults due to kite strings, bird nests etc. which lead to contact or low insulation faults.
13. Use of improved telephone instruments.
14. Replacement of aluminium wires in the fittings at the subscribers premises by copper wires to avoid break faults.
15. Computerisation of cable records and fault repair service to bring down duration of faults.
16. Computerisation of Directory Assistance, (197) service and records.
17. Computerisation operator assisted (180) trunk services.
18. Monitoring of the automanual service and trunk service is being carried out so as to ensure prompt response on these services.
19. Public grievance cells have been opened at General Managers headquarters and Area Managers offices to provide single outlet attention to the subscribers.
20. Formation of Inter-utility coordination Boards to avoid damage to cables.
21. Engine alternator sets and higher size batteries are being provided to overcome the problem due to unstable power supplies.

[Translation]

SHRI VIRDHI CHANDER JAIN : Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is clear even from the reply just now given by the hon. Minister that telecommunication system in the country, especially in the rural areas, is not functioning properly. It has been clearly stated in the reply that this situation has arisen due to old and worn out exchange equipments. The strike by the Junior Engineers has also crippled this service. If you happen to dial a telephone, you get the reply from the operator that the line is out of order. We do not get even dial tone. The operators do not attend. Especially, when an information is sought on 180, 181, 199 and 183, they are not able to give information as they have only the old directory with them. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he is taking steps to set these things right ?

[English]

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : Sir, it is a fact that in rural areas, the telecommunication system performance is not very satisfactory mainly because most of the exchanges which have been installed there are very out-dated. Now, in this Seventh Five Year Plan, we are trying to gradually change these exchanges into modern ones.

About the services which are rendered by the manual operators, it is a fact that there are complaints and recently, the Department has started a scheme by which these operators are being trained and wherever there is over-staffing, we are transferring them to those places where there is under-staffing. I hope that the situation will improve. But, as I said, gradually, we are trying to change to electronic type of exchanges and then efficiency in rural areas will be improved. This is now being planned in a phased manner. I hope, after the Seventh Plan, it will substantially improve.

[*Translation*]

SHRI VIRDHI CHANDER JAIN : Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has already been admitted that the situation in the rural areas is unsatisfactory, but telecommunication service in cities, especially Delhi, is quite deplorable. I would like to know what steps the hon. Minister is going to take to instal improved telephone equipment, electronic telephone exchange and air conditioning plants? What steps are being taken to provide S.T.D. facilities at the district level?

[*English*]

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : As I said, so far as the whole country is concerned, the total number of exchanges is about 11,600, and rural exchanges number 10,800. The capacity now throughout the country is about 37 lakhs; and out of these 37 lakhs, in the 7th five-year Plan our aim is to instal 768,000 electronic exchanges, and also to improve the cross-bar and strowger efficiency in rural areas, by providing generator sets as well as more powerful battery operations, so that in times of failure of power, they can work properly. In city areas, in various cities specially Bombay and Delhi, Mahanagar Telecommunication Corporations have taken charge from 1985. They are floating Bonds to raise funds and gradually, they will be introduce electronic digital exchanges. In Calcutta and other places also, we are taking steps to see that the situation improves. I request hon. Members to bear with us for some time more; and we shall improve the performance.

[*Translation*]

MR. SPEAKER : He has asked that you, no doubt, have set the equipments right, but can you also set right the persons who man them?

[*English*]

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN : I am extremely glad to go through the lengthy answer given by the Minister. But whatever may be the policy today, people at large are not happy about the functioning of telecommunications in the country, especially in rural areas. This poor performance is due to several factors : They are out-dated as well as worn-out machinery, lack of infra-structure as also lack of sufficient number of employees. To a certain extent it is due to the indifferent and callous attitude taken by certain employees also.

In this connection, may I know from the hon. Minister whether any strict measures are to be introduced by the Ministry to ensure strict discipline as well as efficiency in the Department which is considered to be one of the largest public utility services in our country?

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : About the satisfactory working of the Telecommunication Department, I do agree that it deserves more improvement; and I am fully in agreement with the hon. Member. Kerala has got the best network in the country in telecommunications.

As regards employees, our policy is one of carrot and the cane. If they do good work, we pay them bonus. If they are at fault, we take action. I do not agree that all the staff are bad. Some of them are not working properly, and I can assure you that our attitude is to impart discipline strictly and we shall adhere to that. But those who are working well, should also be encouraged, and I will not say that all the workers are bad. Most of them are good. There are some sections which are not good. We shall try to mend them. I can assure you this much.

SHRI N. VENKATA RATNAM : It is everybody's experience that a lot of mis-

chief is going on in the metering system. Everybody is feeling it. I would like to ask the hon. Minister : is there any possibility of arranging for a meter for each telephone, so that it can be verified, because now we are getting bills. We do not know how it is metered. Whatever is billed for, we have to pay. That is the trouble under this scheme, which all the telephone-owners are facing. Is there any possibility of arranging a separate meter for each telephone just as in electricity? We will then verify and pay it.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : It is a suggestion for consideration.

[Translation]

SHRI MOHD. AYUB KHAN : Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are 27 districts and 38670 villages in Rajasthan. This area, with such a vast population, is quite backward from electricity point of view. I would, therefore, like to know the time by which telephone facility would be provided to these areas, especially Jhunjhunu and Sikar ?

[English]

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : In Rajasthan, our line capacity is about 91,173, and there are demands for more 20,000 and odd lines. In another question of today I have already laid down the number of telephone exchanges which are going to be established in Rajasthan and they are quite a good number; and in comparison to other States, Rajasthan has got a lion's share and 40 more telephone exchanges are going to be established.

MR. SPEAKER : We have a lion's share in drought.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : You have got a special interest for Rajasthan.

RAO BIRENDRA SINGH : Are you satisfied ?

MR. SPEAKER : Not yet.

[Translation]

SHRI PRATAP BHANU SHARMA : MR. Speaker, Sir, it is true that remarkable progress has been made in the field of telephones and modernisation and expansion of other telecommunication systems. Last year, the Telephone Department had requested the Finance Department that since they were in need of technicians and operators, they be allowed to make recruitment to these cadres, because if the equipment was replaced and electronic exchanges were installed and if the number of technicians and operating staff was not sufficient, the maintenance would suffer a lot. Therefore, I would like to know from the hon. Minister the extent of demand made for the recruitment of additional staff and the number of personnel for which permission has been given ?

[English]

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : I do not have the information now with me. I shall inform the hon. member, but this much we can say that now there are bans on recruitment...

SHRI PRATAP BHANU SHARMA : I am getting this reply for the last four years.

MR. SPEAKER : Don't you appreciate his consistency ?

SHRI PRATAP BHANU SHARMA : There is no question of appreciating it. Last time I got an assurance that permission will be obtained from the Ministry of Finance.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : We are trying. You help us.

[Translation]

SHRI V. TULSIRAM : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to bring one thing to the notice of the hon. Minister about telephones. Just two days back, I dialled a number and a female voice was heard from the other end who abused me. I had to suffer this indignity because of wrong number. I did not dial her telephone number deliberately. He is talking of effecting improvements in the telephone service in the rural areas but I am narrating

this incident which happened in Delhi and that too involving an M.P. ?

MR. SPEAKER : You are fortunate, Mr. Professor, to be abused by a lady.

SHRI V. TULSIRAM : He is talking of improvement; Prime Minister's letter has taken 25 days to reach Shantiniketan; is this the improvement he is talking about ?

[English]

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI ARJUN SINGH) : If you have got this abuse only because of the telephone, I deeply apologise for it, but if it is due to some other reasons, I cannot help it.

Sharing of Gravity Data

*105. SHRI SYED SHAHABUDDIN† :
PROF. RAMKRISHNA MORE† :

Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Oil and Natural Gas Commission and Survey of India have been collecting and sharing sensitive gravity data relating to the Himalayas, having military importance, under an international collaboration;

(b) whether this kind of data is not published and is kept secret by other countries like USA and Soviet Union; and

(c) if so, the reasons for sharing such a sensitive Himalayan gravity data having potential military use ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI BRAHMA DUTT) : (a) to (c). A statement is given below.

Statement

(a) to (c). The ONGC have not shared gravity data relating to Himalayas under any international collaboration.

Such data was published by the Survey of India in 1956 when there were no restrictions. With the introduction of

restrictions in 1965, no further data were exchanged with outside agencies. Also no further collaborations were entered into by Survey of India in this field.

The practice adopted by USSR/USA in the matter is not known.

SHRI SYED SHAHABUDDIN : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the statement which has been laid on the Table of the house gives no specific reply to the question raised—It borders on vagueness. There are three agencies involved and the question names only two. Apart from the ONGC and the Survey of India, there is a third agency for collecting this information and that is the National Institute of Geo-physics; and it is not even mentioned in the reply. So, I would like to have first a categorical affirmation or negation from the hon. Minister whether these three agencies that is to say ONGC, the Survey of India and the National Institute of Geo-physics have no collaboration arrangement with any foreign agencies in this field of collecting seismic information.

SHRI BRAHMA DUTT : The question was asked about ONGC and the Survey of India. Of course, there is a third agency, and in short, I would like to elaborate the position. The ONGC has been conducting gravity surveys all over India for oil exploration. The only gravity measurements made in the Himalayas by ONGC were from 1968 to 1973 and the gravity data pertaining to the Himalayan region collected by the ONGC has not been handed over to any agency in India or abroad. That was the position then. Now, coming to NGRI, prior to 1974, ONGC did hand over to the National Geophysical Research Institute, Hyderabad, the gravity data acquired by it over various sedimentary basins of India excluding the Himalayan region for oil exploration for the purpose of compiling and preparing a composite anomaly map of India and like ONGC the Survey of India also handed over their own data to NGRI for the above purpose, and the result was that an anomaly map was published by NGRI. But it is so much smoothed and is on such a scale that it cannot be used for any strategic purpose.

The Survey of India in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin and Hawaii