

Telecommunication Facilities in Rural Areas

*911. SHRI ANANTA PRASAD SETHI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the existing policy to provide telecommunication facilities in the rural areas;

(b) how far the present policy has proved rational for the development of rural communication;

(c) whether in view of the experience gained, Government propose to bring about changes in the existing policy to make it more rational to achieve the objective; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV): (a), (b) and (d). A Statement is given below.

(c) Yes, Sir.

STATEMENT

(a) (i) The Department of Telecommunications normally provides telecommunication facilities, wherever they are financially viable. This condition has been relaxed in case of rural, backward, tribal and hilly areas. For this purpose department has been continuously liberalizing the policy of providing public telephones on fully subsidized basis in rural areas. Having covered Tehsil, Sub Tehsil and Block headquarters it has been decided to provide a public telephone within 5 K.M. of every village in next few years. For this purpose it is planned to provide a public telephone on fully subsidised basis, at one principal village in every inhabited geographical area bounded by a hexagon of 5 km. sides.

(ii) For private telephone connections, a small telephone exchange of 9 lines or 25 lines can be opened at a place if there is a demand of 5 and 10 telephone connections respectively and revenue is 35% and 40% respectively of anticipated annual recurring

expenditure. Similarly, 50 lines or 100 lines capacity exchange can be opened if the demand at a place is for 23 and 46 telephone connections respectively and revenue is 60% and 70% respectively of annual recurring expenditure.

(b) The present policy has proved rational to a great extent for the development of rural communication in the country, as it is based on spatial distribution of the telecom facility without consideration of population in an Hexagon. It provides for uniform extension of telecommunication facility all over the country.

(d) This policy has been reviewed from time to time and the latest revision has been carried out in the month of April, 1987. According to which it has been decided as under:

(i) All long distance public telephones shall work for a minimum of 8 hours.

(ii) For opening of 9, 25, 50 and 100 lines exchanges, the condition for minimum revenue has been removed and now these exchanges can be opened on the basis of minimum demand as indicated in para (a) (ii) above.

SHRI ANANTA PRASAD SETHI: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the overall policy is very good and sounds rational. The hon. Minister has mentioned in his statement that "the Department of Telecommunications normally provides telecommunication facilities, wherever they are financially viable. This condition has been relaxed in case of rural, backward, tribal and hilly areas. For this purpose department has been continuously liberalising the policy of providing public telephones on fully subsidized basis in rural areas."

As far as my experience is concerned, after being elected as an M.P., whenever I have submitted a proposal for consideration of opening of a PCO in my constituency in the rural and tribal areas, I always get a reply in the negative, saying that the proposal is not remunerative, or

the proposal is not financially viable or the proposal is not coming under the five kilometre hexagon, this is the general reply. The policy is very good, I do not know whether all the other public representatives get such replies.

MR. SPEAKER: Put the question.

SHRI ANANTA PRASAD SETHI: I want to know in this connection whether there is any information or not, as to how many proposals have been received since 1985 throughout the country, received from the rural areas and proposals sent by public representatives and how many have been rejected, whether you are monitoring the rejected proposals, if not whether you have any proposal to monitor them.

MR. SPEAKER: Will you put the question?

SHRI ANANTA PRASAD SETHI: I also would like to know what is the criteria for considering the proposals, whether you will only look at the map sitting in the department or whether the officers go to the villages and the hilly areas and see for themselves.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: As I have stated in my answer, the policy has been changed only very recently. Previously the consideration was profit earning factor. Now for tribal, rural and village areas that particular revenue earning factor has been deleted and the necessity of the area has been given the utmost priority.

SHRI ANANTA PRASAD SETHI: About the rural areas, I am asking, whether you have subsidised or not.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: I am telling you. The whole country has been divided into 50,280 hexagons; we have got 25,856 PCOs in the country, and our target in the Seventh Plan is 10,000. There will be a backlog of about 31,000. As such, we will not be able to cover all the areas during the

Seventh Five Year Plan. But we are giving consideration to the block level headquarters, tehsil headquarters and revenue villages. The consideration of population is also there.

For hilly and tribal areas the consideration of population is 2500 and for other areas it is 5000. If the hon. Member has got such an experience after the change of this policy, I think, he can write to us again and we will be able to help him in certain areas.

SHRI ANANTA PRASAD SETHI: For consideration of any proposal will the Department see the map sitting in the chamber and reject or accept the proposal or will they go to the field and see whether that particular place is viable, economical or remunerative or according to the norms of hexagon?

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: This hexagon has been created after taking a thorough study in the field. If there is any suggestion that this limit of hexagon should be changed it is not realistic, we are in a situation to change it. The hon. Member can write to us. I can also show him the hexagon which has been decided for the State of Orissa. He is most welcome to see me.

SHRI ASUTOSH LAW: At the outset, may I congratulate the Communication Minister for substantially improving the telephone system in Calcutta? From our experience we find that electronic system is very good and by introducing electronic system in the telephones most of the telephone system is improving. What positive steps have been taken by the Department to introduce electronic system in rural areas because till now communication is very bad and hardly we have any electronics exchange in rural areas? Has the Government any positive plan to introduce electronic exchanges in rural areas; if so when?

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: Most of the electronic exchanges are now being installed in metro cities. But Government

has given licences to various firms to produce smaller electronic exchanges. C-Dot as well as ITI are now at a situation where they have prototype production of electronic small exchanges for rural areas. Once it is found viable, it will be gradually given to rural areas, because our aim is to give electronic exchanges in rural areas also. But at the moment, we are not in a position to give electronic exchanges to rural areas though for smaller towns we have imported some electronics exchanges and we are providing them there.

SHRI BHADRESWAR TANTI: The telecommunication system in the country is bad and it is worse in Assam. In my constituency, Kaliabor, and Gauhati if you go there you will find that the telephone is there but it does not work. I doubt whether the telephone of the hon. Minister who belongs to the state of Assam, is working in Assam. For the last 20 years, there is no new post office opened in my constituency. I have written a number of letters to the hon. Minister. But always I got the stock reply that the matter is under consideration. Whenever we write to the Minister, he always says they will examine it or the matter is under consideration.

MR SPEAKER: Put the question.

SHRI BHADRESWAR TANTI: May I know from the hon. Minister who is also from Assam as to what steps he will take to improve the communication system in Assam and particularly in my constituency Kaliabor and Gauhati? What steps have been taken to open new post offices in my constituency in Kaliabor?

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: This is a question about rural exchanges and not concerned with post offices. I will request the hon. Member to go through his mail. As regards Assam I have written to all the Members of Parliament. He should go through his mail and write back to me if he has got any suggestion.

SHRI BHADRESWAR TANTI: I have written to him....

MR SPEAKER: You get in touch with him. Do not interrupt.

SHRI SYED SHAHABUDDIN: Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are very familiar with the functioning and performance of the telephone system in urban areas and we can only imagine how bad it is or it can be in the rural areas. In my experience, the rural telephones are mostly out of order for six months or months at a stretch. So, my simple question is that the maintenance facilities being what they are, what is the average period for which an average rural line remains out of order?

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: Sir I am not supposed to believe the hon. Member. If one single Member writes ten letters a day and if he has any experience for about six months, I am sure, with this position he will not leave me alone. Let him give any particular instance and I will look into that. In the rural areas where continuous electricity failures are there, it may be that certain particular exchanges may be out of order for certain period. Recently in U.P. we have installed one exchange but the whole village's electricity has been cut down because of too much of pilferage. So, we are not in a position to do anything. We have installed battery system there. So such cases may be there. As regards the failures, I think the amount of the bills the hon. Member is getting from the Department, itself proves that our department is not working as bad as he is saying. Most of the Members can go through their bills and from there they can see our performance.

Payment of Rent by Oil Companies for Sites Allotted in Chandigarh

*913. SHRI CHIRANJI LAL SHARMA: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that three major oil