

(c) Depending upon the registered demand in different areas new exchanges are opened or the capacity of existing exchanges is expanded.

New Post Offices in Assam

11. SHRIMATI BASANTI SHARMA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a few new post offices have been sanctioned during the current financial year for Assam; and

(b) if so, the details and number of new post offices sanctioned for both urban and rural areas?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA): (a) New Post Offices have not yet been sanctioned for Assam Postal Circle.

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

Telephone facility at Panchayat Headquarters

12. DR. B.B. DUTTA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the decision taken earlier to provide telecommunication facility at each Panchayat Headquarter in the country is being implemented satisfactorily;

(b) if so, the progress made so far in this regard with particular reference to the North-Eastern States;

(c) if not, by when the above facilities are likely to be provided to all the Panchayat Headquarters;

(d) whether Government have reduced the budgetary allocation under the Head 'Village Panchayat Telephone' for the current year; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA): (a) Yes Sir, The Department has enhanced the policy to cover all the villages of the country in the Panchayat villages.

(b) The status of total villages covered upto 7.11.97 is given in the statement (*see below*). As regards NE Region, the following is the status:—

Assam Circle:— Out of 2485 Village Panchayats, 2093 have been covered.

North East Circle:— Out of 4347 village Panchayats, 2370 have been covered.

State	Total No. of Panchayat	Panchayats with Telephone
Arunachal Pradesh	944	365
Manipur	429	359
Meghalaya	450	415
Mizoram	613	429
Nagaland	1001	387
Tripura	910	415
Total	4347	2370

(c) It is expected to cover all the Panchayat Headquarters in North East States by the end of IXth Five Year Plan.

(d) and (e) There is no reduction in the Budgetary allocation for this programme. The Government has granted Rs. 498 Crores under Cash and Rs. 200 Crores under Lease Procurement for the Village Public Telephone Programme this year.