

Modernisation of Postal Service

*57. SHRI. BASUDEB MOHAPATRA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any decision has been taken to start modernisation drive to upgrade and expedite the Postal Service in different parts of the country to ensure customers satisfaction;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof; and

(c) what would be the total cost of such modernisation scheme?

THE MINISTER OF SURFACE TRANSPORT AND THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI K. P. UNNIKRISHNAN):

(a) Yes, Sir. The Department of Posts is trying to increase the use of technology to improve its performance.

(b) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

(c) Modernisation has necessarily to be a continuous process. However the magnitude of investment required for the next five years for the programme now under consideration would be approximately Rs. 220 crores.

Statement

1. Application of technology for postal operation has so far been restricted to the use of some electro mechanical machines at the counter and behind the counter. Electro mechanical cash registers are in use for booking registered articles and money orders for about two decades. Electro mechanical stamp cancelling machines, and franking machines are also in use in the Department for a longer time. In recent times the pace of modernisation in postal organisation has been sought to be accelerated.

2. The Department included some new technology oriented proposals in its draft for the 7th Plan. The new proposals which were taken up are as follows: —

(a) Automated mail processing system in metro-cities.

(b) Use of micro-processor based machines at the counter.

(c) Development of digital weighing scales for calculation of postal tariff.

(d) Use of high speed franking machine.

(e) Introduction of bag dedusting machines for bag cleaning.

(f) Computerisation for—

(i) Postal Life Insurance

(ii) Savings Bank Accounting

(iii) Money Order Pairing.

3. The position of each is indicated below:

3. (a) The formulation of the proposals for automated mail sorting was completed in 1988. The Department has obtained approval of the Expenditure Finance Committee for one project in South Bombay at a cost of Rs. 17 crores (including Customs Duty). This is now in the implementation stage with the help of Computer Maintenance Corporation (CMC), which is acting as a consultant to the Department in the project. The Department has the proposal to set up a network of automated mail handling systems in metro and other important cities during the 8th Plan. This will, however, depend upon availability of resources during the 8th Plan.

(b) A prototype of micro-processor based multi purpose counter machine was developed

and order for 25 machines was placed in July 1989, out of which 5 machines have already been supplied in some post offices in Delhi.

(c) A prototype of digital weighing scale for postal tariff was developed and an order for 50 machines has been placed. Eleven such machines have already been supplied in different offices in Delhi.

(d) Imported High Speed Franking machines have been installed in 60 post offices in the country during the 7th Plan. Attempts are now being made for import of more such machines and also for indigenous development and production of High Speed Franking machines in the country.

(e) Bag de-dusting machines have been introduced through import of three machines from France. Efforts for indigenisation of the machine for wider use are yet to bear fruit.

(f) (i) The first computer in the Department was introduced for Postal Life Insurance work in Bangalore in 1986. At present software based on recent systems for PLI work is under development by the National Informatics Centre, New Delhi to be used as prototype for application in all Circles.

(ii) One mini computer was installed in 1986 in the office of the Director Postal Accounts in Madras for Money Order pairing work. Installation of more computers for this application will depend upon the evaluation of the results of this pilot project.

(ia) One mini computer system for Savings Bank

Accounting was installed in Parliament Street Head Post Office. Installation of more computers for Savings Bank Accounting work will depend on the result of this pilot project.

4. Apart from the above schemes, the Expert Committee on Postal Excellence made recommendations for three new areas of technology application in its report: —

(a) Use of personal computer based machines at the counters.

(b) Stepping into satellite mail—introduction of mail and electronic fund transfer.

(c) Use of computers in Head Post Offices for Accounting work.

For these, the Department is trying to develop necessary hardware and software for introduction of these new machines. Actual implementation will depend upon the results of the efforts and availability of resources in the coming years.

Pricing of newsprint

*58. SHRI SUKOMAL SEN: Will the Minister of INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING be pleased to state:

(a) what is the policy of Government in regard to pricing of newsprint; and,

(b) what steps are likely to be taken by Government to bring down the prices of newsprint?

THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING AND THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRI P. UPENDRA): (a) and (b) The Government does not exercise any statutory control on the price of indigenous newsprint. The price of imported newsprint is