

RAJYA SABHA

Monday, the 19th August, 1985/
28th Shrawana, 1907 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the
clock. Mr. Chairman in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Disconnection of STD facility

*361. PROF. C. LAKSHMANNA:
Will the Minister of COMMUNICA-
TIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware
that in view of excessive and wrong
billing, more and more people are
preferring not to have STD system
on their telephones;

(b) if so, what was the number of
applications received during 1983-84
and 1984-85 for disconnection of STD
facility in Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi
and Madras; and

(c) what was the number of new
connections given during the period
and in how many of these cases
S.T.D. facility was provided?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF
THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICA-
TIONS (SHRI RAM NIWAS
MIRDHA): (a) No, Sir. The main
reasons why many Government offices
and business houses do not desire
STD facility seems to be that they
do not wish to avail from all their
telephones and want this facility to
be available only for certain selected
persons. Some individual subscribers
probably do not need STD facility
for fear of its misuse by others with-
out their knowledge or during their
absence. Some requests are however,
received for STD barring on grounds
of high bills.

(b) and (c) The required informa-
tion is given in Annexure which is
placed on the Table of the House.

Annexure

Name of city	Applications received for S.T.D. barring during		Number of new telephone connections given during		Number of new telephone connections given with S.T.D. facility	
	1983-84	1984-85	1983-84	1984-85	1983-84	1984-85
Bombay	15,698	16,987	41,273	45,420	22,947	24,724
Calcutta	4,354	4,251	7,616	10,872	5,512	7,488
Delhi	7,199	9,626	25,229	25,690	11,660	11,252
Madras	2,340	4,417	8,743	9,949	5,330	5,607

MR. CHAIRMAN: Not the Minister
of Parliamentary Affairs

SHRI PARVATHANENI UPENDRA:
Some intruder.

SHRI R. MOHANARANGAM: I
thought she was promoted.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Some day in
future. Yes, Mr. Lakshmanna.

PROF. C. LAKSHMANNA: Mr.
Chairman, Sir, as per the statement
given by the Minister the applications
received for STD barring during the
year 1983-84 have been 15,698 in
Bombay, 4354 in Calcutta, 7,199 in
Delhi and 2,340 in Madras. This is
the position for the year 1983-84.
For the year 1984-85, the position has
been 16,987, 4,251, 9,626 and 4,417
respectively in respect of Bombay,
Calcutta, Delhi and Madras. These

are the numbers of applications who have asked for barring of STD facility and the Minister says that some requests are, however, received for STD barring on grounds of highbills. I would like to know from the Minister, out of these telephone connections which have been barred from the STD facility during the year 1983-84 and 1984-85, how many of them, specifically in each one of these cities, is for the reason of high billing and also how many for the gross misuse of the telephone facilities by, not necessarily those who use it in the absence of members but even by the telephone exchanges themselves? Therefore, I would like to know from the Minister the exact number of those who have complained that there has been wrong billing and as a result they have asked for...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes, you are repeating again and again.

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: Well, Sir, all that I had stated was that there were a variety of reasons why people and organisations asked for STD barring. It is not only because of the fear of excessive billing, which I have admitted also exists, but also because many Government offices do not want officers below a certain level to use STD facility. Certain business houses also permit their executives to do that in a limited way. So, there are a variety of reasons why people have asked for barring of STD facility. But it is not possible to say what percentage belongs to this category or to that category because when they write to us they do not mention the reasons. They just say, please debar the STD facility. This is all that I wanted to say. There are a variety of reasons why people have asked for barring of STD facility and it should be looked at in that context.

PROF. C. LAKSHMANNA: Sir, the Minister himself had earlier stated that a major reason for inefficient telephone service was the antiquated equipment, largely manually opera-

ted. If this could be one of the reasons, I would like to know from the Minister as to what efforts he will make to see that no wrong billing is done, especially because there have been complaints even by the Members of Parliament. Not only have they written individually to you but they have also complained about wrong billing of a high order on the floor of the House. Therefore, I would like to know from the hon. Minister, what steps will be taken to prevent this sort of thing.

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: Sir, there are complaints in regard to excess billing. But they have not exceeded, in recent years, even one per cent of the total number of bills issued. Actually, it is much less than that. Therefore, it is not correct to say that there have been widespread complaints in regard to excess billing. Sir, the number of bills issued is very large. I can give the figures, how many bills were issued in a particular city and how many complaints were received. It is much less than one per cent, at any particular time, in spite of the fact that we have been constantly adding to the number of telephones in the metropolitan cities as well as in other places. There are a variety of reasons for excess billing. It may be clerical error, it may be lack of maintenance of the lines etc. All these reasons are being attended to. Particularly, when we get complaints of excess billing from Members of Parliament and other distinguished persons, they are carefully scrutinised and we see that wherever complaints of excess billing come, liberal rebates are given. Similarly, when there is fault somewhere, I can assure the House that we will continue to do so.

SHRI R. MOHANARANGAM: Sir, my question is not in regard to wrong billing. My specific question is, whether the hon. Minister has received any complaints from persons who are having the STD facility—I have received a number of complaints in this

regard—that their telephone is used by officers and staff of the exchange. The staff at the exchange knowing that Members of Parliament and others have the STD facility, without their knowledge, are using it and this is the reason why there is excess billing for the actual owners.

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: Perhaps, what the hon. Member wants to say is that there are instances, when the telephone staff wrongly, mischievously and dishonestly transfer some calls to another telephone and bill them there. We are very strict on this and we see that this sort of diversion does not take place and whenever such things come to our notice, we take very strict action. Actually, we have taken a number of steps. For example, it can be done at the exchange level. In the exchange, subscribers' things are completely locked. No officer below a particular level can even go to that section. These are the steps we are taking. We are also taking other steps to see that this sort of diversion does not take place.

श्रीमती शांती पहाड़िया : श्रीमान्, मैं यह पूछना चाहती हूँ कि यह जो एस० टी० डी० कटती जा रही है यह सभी कट जाँगी तो देश को बड़ी हानि होगी और दूसरी बात यह है कि इस एस० टी० डी० के ऊपर जो भी ऐसी गलती करता है वह चाहे अफसरान हो, छोटा कर्मचारी हो या कोई और हो, इन पर कोई एक्शन लिया जाएगा ?

श्री राम निवास मिर्धा : श्रीमान्, जब कभी भी ऐसी घटना हमारे ध्यान में आती है उस पर हम जांच करते हैं और एक्शन लिया जाएगा और निश्चित रूप से वह सब पर लागू होगा ।

PROF. B. RAMACHANDRA RAO: Sir, I would like to ask a specific technical question. Now, there are a number of electronic units sold with the approval of the Post and Telegraphs Department for barring STD whenever you do not want to use it

in your own home or using it with a key when you want to turn it on. Such units are permitted by the Post and Telegraphs Department. I, myself, have used one of these for about three months and in spite of this, there has been excess billing. I do not know whether the telephone department has any way of monitoring this and seeing that calls from any other connection are not transferred or in other words there is no misuse of telephone calls by the telephone operators or anybody else at the exchange. I would like to know whether this is a fool-proof device.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I do not think, the Minister can answer this.

SHRI P. BABUL REDDY: Sir, I, myself, am a victim of wrong billing. I made a complaint. Fortunately for me, my next door neighbour is the General Manager of Telephones. He lives behind my house. There is only a compound wall in between.

SHRI N. K. P. SALVE: That was the reason.

SHRI P. BABUL REDDY: He told me that it is possible—I think, the Minister is aware—to transfer a call, when STD is there, from one telephone to another telephone. An advocate friend of mine told me that he has a business man friend who pays one thousand rupees to the officials for making calls worth Rs. 10,000. Is the Minister aware of this possibility? May I suggest, to overcome this mischief why not instal meters in the residence itself, maybe at an extra cost? Many people are prepared to pay extra cost, if meters are installed, even if the cost is more, he will come to know on what date he made a call to which place and also what the reading of the meter is. I went...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Two minutes over.

SHRI P. BABUL REDDY: That is all right. Let him answer up to this.

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: This suggestion has been given by a number of hon. Members as to why can't we have a device at the subscriber's end so that it could be known how much the meter has run. Firstly, such a device has not yet been installed here, nor do we think that they will approve of a device of this nature. Secondly, it would mean giving an extra pair of wires from the exchange to the subscriber, which would mean that we will be able to give less and less telephone connections. That device has not been found suitable in our circumstances.

SHRI PARVATHANENI UPENDRA: In spite of the Minister's assurance that all the steps have been taken to prevent manipulation in the exchanges, I have been told by the telephone staff themselves that it is possible to divert the calls to some other subscriber and get your particular bill reduced. Therefore, it is very necessary to modernise our exchanges. In several countries they are using computers and other modern gadgets. Why can't you think of those things, instead of allowing this problem to continue to grow? Will the Minister consider this aspect?

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: As and when electronic and other modern gadgets are introduced, this type of complaints would be considerably reduced. In modern electronic exchanges like the one we have started the other day in Gurgaon, every subscriber's number, duration of call, etc. can be recorded on computer. We are introducing this and we have given facility to the subscriber that if they want a 15-day reading of their telephones, that is how many calls they have made over a period of 15 days, they can have it by making a payment of just Rs. 2. So, any subscriber, vigilant enough, can use this facility.

SHRI DHARAM CHANDER PRASHANT: Sir, instances have come to our notice where the STD connection

is disconnected after six months of the application by the subscriber. Why this long delay even in small places, not in big cities? I would like to know this from the hon. Minister.

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: It does not take that long to debar it. I am not aware of this type of delay.

SHRI INDRADEEP SINHA: I have been a victim of this.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Every member.

SHRI INDRADEEP SINHA: STD calls only swell the number of local calls and the excess billing comes in the form of the bill for excess calls. Apart from the general complaint of paying thousands of rupees every year for excess local calls, there are two instances when money was deducted from my salary in the name of phonograms. In the first instance I was informed that you have made a phonogram call to Bombay costing Rs. 124. I asked them to send me the text. They did not do this. I went on writing and finally they quietly sent me a cheque of Rs. 122 after deducting Rs. 2. On the second occasion again Rs. 52 were billed against me for another phonogram call and the amount was deducted from my salary. I made a protest and again after some time after deducting Rs. 2 they sent me a cheque.

MR. CHAIRMAN: You seem to be very lucky.

SHRI INDRADEEP SINHA: The point that I want to raise is that the gentleman or the officer who signed the bill on both the occasions was the same. On both the occasions, I wrote to the hon. Minister. I want to suggest that if there is a racket in the telephone exchange which goes on transferring the bills of others to the account of MPs, this should be investigated. I would like to know from the hon. Minister what action has been taken in pursuance of my specific complaints against specific officers of the department on both these occasions?

SHRI RAM NIWAS MIRDHA: It is not easy to detect where the diversion has taken place. Firstly, I can assure the House that it is very rare that this type of thing happens because one has to go out and then put a certain instrument on an open wire or in the exchange itself which is most unlikely. I would not rule it out altogether, but I can assure the House that it is a very difficult operation and it is not possible as often as the hon. Members think to do so.

As regards giving him rebate on a number of occasions, I can assure him that we will continue doing so whenever he makes a complaint.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Not only to him; you must give to others also.

SHRI INDRADEEP SINHA: Sir, he has not answered my specific question. I can submit the two bills signed by the same person.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please send it to him.

SHRI INDRADEEP SINHA: Twice he signed a wrong bill.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Next question. I think the others will have to wait.

Short supply of drugs

*362. **DR. SHANTI G. PATEL:**

SHRI M. S. GURUPADASWAMY:

Will the Minister of **CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS** be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that several widely used drugs like aspirin, vitamins, sulpha drugs and antibiotics have been in short supply for the past several months;

(b) whether it is a fact that IDPL has monopoly in respect of import of these drugs;

The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by **Shri M. S. Gurupadaswamy**.

(c) whether the shortage is due to non-functioning of a number of plants of IDPL; and

(d) if so, what steps have been taken to meet the demand and maintain easy supply of the drugs?

THE MINISTER OF CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS (SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL): (a) There are no reports of shortage of formulations based on Aspirin, Vitamins, Sulpha drugs and Antibiotics. However due to inadequate availability of industrial alcohol, production of some Alcohol based bulk drugs like Aspirin, Vitamin B1 & Vitamin B2 was affected to some extent.

(b) and (c) No, Sir.

(d) In order to arrange the availability of Alcohol, Government have permitted duty free imports of industrial alcohol. For supply of Aspirin, STC has issued No Objection Certificates to the actual users on the advice of this Ministry to enable imports of Aspirin. The production of Vitamin B1 and Vitamin B2 by IDPL has improved in July, 1985.

SHRI M. S. GURUPADASWAMY: I draw the attention of the hon. Minister to a report in the *Statesman* dated 3-8-85. There it is specifically stated: "Aspirin in short supply for the last one year". So, I would like to know why the IDPL's capacity is not fully utilized. I am told that 90 per cent of the capacity is not utilized and there are about 10-12 drugs which have been reserved for the IDPL for manufacturing and they cannot supply these drugs at all. So what are the reasons for non-utilization of this capacity and why this monopoly has been given to the IDPL in spite of the fact that IDPL is not in a position to supply these drugs?

SHRI VEERENDRA PATIL: Sir, the hon. Member wanted to know about production and supply of Aspirin. I have admitted in my reply that so far as Aspirin is concerned, the production has suffered because of non-availability of industrial alcohol. The production of Aspirin dur-