

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF IRRIGATION AND POWER (PROF. SIDDHESHWAR PRASAD) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c). The boilers are being manufactured by AVB to the standards specified by the International Standards Organisation (ISO) and carry the usual manufacturers' guarantees for satisfactory operation. The West Bengal State Electricity Board, who are in charge of planning of the power stations, are satisfied with the boilers being supplied by AVB. The Chief Inspector of Boilers, West Bengal does not also appear to have expressed any opinion about the life of the boilers to the West Bengal State Electricity Board who are the purchasers.

(d) The boilers have been designed for the Bhojudih middlings and Jharia coal. Necessary arrangements are being made to make available middlings/coal of the appropriate quality for the Santaldih Power Station.

PAPERS LAID ON THE TABLE

The Gujarat Panchayats (Amendment) Ordinance, 1974 and related paper

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND IN THE MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HOUSING (SHRI OM MEHTA): Sir, or, behalf of the Minister of State in the Ministry of Agriculture, Shri B. P. Maurya.

Sir, I beg to lay on the Table, under sub-clause (a) of clause (2) of article 213 of the Constitution, read with sub-clause (iii) of clause (c) of the proclamation dated the 9th February, 1974, issued by the President in relation to the State of Gujarat, a copy of the Gujarat Panchayats (Amendment) Ordinance, 1974, (Gujarat Ordinance No. 1 of 1974), promulgated by the Governor of Gujarat on the 25th January, 1974, together

with a statement (in English and Hindi) giving reason for not laying simultaneously Hindi version of the Ordinance. [Placed in Library. See No. LT-6365/74].

The Railway * Accidents (compensation) Amendment Rules, 1974 and related paper

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI MOHD. SHAFI QURESHI) : Sir, I beg to lay on the Table, under sub-section (3) of section 82J of the Indian Railways Act, 1890, a copy (in English and Hindi) of the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) Notification S.O. No. 119(E) dated the 23rd February, 1974, publishing the Railway Accidents (Compensation) Amendment Rules, 1974, together with an Explanatory Memorandum thereon. [Placed in Library See No. KT-6311/74].

CALLING ATTENTION TO A MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Serious Crisis facing the telephone system in Calcutta

SHRI KALYAN ROY (West Bengal): Sir, I beg to call the attention of the Minister of Communications to the serious crisis facing the telephone system in Calcutta and the steps Government propose to take to meet the situation.

[The Vice-Chairman (Shri Yogesndra Shurma) in the Chair].

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (PROF. SHER SINGH): Sir, Calcutta telephone system has an equipped capacity of 1.33 lakh lines with 1.16 lakh working connections and 1.7 lakh telephones including extensions. The waiting list is about 60,000 consisting of about 10,500 under 'OYT', 3,500 under 'special' category and 46,000 under 'general' category.

The telephone systems in the country are programmed to be expanded by 7.6 lakh lines during the Fifth Plan; there will be, an increase of 92,000 lines in the capacity, of the Calcutta telephone system. Position

about the Bombay and Delhi Telephone systems regarding the number of telephones, waiting lists, expansion of the capacity, etc. is as follows:—

Telephone system	Telephone working	Waiting list	Fifth Plan expansion
All India	15 lakhs	4.7 lakhs	7.6 lakhs
Calcutta	1.7 lakh	60,000	92,000
Bombay	2.5 lakhs	1,34,000	1,05,000
Delhi	1.3 lakhs	88,000	77,000

This shows that Calcutta would get an appropriate share of the expansion planned. Of the 92,000 lines, 16,000 lines will be added during 1974-75, 15,000 during 1975-76, 13,000 during 1976-77, 17,000 during 1977-78 and 31,000 during 1978-79.

On an average, about 12,000 trunk calls are booked daily. To handle the growing trunk traffic, a coaxial trunk cable link between Calcutta and Madras and a microwave link between Calcutta and Nagpur are under installation. These are expected to materialise during the next two years, and will provide stable trunk media to connect Calcutta with Madras and Bombay.

A 2,000 line trunk automatic exchange is being commissioned at Calcutta and thereafter, S.T.D. services would be introduced with Asansol and Kharagpur by the end of 1974. S.T.D. service with Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Jamshedpur would be introduced progressively during 1975/1976. S.T.D. service between Calcutta and Delhi would also be introduced during the Fifth Plan. Demand Trunk Service is available between Calcutta and 12 important stations like, Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Asansol, Dhanbad, Durgapur etc.

There are 70 boards for Assistance Service '199' and 10 more boards are being added. 20 Boards are installed for '197' Enquiry Service..

Most of the spares required for the maintenance of the exchange equipment have been arranged in adequate quantity* from I.T.I. Bangalore.

The performance of the two crossbar exchanges installed in Calcutta is satisfactory and the call failure rate is lower than in other crossbar exchanges in the country.

The last issue of the Calcutta Telephone Directory was published in November, 1973 and the next issue is due by the end of this year.

The Telephone Advisory Committee in Calcutta was constituted last year **and** is due for reconstitution next year.

On an average, about 45 complaints are received per 100 subscribers per month at Calcutta. This is not different from other large systems.

There is no serious crisis facing the telephone system in Calcutta. The management set up of the Calcutta telephones is being suitably reorganised to bring up the efficiency. The service at Calcutta would considerably improve in the coming years with the expansion in the local and trunk service facilities.

SHRI KALYAN ROY : Sir, the Minister has not even touched the fringe of the problem, Calcutta is not just a commercial and trading centre. It is surrounded by two-thirds of basic industries, what we call the core industry, and a city of seventy lakhs people. The entire telephone system has virtually collapsed, and it is apprehended that in the coming monsoon there will not be any telephone service inside the city and telelinks with outside will be totally cut off. The dimension of the problem can

[Shri Kalyan Roy]

be seen by the fact that one thousand to two thousand telephones are dead per day, on an average. Those which are alive are technically alive and are unserviceable. This has been admitted on 2nd August, 1973, in reply to Unstarred Question No. 519. This miserable and unfortunate situation has been brought about by the following : (1) Long and calculated negligence to modernize and expand the telephone system ; the equipment and instruments are outmoded and sick, (2) Existing telephone equipments are hopelessly inadequate to meet the additional load on them. (3) Absolute lack of proper maintenance and repair and lack of spare parts and components of the standard and the materials for the manufacture of equipments is much inferior to what they were originally designed. (4) Rampant digging of roads by the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority. As a result, there is complete absence of co-ordination between Telephone authorities, CMDA and Electricity Supply Corporation. (5) Negligence to repair multiple faults in the under-ground cables. (6) Severe shortage of staff. (7) Defects in both crossbar and strowger direct system. The position is such that the existing system can best accommodate 14 calls a day per subscriber, but, in reality, as many as 22 calls are made on an average per subscriber. It was estimated that 250,000 new connections would be necessary during the Fourth Five Year Plan. But, unfortunately, only 70,000 lines were actually provided. The result is that there is abnormal load on the existing system, leading to gradual deterioration in the telephone system in the city. Spares and replacements are not available in sufficient quantity. Necessary replacements are not always possible. The I.T.I., which produces these spares, has totally failed to supply the requirements. Then, is the Minister aware that the underground construction was being done by unskilled workers, without any supervision by senior staff?

At several points telephone cables had been displaced; instead of laying them

about 3 feet below the surface, they had been placed even 9 feet below the ground. With no one to guide the unskilled workers, the cables had often been laid without adequately ramping the loose earth and keeping them suspended along uneven alignment, thus causing small cracks in them. These cracks were not so vulnerable during the dry season although occasional faults did occur; the rain water could easily percolate into such cables making them completely ineffective. At some places the cables had got mixed up with reinforced concrete which had to be dismantled again. Is the Minister aware that there should be a separate channel for telephone cables so that this can be avoided? Then, routine check-up of the subscribers' lines which is laid down in the rules is not properly carried out in the exchanges. There is a large number of routine faults of diverse nature in the subscribers' lines. . .

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI (Maharashtra) : Why don't you lay it on the Table of the House?

SHRI KALYAN ROY ; I am giving one by one.

There is failure of routine maintenance, there is a lack of spare parts; there is a lack of co-ordination between the CMDA and the Electricity Supply Undertaking. All these conditions as a whole have brought about this state of affairs. This is one side of the story.

The other side is about the proposed expansion and modernisation. Is he not aware that whereas expansion in Delhi and Bombay it has gone up by only 4 per cent? I am quoting from the waiting list: On 31st March, 1971 in Calcutta the waiting list was over 34,000. On 30th June 1972 the Waiting list shot up to 37,000. And now the Minister stated that the waiting list has gone up to over 60,000. Not only that, I will read for information and clarification from the Minister. A reply was given on 1-3-1973, exactly a year back, in this House to a question and it is like this. Why

I say this is Calcutta has suffered from deliberate callousness and negligence. I am reading it: Capacity added by new exchanges in Bombay was 6,000 in 1972; NIL in Calcutta; capacity added by expansion was 4,900 in Bombay in 1972 ; NIL in Calcutta ; capacity added by expansion was 6,700 in 1973 in Bombay; NIL in Calcutta. This was the reply given on 1st March 1973. So we are left with very old strowger system which has no use in this country. Secondly, we are left with a cross-bar system whose defects have been discussed again and again and which was sold by ITI which is totally unsuitable to this country. These two ab-solete systems are there. And then there is no co-ordination between the three authorities: Firstly, the CMDA, trusted with the development of Calcutta; they go on digging the roads. Secondly, the Electricity Supply Undertaking; they go on digging the roads; cables are cut off; nobody is there it repair; and if the repair is done as the Statesman, the Amrit Bazar Patrika and the Hindustan pointed out, it is done by absolutely unskilled workers without any supervision. Spare parts can only come from the ITI. There is only one concern which can give spare parts. What I find is not even 25 per cent of the spare parts are available. Modernisation is gone; expansion is gone; spare parts are gone; unskilled digging is going on. And the result is the entire telephone service is being disrupted. That is one aside. The other side is this: It has been pointed out by Government in reply to another question and it was replied by the Minister on 16th August 1973. It was asked "How many times the tele-links between Calcutta and Delhi got disrupted and how many times the tele-links between Delhi and Bombay got disrupted?" May be, Mr. Kulkarni does not know the facts. And the facts which have been brought about are starting. Between Calcutta and Delhi between November 1972 and July 1973 the number of faults developed was 70 leading to a total breakdown for 293 hours.

This is the position between Calcutta and Delhi. And Sir, what is the position between Bombay and Delhi? The number of

faults which developed between November 1972 and July 1973 was only 38 . . .

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI : In Calcutta, that is because of Naxalites.

SHRI KALYAN ROY : I have nothing to fight with you on that. I think the only difference between myself and Mr. Kulkarni is that I condemn both Naxalites and Shiv Sena, but he compromises Shiv Sena, supports them, connives with them, colludes with them and points out at Naxalites. That is the only difference between him and me.

Sir, the number of faults which developed between Bombay and Delhi in between November 1972 and July 1973 was only 38, not even half of Calcutta-Delhi number. And the entire development for overseas communications for the Eastern India has been totally neglected. It was decided that there should be some special arrangement to connect directly the Eastern region with the outside world. And that has been scrapped. All the overseas communications are being concentrated now in Dehra Dun and Bombay. If you look at the modernization, expansion and maintenance of Calcutta Telephones, Sir, there is nothing. If you take the question of supplying spare parts, there is nothing. If you take the question of expansion in relation to Bombay and Delhi, that has gone. If you take into consideration the modernization, that has gone. Outside connection has gone. What is left? The General Manager of Calcutta Telephones has recently admitted that . . .

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI YOGENDRA SHARMA) : You now conclude, please.

SHRI KALYAN ROY : Mr. S. K. Roy, General Manager of Calcutta Telephones admits in the 'Hindustan Standard' of 6th March, 1974, that the telephone service in the city has deteriorated recently. After all that, Sir, for the Minister to say that it is improving is either insult or abysmal ignorance, inefficiency and what else, I do not want to say here,

PROF. SHER SINGH : Sir the hon. Member has raised a number of questions and I will reply them one by one. In fact, I have tried to reply most of these questions in the main statement itself. For example, he has mentioned about expansion I have given the comparative figures for Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi about the expansion programme in the Fifth Plan. And for Calcutta, I have given the details- of the waiting list also. In Bombay, the waiting list is 1,34,000 and we are giving only 1,05,000 lines in the Fifth Plan. For Calcutta the waiting list is 60,000 and we have allotted 92,000 lines in the Fifth Plan period, which is more than the waiting list. As regards the outstanding list, it is not as if we are not vigilant about it and we are not doing anything about it. In fact, the expansion depends on the waiting list. So, it will be on the basis of demand that we plan the future expansion. So, on that score . . .

SHRI KALYAN ROY : There is a waiting list of Congress MPs to become Ministers.

PROF. SHER SINGH : . . . you cannot blame us that we are not giving due consideration to the claims of Calcutta as compared to other cities.

As regards modernization, as the hon. Member pointed out, the director system—Stowger system—was installed in Calcutta in 1950's when that type of equipment was considered very modern. That was functioning in the United Kingdom, Because it was considered as a very modern tquipment in 1950's, that was installed in Calcutta. No doubt, at no other place is that system working. Therefore, there was difficulty for some time for getting spares because in no other city this system was working. I.T.I., of course, did not supply spares in time. But, this was taken up with the I.T.I. specially and now, as the hon. Member himself has admitted, there are 36 components for director system which were needed to be manufactured by I.T.I. and to be supplied to improve that system.

Sir, I may submit for the information of the hon. Member that the I.T.I. has already supplied 30 components and other six components they are shortly supplying. Now, that will meet the demand for the upgrading of this director system. As regards our requirement for maintenance and repair, a large number of spare parts, as I have mentioned in my Statement itself, have been supplied. A large number of spare parts have been supplied to improve the situation for maintenance and repairs.

Sir, nowhere have I said that the woik-ing of the Calcutta Telephone system is quite up-to-date. I have never said that it is satisfactory. I have only said that we are trying to improve it because we have now ten thousand people working there. It is a big establishment and we have an annual revenue of about Rs. 15 crores there.

As I have stated in the Statement itself, we are now trying to reorganise the management set up so that we can improve things there. We want to divide Calcutta telephone system into various zones so that we could place each zone in charge of an officer and he would be made responsible for everything in that /one; and not that everyone has to come to the General Manager for the whole city and he has to look after the complaints. We propose to divide it into four or five zones so that one officer of that zone may be held responsible for all maintenance, repairs, complaints and planning in respect of that zone. So, we are taking steps to improve this situation.

Now, as far as matters regarding staff ;,re concerned, we have recruited more staff. All the vacant posts of operators have been filled up. Now, there is no vacant post of an operator. In fact, now the problem is that sometimes there is too "much of absenteeism. Sometimes 40 per cent of the people do not trun up on a single day.

SHRI KALYAN ROY : Minister is also absent today.

PROF. SHER SINGH : My colleague is also here. Two of us are already here.

Sometimes the number of absentees goes up to 40 per cent. We have some arrangement for procuring short-time operators also. We employ them also. But, sometimes when suddenly some people do not turn up, it becomes difficult for us to manage to fill the gap created by a large number of absentees. That problem is there and we are taking all care to see that the staff is put into position and we also see that if there is any great absenteeism, we are able to replace them by other operators.

As regards under-ground cables, that is yet another problem. It arises out of the digging problem. The Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority are laying their sewage pipes etc. and they have often to dig open at places. When they dig, sometimes our cables are also dug out with result that sometimes theft of these cables also takes place and these cables are stolen. There have been cases of that type. Now, we have taken care to see that there is continuous co-ordination between the Telephone authorities and the C.M.D.A. We have a member of C.M.D.A. on the Telephone Advisory Committee of Calcutta and we hold meetings every two months with the C.M.D.A. so that there may be close coordination between the two bodies and these digging problems and thefts etc. could be minimised. We have taken up this case with the State Police authorities also and they are helping us. Now, the number of thefts has gone down and things are improving in that sector also.

My friend has made some remarks about cross-bar system. This system was adopted in our country in 1964. I admit that at that time when we adopted this system we did not go into details to know whether this system will be suitable to Indian conditions.

SHRI N. G. GORAY (Maharashtra) : You call it a detail "whether it will be suitable to Indian conditions or not". I think it was a major thing.

PROF. SHER SINGH : I said so because the traffic expected here in India was much more as compared to the traffic per telephone in the countries where this system is working. Therefore one telephone on an average there are 8 to 9 calls whereas here it comes to 22 or 23 calls. My friend himself read out from a paper just now that in place of 14 there are 22 to 23 calls. Because of heavy traffic on this cross-bar system it really collapses and now we are upgrading this . . .

SHRI N. G. GORAY : These people did not know, did not understand what it was.

PROF. SHER SINGH : I accept that at that time when this system was selected in 1964, our technicians could not look forward to see that the traffic in our country would be so much higher . . .

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI : Then why should you call them 'technicians'? If a person does not know the technical details, how can you call him a technocrat?

SHRI BABUBHAI M. CHINAI (Maharashtra) : In view of the statement of the hon. Minister that the cross-bar system has really failed, why are they putting up a cross-bar manufacturing plant here?

SHRI N. G. GORAY : That is an Indian cross-bar.

PROF. SHER SINGH : I am coming to that. Now, we are upgrading these crossbar exchanges, replacing certain components which have not been found suitable and this work is going on in various exchanges and some improvements have already been carried out. Only after the upgradation work is completed we will be able to know whether this pentaconta system is workable. We are not confining ourselves only to production of pentaconta. In Rae Bareilly we are putting up another

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switching equipment factory. We will produce one lakh lines strowger exchange equipment and another 2 lakhs lines from another system. Now what that system will be has yet to be decided upon. We have got an Officer-on-Special Duty for system selection. He is going into the whole question and he is studying all the systems that are in vogue in the world. We are also shortly constituting a Commi-tee for system selection and it is after that System Selection Committee has reported to us that we will manufacture the future crossbar or any other type of exchange equipment.

Now, for redesigning also we are taking up the redesigning of these crossbar exchanges to make them suitable for Indian conditions. Recently, four or five days back we have appointed a Redesigning Committee. This Committee will advise the I.T.I. and the I.T.I., which is manufacturing about one lakh crossbar equipment every year will take these designs and produce crossbar exchanges as redesigned and as recommended by this Redesigning Committee.

This is all that I have to say about . . .

SHRI KALYAN ROY : What about the telex lines? What about the repeated breakdowns?

PROF. SHER SINGH : We have the telex facilities in Calcutta. We have a number of lines working there in Calcutta.

SHRI KALYAN ROY : But all the time they are dead.

PROF. SHER SINGH : As far as the overseas communication, we have located one earth station at Arvi near Poona. That is working and the other station is going to be put up near Dehradun.

SHRI KALYAN ROY : Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, have all gone?

PROF. SHER SINGH : And we are examining about the installation of a third

one somewhere near Calcutta but then we have to see what will be the economics of this. If it is justified then we can take it up in the Fifth Plan. So that is being studied.

I think these were all the points that the hon. Member raised.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI : Sir, it is surprising that my esteemed colleague made such formidable allegations and brought out the defects so forcefully but the defence given by the Minister is weak and ineffective. Particularly I want to know whether the Minister himself has read the articles that appeared very recently in the National Herald where the harassment and the irritations suffered by the telephone subscribers were vividly explained. That came out last week only and I want to know whether he has gone through it because instead of defending the indefensible, instead of defending a weak case, he should have read that article before coming to the House so that he could have given better replies and he could know what actually is in our mind. Now I will put some clarifications. Particularly I am very sorry . . .

SHRI NIREN GHOSH (West Bengal) : You will seek clarification from him, not put some clarifications.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI : Yes, I want to know from Mr. Sher Singh whether he is aware—whether it is Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay or anywhere—that the collapse of the telephone system due to this cross-bar system and the inefficient working of the Department and the telephone organisation is so vivid that really one gets headache and a good deal of strain on his mind when he tries to make a trunk call or a local call. All the time you get wrong calls. Perhaps as you have stated in this country we have 22 calls per telephone instead of eight and it is not proper for the cross-bar system. Perhaps you do not know; sometimes one faces such an awkward situation that young students

and girls are telephoning each other and that call is received by Mr. Niren Ghosh and he does not know how to deal with that. The requirements of the youngsters are so different . . . (*Interruptions*) I think he is young but I do not know whether he is married or not.

SHRI KRISHAN KANT (Haryana) : He is not; he is an eligible bachelor.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI : Then such wrong calls should be given to him.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI YOGENDRA SHARMA) : You come to your clarifications.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI : When this Committee is going to be appointed I want to know whether they will try to evolve a new technology and rectify the mistakes in the present cross-bar system. I want to know whether it is at all possible technically that this system can be changed and replaced by some other system where such faults will not occur.

Secondly, as has been mentioned in the National Herald article I want to know about the billing process. How is it done? I received a Bill which was for about Rs. 1200/- when my telephone was not being operated at all. You know, when we are out of station we do not use it. I gave a complaint and then they sent some second monitored reading or something. Ultimately I thought it was better to pay it off and keep quiet. What we find is there is the wrong billing of persons who like us want honestly to pay and actually no billing of persons who are unscrupulous and who manage with the telephone operators and get their trunk calls transferred to somebody else's account. All this has been given in the National Herald. Some unscrupulous traders—rather any type of people, why say traders—so many people in various parts of the country, not only in Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and other places, are going away scot-free without paying anything for all the calls they make while we are getting wrong bills I

and have to pay for the calls which we do not make. How are you going to improve this billing system? Then, I want to have another clarification from you. On the Telephone Advisory Committees. . . .

THE VICE CHAIRMAN (SHRI YOGENDRA SHARMA) : The issue is the serious telephone crisis in Calcutta. Please confine yourself to it.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI : He has given information about all over the country. There are Telephone Advisory Committees in Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, etc. and what priorities are there for appointing such persons? I know certain persons being on the Telephone Advisory Committee minting money and they are there for the last ten or fifteen years. May I know whether you will evolve a priority whereby persons who continue for more than three years or five years, whatever may be the period, are discontinued, so that the Telephone Advisory Committee becomes really an effective instrument for allocating telephones on priorities? About Bombay I know, but I do not want to take the names of the persons. I know definitely there are malpractices, whether in Bombay, Delhi, Poona, Calcutta, Amritsar or whatever it is.

The last point I want to mention is this. You have promised—you means your predecessors and your Ministers who were in charge—that more attention will be given to the rural telephone system. What are the priorities given in the Fifth Plan for this, particularly in the agricultural field?

PROF. SHER SINGH : The hon. Member has raised four issues. One is about the upgradation of the cross-bar system. I admit that because of defects in the cross-bar system and other systems sometimes cross-connections and wrong connections do take place. We have taken up the work of upgradation of these cross-bar exchanges and we hope that in about twelve months time this work will

[Prof Sher Singh]

be completed and substantial improvement will take place in six to eight months. In some places some improvements have been made and there is some improvement. As regards appointing a committee, I just now submitted that we have already appointed a committee, about four days back for suggesting the redesigning of the cross-bar pentaconta system, so that it may be made suitable for Indian conditions. The second point is about the billing system. Sometimes wrong bills are there and there are complaints. We have taken certain decisions. One is when we find that a bill for a particular month or quarter is in excess of the average for the last three or four quarters, we request the subscriber to deposit only the maximum sum for the last three quarters. Then we investigate the matter and if we find that the bill was not justified and it was wrong, we do not charge him more. If something more has been paid, we refund it, after going into the case. This is about the billing system.

While constituting the Telephone Advisory Committees, we ask the State Governments to send their recommendations. Members of Legislatures and Members of Parliament are also on these Telephone Advisory Committees. We have representatives of trade and commerce. We have representatives of press. We have representatives of the medical profession and also some unrepresented interests and prominent public men. As the hon. Member has said, sometimes complaints are received that some Telephone Advisory Committee members are misusing their power. Unless we have proof . . .

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI : Reduce their period.

PROF. SHER SINGH : I told the correspondent of the newspaper National Herald, who met me the other day, that if he had got some proof about billing, he should give it to me, but he was hesitant. He would not like to disclose it. Unless we have some positive proof, it is difficult.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI : In that case the subscriber will be completely wiped out.

PROF. SHER SINGH : It is difficult to take action in such cases.

But we have fixed a time limit. Now we are reconstituting the Telephone Advisory Committee after two years. The life of the Committee is two years.

SHRI A. G. KULKARNI : But the same person must not find a place in the Committee.

PROF. SHER SINGH : The suggestion will be kept in view. About the rural telephone system, I am myself very keen that we should give some PCOs in the rural areas also. Five thousand more PCOs and seven thousand more telegraph offices are to be given in the Fifth Plan to provide telecommunication facilities to the rural areas. In fact, for the rural areas, I myself suggested to the telecommunication research people here to evolve some new equipment which might be cheaper, better ; and more efficient in service. A VHF set has now been designed, its design has been completed, that has been produced also, it has been tested and some improvements are also being made in that. And I hope, when the VHF set is ultimately finalised, it will become cheaper and we will be able to provide more and more telecommunication facilities to the rural areas.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : I would say that Calcutta is still the largest metropolitan city as regards population. But from your figures it seems that the subscribers in Calcutta are only 50 per cent of those in Bombay and 55 per cent of those in Delhi.

PROF. SHER SINGH : More than Delhi.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : I suppose that in 1950 Calcutta had the largest number of subscribers. During your regime how the number of the subscribers has dropped so steeply ? It is because, I know, the people

there do not apply for telephone connection being fully aware that they will not get a connection for years together. You have given the figure that the outstanding at Bombay is one lakh five thousand or something, sixty thousand, etc. It is found to be so. They have to stand in the queue for a decade to get a telephone. Why should they send in their names or apply at all? That has become the position in Calcutta. And this is a fact that you must explain, how it could happen that between 1950 and 1974 it has come to this position.

Secondly, some time back, when Shri Bahuguna was Minister he told me—he had to tell me—that the Calcutta telephone system is totally obsolete. So, now from your reply it seems that from 1950 to 1974 you are operating the system with that obsolete equipment, keeping the number of the subscribers down. And the system has totally collapsed. I know from my experience—Calcutta cannot compare with any city as regards the harassment that the telephone subscribers are put to. Knowing all this full well you operate that obsolete equipment; you have done nothing. And now you are talking of giving some lines and all that in the year of grace, 1974. You spoke about large-scale absenteeism. I know about that because I live in that city. Hundreds cannot come because the trains do not run, the buses do not run or they are overcrowded. The entire transport system whether the suburban railway or in the city, is like that. I do not know how the people are carrying on. They are just hanging on to the buses or trains, they may be dashed against. How can they come?

Do you also know that in several Exchanges like Panihati, Bhatpara and so on Congress anti-social rowdies attacked telephone exchanges but no protection was given by the police to the operators? It is a wonderful thing. They are operating the telephone system. I have mimed the places. Nothing is done. They attacked in broad day light with sten guns and revolvers. And frantic calls to the police could not elicit help. In a number of places it

has happened. So that fact also I would like to bring to the notice of the Minister.

Now, many explanations have been given by him. But may I know from him which city in India had the maximum P & T workshops in 1950 and which city now has the maximum manufacturing capacity of P & T equipment because that will reveal the picture for the last 22 years? I do not know for what inexplicable or mysterious reason the largest metropolis of the country has been neglected. We stand for a balanced overall development of the country. I do not know whether Patna has been taken care of...

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI YOGENDRA SHARMA) : Mr. Niren Ghosh, you have had enough time.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : I have taken only three or four minutes.

Mr. Kalyan Roy took 17 minutes.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI YOGENDRA SHARMA) : He was the first speaker.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : I want another Seven, eight or nine minutes because I have to put facts which I know. I would like to get facts and figures about Calcutta from the hon'ble Minister. May I know whether the P & T Department colludes with the Home Ministry in installing, bugging and tapping the telephone apparatus. When Mr. Jyoti Basu was the Deputy Chief Minister and Police Minister in the United Front Government in 1969 • he was given the names of person; of the Opposition Parties whose lines were being bugged. Mr. Jyoti Basu issued instructions that the telephones of no political party, whether the Congress or any of the Opposition Parties should be bugged. It is an incontrovertible fact and instructions were put on record that telephones should not be bugged. Therefore, this thing is going on in Calcutta. I do not know about other places. Perhaps, here also you resort to that practice. Mr. Kuldip Nayyar has

[Shri Niren Ghosh]

asserted this in his statement in the Statesman. Though you have contradicted it but you have not given any convincing explanation so far. So this is a specific instance that I know of. Why does your V & T Department collude with the Home Ministry in installing, bugging and tapping apparatus ? Will you stop it or not ?

Then there is another charge. Compared to Delhi and Bombay, telephone charges in Calcutta, for almost 15 years, have been higher by Rs. 40 per year. If I am wrong I will correct the figure later on. What is the reason for these higher charges ? Why should the Calcutta people pay this penalty? Will you refund all this money that you have taken? It is not for a single year. This has been going on for a number of years—fifteen, sixteen years. You make trunk call to Chandigarh from here and nearabout. But for a distance of 25 miles from the city of Calcutta you have to make trunk calls. There is no automatic system. Even for 25 miles, 20 miles, 30 miles, trunk calls are made. Sir, the Minister has not answered another point of Shri Kalyan Roy and that is about unmanned telephone system, the unmanned Calcutta Telephone system or whatever it is called; it is unmanned. We have seen the operators; we know some of them ; we are bound to know the operators. Mr. Kulkarni should know the operators in Bombay. I know some of them in Calcutta. They say, "What shall we do ? We are helpless. We keep one person there is a box and several rings come at the same time. We do not know how to attend to all of them at the same time." That is because the number of lines to a cable is far above the load. That is the reason why always the telephone calls are wrong. They asked us, "Can you tell us some way out ? We may do some mistakes sometimes. But can you tell us how to meet this situation ?" Then, as regards the TAC I would like to make one point.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SURI YOGENDRA SHARMA) : Mr. Niren Ghosh, you may finish, now.

SHRI NIREN GOSH : You would not take Opposition Members on the Telephone Advisory Committee. You just consult the list and see how many Opposition Members are there. Oh! You are in big numbers; so, you take all from the Congress Party. Rarely is there an Opposition Member; rarely does an Opposition Member find a place on the Telephone Advisory Council. Why? What is the reason ? The Overseas Satellite System in Calcutta handles the largest amount of business, it handles the largest number of calls from foreign countries as compared to any other city like Bombay or Delhi. Yet, Overseas Satellite System was not first installed in Calcutta. It was done elsewhere though Calcutta handles the largest amount of calls and handles the largest amount of business. So everything is mysterious with the attitude of the Central Government towards the city of Calcutta. Do you think Calcutta is in India or outside India ? I do not know what your attitude is. I do not know what you think of Patna. I do not know what you think of any other place like Coimbatore or some other city. You think only of one or two cities and nothing else. Do you think that Bombay and Delhi alone constitute India?

PROF. SHER SINGH : Sir, the honourable Member has raised a number of questions. The first is about the steep fall in the demand for telephones in Calcutta from 1955 onwards. The honourable Member should have put this question to himself, because in Calcutta industries, etc. were not allowed to work for some time. There had been unrest continuing for years and years together, and therefore, the demand did not pick up . . .

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : I am sorry; Sir. I seek your protection. You see the brochure which has come out, that 72 to 80 per cent of the unrest is due to lockouts and due to other reasons. It has brought out that thing. The Minister does not even know that.

PROF. SHER SINGH : May be, that is one of the reasons . . .

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : No. Can you then say that the employers sabotaged ? Have you the check to say ?

PROF. SHER SINGH : But the fact remains that the demand has not gone up. And so much so the revenue per line in Calcutta, even when the revenue is also less, about Rs. 1100 per line per year.

In Bombay it is 1,600 and in Delhi it is 2,000. We plan for expansion on the basis of the demand we receive. In Calcutta the number on the waiting list is 60,000 and that includes 46,000 in the general category. In Bombay the waiting list has 1,34,000 names. And there the OYT waiting list has more than 90,000 names whereas in Calcutta it has just about 10,500 or so. It is on the basis of demand that we have to expand because we cannot just go on expanding when people do not come forward to take connections.

I admit there is congestion in the exchanges. There are manual type of exchanges and there are automatic exchanges. We are now converting manual types into automatic exchanges. There is congestion in several exchanges in Calcutta. The position is very difficult particularly in 22, 23 and 24 and in 44 which has recently been converted from residential into commercial, and in 45, 55, 66 and 67 exchanges. Relief will be given to 47, 66 and 67 exchanges during the current year and to 44 and 45 exchanges in 1975-76 and to 22, 23 and 24 exchanges in 1977-78.

As regards absenteeism. I agree with my friend Shri Chitta Basu...

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI YOGENDRA SHARMA) : Shri Niren Ghosh, not Shri Chitta Basu.

PROF. SHER SINGH : I am sorry. Please excuse me. I agree with Shri Ghosh that one of the causes of absenteeism is non-availability of transport facilities. Some time in Calcutta due to strikes in transport services, telephone operators

cannot reach their places in time. That is one reason. We have taken it up with State Government. They have assured us that they are going to improve the transport services.

As for providing protection to the operators, through you I will appeal to all political parties to see that the operators are allowed to reach their places of duty and they are not intimidated. They should be provided protection. We have taken up with the Police and they are giving us help. But help should come from political parties also. This is an essential service..

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : What can we do ? Can you tell us ?

SHRI KALYAN ROY : He is treading on a dangerous ground. Can he quote one single instance in the last 2 1/2 years where a single operator was intimidated or threatened anywhere in Calcutta ? Just one instance.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI YOGENDRA SHARMA) : There is no point in it.

SHRI KALYAN ROY : The Minister does not know even the names of Members.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : I know exchanges which were raided by Congress rowdies. I can name those places.

PROF. SHER SINGH : We should provide protection to the operators. This was one of the demands which he has himself raised. I appeal to all right-thinking people and all parties to provide protection to all the people who are doing essential work in essential services . . .

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : You should appeal to your own Party.

PROF. SHI R SINGH : He said that in Calcutta there is no P & T factory. There is a factory there working for so many years.

[Prof. Shcr Singh]

As for charges my friend said that the charges in Calcutta are higher—he said it is Rs. 40/- compared to other cities and places. 1 P.M.

Sir, over three decades ago, when the Calcutta telephone system was taken over from a private company, the charges were higher, that is, more than thirty years ago. Now, Sir, after it was taken over by the Government, the charges are not higher.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : Why didn't you lower the charges ? And, for how long these charges have been continuing ?

PROF. SHER SINGH : Sir, after the system was taken over by the Government . . .

SHRI NTRRN GHOSH : Give us the exact date.

PROF. SHER SINGH : I will give the actual date later. I will find it out and give it later. Off hand I cannot give the actual date. As I said, Sir, over three decades ago, when this system was with a private company, the charges were higher and after it was taken over by the Government from the private company, the charges are the same for all places.

Now, regarding the STD, my friend said that it is not available even in the neighbouring places. It is because of certain modifications which were to be carried out on the director system. Now, we are „oing to give STD service and the modifications have been made and the trunk automatic exchange is also being installed and I think this will be installed during this year. As I said in the main statement itself, by the end of this year we will be able to provide STD facilities between Calcutta and Kharagpur and Asansol, etc.

As for the overseas communication, I have already submitted that we have put up two stations and one is already working and the other is being put up and the third one is under our examination which is going to be near Calcutta.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : Sir, he has not answered my question.

SHRI BABUBHAI M. CHINAI : Sir, ..

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : Sir, he has not answered my question about bugging.

SHRI BABUBHAI M. CHINAI : You don't allow me to put questions. You have already put questions.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : I will allow you. But he has not answered an important question of mine.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI YOGENDRA SHARMA) : He has answered. I think he has given his reply to your question.

SHRI NIREN GHOSH : I assert that he has not answered my question regarding bugging. He is avoiding it.

(Interruptions)

SHRI BABUBHAI M. CHINAI : Sir, there is a general deterioration in the telephone administration. In the Cross Bar system, we do not get the dial tone at all and we do not get it for three minutes or four minutes or even five minutes . . .

SHRI PITAMBER DAS (attar Pradesh): Even longer than that.

SHRI BABUBHAI M. CHINAI : I am speaking from my own experience. If this is the position, how is the Minister going to improve the position ? On top of this, Sir, the Minister himself has said that this system has not been found to be satisfactory and we are being told authoritatively that the machinery for this system is going to be manufactured in this country and this will be a permanent affair in this country. I want to have the Minister's clarifications on these points.

Sir, I have had the privilege of working on the Telephone Advisory Committee when there were only seven members.

Today, so far as Bombay is concerned, there are 37 members. The former Communications Minister, Shri Bahuguna, told me, Sir, very frankly and very bluntly : "I have pressures from different directions and I have to yield to them. Now, there is a total of 800 names recommended for 37 posts of members. Tell me how to select 37 out of 800." This is what he told me. Now, I would like to know one thing from the Minister. Does this Committee discuss at all the problems of the customers or their difficulties". Their only job is to sanction a connection on OYT or vinder some other scheme and every member has the right to give two connections and, on an average, every three months they give connections and some of them do make money in the process and I have no doubt about this in my mind.

And if an inquiry is held, I am prepared to go before the inquiry committee and point out the persons who are doing this. I am very clear in my mind.

Sir, another point which I want to ask the hon. Minister is this. In Bombay, Sir, the Advisory Committee was not functioning from February, 1973 to January, 1974. I would like to know whether, during this period, the General Manager was authorised to sanction any connections or not. Or, is this Advisory Committee really a super advisory committee ? I for one know that whenever I have approached the General Manager, he said, "I am sorry, Mr. Chinai. There is no Advisory Committee and, therefore, no lines can be sanctioned". If that is so, what was the reason for the Government not to have this Advisory Committee for February, 1973 to January, 1974? Sir, what happened was that no new committee was appointed; the old committee had been revived, with the idea that they will reconvene it. In the meanwhile, a new Minister has come. I would like to know whether they are going to take the decision before the 31st March to have a new committee, because of the tenure of the committee which has been revived. I would also like

to know from the hon. Minister, when there is no advisory committee or even when an advisory committee is there, what are the functions, powers and privileges of the General Manager in sanctioning telephones ? I would like to have the terms of reference of the advisory committee fixed up, so that no shelter is taken by the General Manager that the advisory committee is not functioning and, therefore, he cannot do anything; I would like that if there are no powers for the General Manager, in the absence of the advisory committee, those powers may be given to him to use his discretion to see to the system of telephones and the management of telephone functioning. May I know from the hon. Minister whether he would be kind enough to tell us as to how he intends to do all these things?

Sir, there are temporary connections given for six months, nine months, twelve months, one and a half years, and so on, which have not been made permanent even today. Members of Parliament and some of the State Ministers and Ministers from the Government of India recommend sometimes cases. The General Manager says, "If my Advisory Committee rejects, it will be an insult both to the Minister of the State and the Minister at the Centre, as also to the Member of Parliament, and, therefore, I do not want to take any risk of putting the case before the Advisory Committee unless you brief any Advisory Committee member who can sponsor your case and then get it through". Is this the condition in which Ministers of the State Government, Ministers of the Government of India and Members of Parliament to be put ? At least, some sort of arrangement must be made where a responsible Member of Parliament or the State Government Minister or the Central Government Minister recommends a case and if the General Manager finds that this is in order then the connection should be made permanent. I would like to know from my friend, Prof. Sher Singh, how he is going to rectify all these things to help the consumers and others ?

PROF. SHER SINGH : Sir, Babubhai Chinai has raised three or four questions. One is about the delay in getting the dial tone. Sir, this is one of the defects which has been identified in the crossbar system. This system, as I said, is being upgraded and this defect will also be removed. The ITI is manufacturing about one lakh strow-ger lines and one lakh crossbar lines. We have to select the system. We are shortly appointing a committee, as I submitted earlier, and it is only after they have made their recommendations, that we can see which of the systems would be suitable for our conditions.

And then one will be selected and in future we will produce equipment of that system. As for the TAG, the Telephone Advisory Committee, no doubt the size of the Committee is becoming larger . . .

SHRI BABUBHAI M. CHINAI : Room is also becoming larger every year.

PROF. SHER SINGH : And the number of telephones in each city is also going up, is becoming larger, every year. In Bombay the area is very big and if we leave it to just seven or eight members, it is very difficult for them to recommend for all areas and all the areas will not have receiving their due share. Among other things, the Telephone Advisory Committee has also got some other functions to perform . . .

SHRI BABUBHAI M. CHINAI : Please lay it on the Table.

PROF. SHER SINGH : If the honourable Member so desires, I will lay it on the Table of the House. One of the functions, among other things, is to recommend out-of-turn connections under special categories. If we take only two or three members or four or five members only from, say, trade and commerce, and one MLA and one MP and so on, then it will be difficult and there will be pressures from various sides asking, "How is it that our area is neglected?" Bombay is a big city

and if there are not enough members on the Committee, sometimes people in some areas may not get a fair deal. I agree with my friend that the size of the Telephone Advisory Committee should not be very big. But it has to be bigger than seven of course. After the intervening period between February, 1973 and December, 1973, the old Telephone Advisory Committee in Bombay was revived. During that intervening period no out-of-turn connection was sanctioned by the General Manager. Out-of-turn connections are given on the recommendation of the Telephone Advisory Committee. Of course, some in-turn connections were given by the General Manager; not that the work stopped altogether. But out-of-turn connections were not sanctioned by him during that period. Now we hope a new Telephone Advisory Committee will be constituted during this month and this new TAC for Bombay will start functioning from 1st April, 1974 . . .

SHRI BABUBHAI M. CHINAI : Why not give discretion to the General Manager in the absence of the Committee ?

PROF. SHER SINGH : I do not think there will be any need now. There will be no interval between the appointment of the new Committee and the completion of the term of the present Committee. The present Committee will function up to the 31st March and from 1st April the new Committee will come into existence.

**MOTION REGARDING APPOINTMENT
OF A MEMBER OF THE LOK SABHA
TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE
HOUSES, ON THE PLANTATIONS
LABOUR (AMENDMENT) BILL, 1973**

THE DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE
MINISTRY OF LABOUR (SHRI BAL-
GOVIND VERMA) : Sir, I move :

"That this House- recommends to
Lok Sabha that Lok Sabha do appoint