

Provision of Telephones in Tribal Villages of Andhra Pradesh

*422. SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether all the tribal villages have been provided with telecommunication facilities in Andhra Pradesh;

(b) if so, the details thereof, location-wise and district-wise;

(c) if not, the reasons therefor; and

(d) whether Government have set any target to provide said facilities to all the tribal villages in Andhra Pradesh?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN): (a) to (d) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) and (b) No, Sir. The district wise details of 1,119 tribal villages provided with telephone connectivity is given in the Statement-I (See below)

(c) and (d) It is assessed that there are 3,624 villages lying in thick forest areas/naxalite infested areas/ having population less than 100. Efforts are being made to cover remaining villages by November, 2007.

Statement-I

District-wise details of villages provided with telephone connectivity in Andhra Pradesh

Sl. No.	Name of the District	No. of Tribal villages provided with telephone connectivity
1	2	3
1.	Adilabad	238
2.	East Godavari	138
3.	Khammam	457

1	2	3
4.	Mahabubnagar	11
5.	Visakhapatnam	117
6.	Srikakulam	10
7.	Vizianagaram	45
8.	Warangal	32
9.	West Godavari	71
TOTAL:		1119

SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Sir, we are living in an age of Information Technology. According to the Mid-term Appraisal, we have achieved 74 per cent of the Tenth Plan targets, that is, Rs. 479 lakhs out of Rs. 650 lakhs. The achievement is noteworthy. But the main contributor is the private sector. The public sector contribution is only 25 percent. The rural tele-density is only 1.67 per cent. And, the total growth in the rural telecom sector continues to be slow. I would like to ask of the hon. Minister as to what steps have been contemplated to improve tele-density in the rural areas, more particularly, in the tribal areas where tele-density is nominal. What is the roadmap for achieving total coverage of rural areas, with specific reference to Andhra Pradesh?

SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN: Sir, through you, I would like to answer the question raised by the hon. Member. Sir, the hon. Member has got good data and said that the private operators have done well. But, I would also like to say that the data which the hon. Member interpreted was of the mobile sector because in the fixed line, I think, still, the private operators have not done much. Sir, it was the Government's policy to encourage more private operators to come into the telecom sector and to provide more phones. But, unfortunately, the earlier policy was diluted in such a way that there was no roll-out of obligation for the private operators to go into the rural areas and provide telecommunication there, and, naturally, Sir, the private operators decided to operate in the creamy layers of the cities. That is the reason why you will find that they have done much more in the creamy layer areas, whereas the BSNL has been doing the job in the rural areas and still trying to do the job of

providing telecommunication in the rural areas, especially in the areas which are not reachable.

Sir, it is a fact that if you see the overall tele-density of 9.37 in cities like Delhi, Chennai and Mumbai, we have reached the tele-density of 40 to 50 per cent; whereas in rural areas, we are still doing between 1.7 to 1.8 per cent. Sir, this is the problem. This is the issue which we are addressing. Sir, at this point, we can only request the private operators. How can we force them to go there? We are also using the USO Fund which is 5 per cent of their licence fee. We are using it to provide telephones in the rural areas. Sir, the BSNL started its mobile service only in the year 2002, whereas the private operators had started their mobile service way back in 1994. So, it is nearly ten years. Sir, in the last three year's time, the BSNL has done extremely well. We are, in fact, going to double our capacity by December. In fact, we have now finished the Northern launch, the Southern launch and the Western launch, and in October, Sir, we are going to do the Eastern launch. So, we are trying to make all efforts to increase the tele-density.... (*Interruptions*)...

SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Sir, I appreciate the efforts of our young Minister. The hon. Minister said that they are going to request the private operators to go to the rural areas. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether the Government is going to compel the private operators to expand the tele-density in the rural areas. Sir, I was quoting from the Mid-term Appraisal. The hon. Minister's answer says that in Andhra Pradesh only 1119 villages are covered in the tribal areas; whereas 3264 villages are yet to be covered. Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what steps the Government is contemplating to compel the private operators to operate in the rural areas because they are operating only in the profit-making areas, as stated by the hon. Minister.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: No compulsion. It is the result of market orientation.

SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN: Sir, through you, I would like to say that there are 29460 villages in Andhra Pradesh.

SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: I was referring to tribal villages.

[25 August, 2005]

RAJYA SABHA

SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN: Sir, 24762 villages are covered. Sir, I am only saying that this is the way we look at it. In Andhra Pradesh, we have a problem. We are not able to cover all the tribal villages because, there, we have the problem of Naxals. The Naxal problem is really in hindrance for us to roll-out our telecommunication facilities in those areas. Sir, so far, 63 exchanges have been burnt by the Naxals. In the last year alone, four exchanges were burnt in Andhra Pradesh, especially in areas like Warangal, Anantapur and Khammam districts. So, we are having this problem there. In some areas, the police themselves are requesting us not to put the towers. Sir, I think, this issue needs to be addressed. The Naxals feel that the moment we put a tower, people are going to inform about their activities to the Government. But, I think, the whole point is missed in it. Telecommunication only improves people's communication and also brings their problems to light.

MR. CHAIRMAN: That is enough. Now, Shri Rajeev Shukla.

SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Sir, the hon. Minister has not even answered my question about compelling the private operators to go to the rural areas. It is very essential to compel them.(Interruptions)...

SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN: Sir, I am not going to mislead the House. At this moment, the laws have been diluted; the policy has been diluted. Sir, we cannot compel anyone to do anything which he doesn't want to do.

SHRI RAJEEV SHUKLA: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would like to say that the fact is that the density of telephones in the urban areas is touching 30 per 1000, while the figure for the rural areas is 1.7 per thousand. Sir, the telecom tariffs in India are the lowest. Then what is preventing telephony to reach the rural areas? What the problems are and what steps the Government are planning to take?

SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN: Sir, the Government realises the problem and we agree that the telecom has to go to the rural areas. Seventy per cent of our population is living in the rural areas. Today, the licence fees is around 50 per cent. Earlier the licence fee was Rs. 10,000 crores and now it is Rs. 5,000 crore. Five per cent of the AGR is taken off to assist them and to give an incentive for people to go to rural areas. We have been calling tenders, inviting the private sector and the public

sector to go into the rural areas, which are not profitable, by giving them incentives.

Sir, I can talk about BSNL here. BSNL has taken upon itself to ensure that whenever it increase capacity, 50 per cent of it they are trying to give to the rural areas to ensure that the rural areas benefit the most.

SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD: Sir, at the very outset I would like to place on record my appreciation for the work the BSNL is doing in the country. As a public sector undertaking, a good work is being done. But tele-density, in terms of mobile connectivity, has taken over the line connectivity. It is a matter of record. At the same time, these private operators are also doing well. State after State are being given to them. Therefore, their concern, towards connectivity in the rural areas also becomes a matter of great importance. What efforts the Government are undertaking, apart from persuasion, to ensure that their operations and connectivity in the rural areas is also increased. Why I am saying this is, in many areas the BSNL is not there and the private operators are operating. What are you doing in that connection?

SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN: Sir, I thank the hon. Member for appreciating the BSNL. As I said, Sir, private operators are not doing a bad job. They are doing a good job, but they are more concentrated in cities. Again, it is a worldwide phenomenon where wireless has overtaken the wired line. It is now faster and easier to connect people through wireless methods than to wired line. That is why, you see a trend in India that people are hungry for telecommunication. They want telephone. And we are making sure that we connect them as fast as possible with wireless communication. Definitely, I will not discount the services of the private operators. But private operators are more concentrated in the creamy layer, but they are now motivated to go to the rural areas.

SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD: Sir, he has not replied to my question.

SHRI ROBERT KHARSHIING: Sir, fifty-eight years after Independence, only 1119 tribal villages out of 3,624 villages in Andhra Pradesh have been provided with telephones. This means that 70 per cent are without telephones in an IT State like Andhra Pradesh. Sir, then, you can imagine the connectivity of villages in less fortunate States.

[25 August, 2005]

RAJYA SABHA

May I know, Sir, from the hon. Minister as to how many of these telephones in these 1119 Andhra Pradesh tribal villages are still working? May I also know whether the Government has done any survey of these tribal villages on connectivity of telephone connections, or, whether most of these connections are out of order?

SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN: Sir, I do not have the data with me now. I can provide the data to the hon. Member, definitely.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Sir, I think, the pattern of development of telecom in the country is posing a very big challenge for the rural areas because, if you look at the tele-density figures, for metro cities, it is 40 per 100 households. For the city areas, it is 19.7 per 100 households. But in the rural areas, it is 1.9 per 100 households. Sir, the question is, BSNL has to go to these areas because it is in the public sector and we also put the Minister into trouble in the House if they are not going to the rural areas. On the other hand, they have to compete with these people who are cream-skinny. So, this problem could be addressed very effectively by the Regulatory intervention, by giving incentives for going to rural areas and by reducing termination charges and all that for the village areas. Hence, only 20 per cent is the network coverage.

I would like to know whether the Government is going to invoke article 25 of the TRAI Act to make sufficient adjustment in the Regulatory Policy so that there is a disincentive in not going to the rural areas and incentive in going to the rural areas.

SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN: Sir, the Government is very much aware of the issue that we have somehow to make the private operators to go to the rural areas. Sir, in fact, the Government believes that the market forces are the best way to make people to go to the rural areas....(Interruptions)...

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: It is a complete failure of the market mechanism....(Interruptions)...

SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN: At this moment, we feel that the market forces are themselves going to attract private operators to go towards the rural areas.(Interruptions)...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Next question.(Interruptions)...