

LOK SABHA DEBATES

LOK SABHA

Monday, June 1, 1998/Jyaistha 11,
1920 (Saka)

*The Lok Sabha met at
Eleven of the Clock.*

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

[English]

Telephone Connections

*61. SHRI D.S. AHIRE :
SHRI BIJOY KUMAR 'BIJOY' :

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) the number of persons on the waiting list of telephone connections in the country as on April 30, 1998, State-wise;

(b) the number of telephone connections allotted during the last three years, State-wise;

(c) whether the Government have evolved any scheme for the speedy allotment of telephone connections; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING AND MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ) :

[Translation]

(a) The number of persons on the waiting list of telephone connections as on 30th April, 1998 is as per Annexure-I.

(b) The number of telephone connections given during the last three years is as per Annexure-II.

(c) and (d) During 1997-98, 32.59 lakhs new telephone connections were provided in the country against a target of 29 lakhs new telephone connection. This is 27% higher than the number of connections provided during 1996-97 (25.64 lakh lines). For the year 1998-99, 33 lakhs new telephone connections were proposed in the Ninth Five Year Plan. This has been revised to 36 lakhs in the Annual Plan, 1998-99. All efforts will be made not only to achieve this target but to exceed it.

Statement-I

*Number of persons in the waiting list as on
30.04.1998—State-wise*

S.No.	State	Waiting List
1.	Andhra Pradesh	219569
2.	Assam	23189
3.	Bihar	65326
4.	Gujarat (Including Dadar, Diu, Daman & Nagar Haveli)	243522
5.	Haryana	100183
6.	Himachal Pradesh	44484
7.	Jammu & Kashmir	30975
8.	Karnataka	123316
9.	Kerala (Including Lakshadweep-UT)	682779
10.	Madhya Pradesh	42193
11.	Maharashtra (Including Goa)	207919
12.	North East (Including Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura)	11350
13.	Orissa	24577
14.	Punjab (Including Chandigarh-UT).	202315
15.	Rajasthan	147293
16.	Tamil Nadu (Including Pondicherry-UT).	329212
17.	Uttar Pradesh	153812
18.	West Bengal (Including Sikkim & Andaman and Nicobar)	148303
19.	Delhi	2251
Total		2802568

Statement-II

*Number of Telephone Connections given during the
last three years, State-wise.*

S.No.	State	Number of telephone connections allotted		
		1995-96	1996-97	1997-98
1	2	3	4	5
1.	Andhra Pradesh	150021	153606	216487
2.	Assam	20295	18003	36477
3.	Bihar	33115	52368	66294
4.	Gujarat (Including Dadar, Diu, Daman & Nagar Haveli)	134832	163053	213824

1	2	3	4	5
5.	Haryana	52486	60800	73081
6.	Himachal	30212	31452	40176
7.	J & K	5988	15945	20819
8.	Karnataka	139694	189608	254378
9.	Kerala (Including Lakshadweep-UT.)	154033	172775	230010
10.	Madhya Pradesh	81275	75541	102692
11.	Maharashtra (including Goa)	418131	458260	501441
12.	North East (Including Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura)	16433	18056	23030
13.	Orissa	31014	32505	67178
14.	Punjab (Including Chandigarh-UT.)	143569	153560	165969
15.	Rajasthan	100672	113518	147632
16.	Tamil Nadu (Including Pondicherry-UT.)	207452	290082	364546
17.	Uttar Pradesh	151336	216912	313918
18.	West Bengal (Including Sikkim & Andaman & Nicobar)	112463	145052	240152
19.	Delhi	200070	203160	180941
Total		2183091	2564256	3259045

[English]

SHRI D.S. AHIRE (Dulho) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the information given, it appears that the Government is paying much attention to giving new connections. However, in rural areas, people are waiting for telephone connections for years together. I would like to know from the hon. Minister of Communications, through you, what special steps are being taken to clear the waiting lists in rural areas as well as in the exchanges in smaller towns.

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ : Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a comprehensive list which includes even the rural connections and the connections in respect of small towns. This is not a list of metropolitan cities. This is a State-wise list, circle-wise list and this is a comprehensive list. This includes telephone connections wanted in rural areas as well as in small towns.

SHRI D.S. AHIRE : In my constituency, Dhule, in Maharashtra, there are waiting lists pending since

November 1996. Those wait-listed people are still not given telephone connections. Will the hon. Minister clarify the position?

MR. SPEAKER : It has already been answered.

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ : The period of waiting list ranges from 10 months to two-and-a-half years. As the hon. Member has stated, there must be some telephone connections for which he must be waiting for the last two years. But I will see to it that all those areas, which are hilly areas where telephone connections are kept in waiting for the last many years, are provided with telephones on a priority basis.

SHRI SUDHIR GIRI (Contai) : Sir, from the reply given in the Annexure-II, it appears that during the period from 1995-96 to 1997-98 about 80,06,392 connections have been effected. Out of these connections, a good number of connections are given in the rural areas. As per the promise given by the previous Government, every village has got to have telephone connections. But those connections have been rendered useless because of the poor quality of equipment. May I know from the hon. Minister whether punitive measures will be taken against the suppliers who supplied poor quality equipment and whether those village telephones would be set right in due course?

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will look into the complaints about the poor quality instruments and we will take corrective and remedial measures.

SHRI P.S. GADHAVI (Kutch) : Sir, in the reply, the hon. Minister has informed about the number of persons in the waiting list as on 30.4.98. In the case of Gujarat, the number of persons in the waiting list is 2,43,522. My district Kutch is the third largest district in the country which is near the border of Pakistan. There is an imminent danger of war to my district after this nuclear explosion. Though there is a presence of large number of army personnel and security staff in my district yet there is a shortage of telephone facility and the shortage is about 30 per cent. When we ask the authorities, they say that there is neither the material nor the personnel with them. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether she is going to do anything specially for this district in the light of the nuclear explosion.

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ : In future, never will the hon. Member get this answer from us that we do not have any material or we do not have any instrument. The hon. Member has brought it to the notice of the Minister of Communications and as the Minister of Communications, I am saying that special priority will be accorded to his district.

[Translation]

SHRI BALRAM JAKHAR : Will the Hon'ble Minister like to state whether issuing the telephone connection is enough? Should it not be in working condition? I have seen that not only in villages but telephone

exchanges of small new markets also are not working. Will the Hon'ble Minister take steps to improve the conditions?

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ : The Hon'ble Member has raised a genuine question. It is also my concern that deleting the waiting list from the paper and installing the instrument is not enough. Many a time name of the subscriber is deleted after issuing the O.B. number only and it is stated that telephone connection has been given. But till the O.B. Number is issued and a telephone instrument in working condition is installed, we cannot accept that the connection has been provided. I may assure Shri Jakharji that I am making special efforts in this direction.

SHRI RAMNARAYAN MEENA : Mr. Speaker, Sir, waiting list of 1996 for allotment of telephone connection is pending in Rajasthan. I would like to talk mainly about Bundi and Kota Districts. Kota is my Parliamentary constituency where Telephone connections have not been given even after issuing O.B. Number, telephone services remain out of order for months together in Itawa, Nainwa, Siewal, Sangrol area of Kota District. People can not communicate on telephone. Telephone connections have been provided to these areas but nothing is done to keep them in order. When we approach the officers of the telephone department about our problems, they just verbally reply regarding the non-availability of the instruments. I want to know whether the Hon'ble Minister will accord priority to those areas so that the efforts can be made to supply the instrument where telephone connections are lying dead for the last two-three months due to the non-availability of such instruments.

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ : I have given reply to the question asked by the hon'ble Member while answering the supplementary question asked by Shri Balram Jakhar. Though he has not raised the question of O.B, I myself have raised this issue that the instruments installed are not working. This is not the only problem. Problem is that after clearance of O.B. the name of the subscriber is deleted from the waiting list but still the instrument has not been installed. It is correct that the waiting list of 1996 is pending in Rajasthan. There are other States also where waiting list of about two and a half year is still pending. I would like to assure you that not only the telephones against O.B. will be installed but they will be in working condition also. Now officers of the department will not reply that instruments are not with them. Our main concern is that the telephones should not only installed but they work also.

[English]

SHRI N.K. PREMCHANDRAN (Quilon) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the waiting list in Kerala is 6,82,779. An official statement has come out in the Press that by the end of the year 1998, all persons who are in the waiting list,

will be provided with the telephone connections. Through you, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether it is correct or not.

There is a classification of rural exchange and town exchange. There are so many anomalies in rural exchange and town exchange. So, I would like to know the criterion for determining a rural exchange and a town exchange. Will the anomalies be rectified?

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ : Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is right that the waiting list in Kerala is very high. It is about six lakhs or even more than six lakhs. But that does not mean that the tele density in Kerala is high. What is tele density? This is a telephone connection which is given to every 100 inhabitants. The average tele density in the country is 1.84 whereas the tele density in Kerala is 3.38. That means, given a reason of good economy, the demand in Kerala is enormous, whereas the tele density is high. I must tell my hon. Member that this time also circle-wise, it is the highest in Kerala. We have set a target of 3,25,000 telephone connections for the year 1998-99.

So, this news report is not true that by 1998, the whole list will be cleared, and 3,25,000 telephone connections will be provided in Kerala.

SHRI N.K. PREMCHANDRAN (Quilon) : What about the rural exchange, Madam?...*(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

SHRI CHAMAN LAL GUPTA : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to draw the attention of the Hon'ble Minister towards the list for 1997-98 in which 20,819 telephone connections have been given in Jammu and Kashmir and approx. 23,000 telephone connections have been given in North-east also. Both these regions are reeling under insurgency conditions. Even when 26 people were killed by extremists in Parankot, the Government came to know about it only after 3 days. Our area is a border area where no means of communications are available. I would like to know from the Hon'ble Minister whether priority will be given to these hilly areas so that communication facility may be provided to the people living there?

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ : Mr. Speaker, Sir, allotment of telephone depends upon the demand. I feel that the entire House share concern expressed by Shri Chaman Lal ji. So far as insurgency and militancy prone areas are concerned, when all other means and facilities are severed the only medium of communication left is telephone. Through you, I would like to assure the House that by giving priority to your area as well as to North Eastern states, we shall improve the telephone facilities and will provide more communication facilities.

[English]

SHRI A.C. JOS (Mukundapuram) : Sir, in her reply, the hon. Minister has said that more than six lakhs

telephones are there in the waiting list in Kerala and only three lakhs connections will be given this year. Sir, the present system is primitive one because the Department takes the planned development on the basis of waiting list. My suggestion is that the hon. Minister can give instructions to the Department so that the development takes place on the basis of projections. Wherever necessity arises, it all depends on the waiting list now. The person who had registered himself for a telephone connection, may have to wait for three to four years or even more.

MR. SPEAKER : Shri A.C. Jos, please come to your supplementary.

SHRI A.C. JOS : My question is whether the Department will undertake their expansion and development on the basis of scientific projection of each area's necessity.

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ : I would like to tell the hon. Member that the planning is not done on the basis of waiting list, planning is done on the basis of projection. We have undertaken a programme of expansion in Kerala. We are trying all upgraded technologies in Kerala. We are also trying even the WILL Scheme. A pilot project has been sanctioned in Kerala for that. The hon. Member must be assured on that count that we are not doing that only on the basis of demand, but we are really doing it on the basis of projections.

Cellular Mobile Services

*62. SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the lapses committed by the Department of Telecom (DOT) causing a loss of Rs. 837 crore while giving out licences to eight private companies for operating cellular mobile services in the four metros of Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai were detected by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG); and

(b) if so, the details thereof and the action proposed to be taken by the Government against the culprits?

THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING AND MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ) : (a) A modified Draft Audit Para (DAP) was received by the Department of Telecom. (DOT) in January, 1998 in which a case has been made out of a notional loss of Rs. 487.86 crores on account of defective fixation of licence fee for the eight licences granted to the private operators for the four metro cities.

(b) A summary of the modified draft audit para is given at para 1 of the statement enclosed. At para 2, the reasons for fixing the licence fee based on the projected demand in 1992, and the call charges prevailing then are indicated. The matter is still under correspondence with the Audit.

Statement

1. MODIFIED DRAFT AUDIT PARA RECEIVED IN JANUARY, 1998.

The contention of the D.G. (Audit) in the draft audit para captioned "Under benefit of Rs. 487.36 crores to metro cellular operators" are summed up as below :

"DOT did not make realistic projection of demand for cellular mobile telephone services in four metros and fixed annual lumpsum licence fee for first three years on the basis of grossly under stated projections of demand made by one of the bidders. It also failed to incorporate suitable provisions in the licence agreement for charging higher licence fee if the actual demand was more than the projections for first three years. This unduly benefited cellular mobile telephone operators in four metros by more than Rs. 354.47 crores in fixation of licence fee. DoT also gave benefit rate but not enhancing the lumpsum licence fee accordingly."

2. The contention of D.G. (Audit) as made out in para (1) above, are not acceptable to DoT for the following reasons :—

- (i) The Cellular Mobile Telephone Service (CMTs) based of GSM standards which was proposed to be started in four metros of the country in early 90s was a new service even by global standards. There was no historical data based on which accurate demand projections could be made. At best, a rough estimate of the number of subscribers and traffic in terms of air time generated by them, could be made for fixing the licence fee. The Government was keen to liberalise the telecom sector with a view to attracting foreign direct investment as well as capital from the domestic markets in the cellular business. Therefore, the DoT did not have the time available to carry out the detailed market research its growth rate, the traffic volume, etc. very accurately to fix the licence fee. Some inaccuracies are inevitable in such a scenario and it should be considered as part of normal business risk.
- (ii) The objective of the Government was to promote this new business which was considered to be very attractive from the foreign investment angle. Fixing a very high licence fee in the initial years would have inhibited the market demand which in turn would result in loss of revenue in terms of traffic volume. The cellular market is highly price elastic. Therefore, for the first three years, a predetermined fixed amount was charged for the first, second and third year. For the remaining seven years, however, the