

11.15 hrs.

MATTERS UNDER RULE 377

(1) Reported breakdown of Telephone System in Calcutta

MR. SPEAKER: Now, matters under Rule 377.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE:

SHRI DINEN BHATTACHARYYA (Serampore): Before that, would you kindly permit me to mention that on that day when the LIC matter was referred to here by myself and Mr S. M. Banerjee, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee was not here. We mentioned that the Calcutta High Court has struck down the order or notice under which the payment of bonus was stopped to the LIC employees....

MR. SPEAKER. That is another matter.

SHRI DINEN BHATTACHARYYA: That day you said that the Minister will make a statement at least to clarify the position.

MR. SPEAKER: I will ask the Minister to make a statement.

SHRI DINEN BHATTACHARYYA: We were told that the matter came up before the Calcutta High Court even yesterday.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (Burdwan): The LIC stay application has been rejected in spite of their best efforts.

MR. SPEAKER: The Minister will make a statement....

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE: ... and consider these things. Under Rule 377 I wish to bring to the notice of the hon. Minister the virtual breakdown of the Calcutta telephone system....

SHRI DINEN BHATTACHARYYA: Collapse.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE: Thousands of telephone connections

are out of order for weeks causing great inconvenience and suffering to thousands of subscribers. It appears that a controversy is going on as to the causes for the breakdown. The telephone authorities in Calcutta seem to be of the view that because of lack of spare parts and equipments as also because of the activities of the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority proper services cannot be rendered by the telephone authority, while the CMDA is disowning any responsibility for the same. We are finding a statement by the Minister in charge of CMDA in Calcutta which has been controverted by the Telephone Authorities. It appears that there is no immediate prospect of the improvement of the situation.

On 22nd May 1976 a statement appeared in the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* by Shri Arun Banerjee, Addl. General Manager of Calcutta Telephones. He said that a large number of telephone connections in all the 39 exchanges in Calcutta and Greater Calcutta are out of order, 1800 telephone connections in 46 Exchanges and 1200 connections in 44 Exchanges and more than 6500 connections are out of order every day. According to him and from the press reports, it appears that the reasons for the present situation are that the telephone authorities do not have the equipment and spare parts and even if the spare parts are given, they are not available in time. Then what are known as wipers which are absolutely necessary for each exchange are not available at all. There is no system of maintaining a sort of what is now known as bank for spare parts. As the Addl. General Manager himself has mentioned, the additional cause is the digging up of the streets indiscriminately by the CMDA and we who live in Calcutta are suffering from this every day. It has also completely brought about a standstill in the telephone administration in Calcutta.

The other reason is, as Mr. Banerjee himself has said in his statement,

[Shri Somnath Chatterjee]

that lines which were laid about 40-50 years ago have become rusted and there has been no replacement. No special attention is being given. Then now-a-days because of certain emergency ideas, new telephone connections are being given just to take credit but without taking any steps to effect repairs and replacing old parts and proper maintenance. There is no proper maintenance of the existing lines and just to curry favour with the powers at Delhi they are giving new lines when even the existing lines are not working properly. I will give you one instance. In Sarat Bose Road which is just opposite the Rama Krishna Mission Hospital, a new connection was given and it is not more than 7 days when another new telephone connection is given.

It is a shameful affair. Nobody seems to be interested and nobody seems to take any step about it. I request the hon. Minister to tell the House and assure us that something is really going to be done. Again I am quoting from the statement of the Additional General Manager. He says:

"In '44' exchange the lines have been continuously out of order first for 12 days, then after a gap of 3 days they are still out of order. In the whole area of Entally the lines are out of order for days.

In the old exchanges namely, '44', '46', '45', '22', '35' '55' and '57' the trouble is most acute."

I am being reminded of by Shri Priya Ranjan Das Munsi, probably, he has '41' exchange. He has a great trouble.

Everyone will ensure that our Ministers come and go back without feeling any such difficulty. Prof. Chattopadhyaya will bear with me and will stand by me. The telephone connections are not for the rich people only. These are required for various

purposes and even for medical treatment.

I was reading, two days back, that the Minister Shri Bhola Sen was waiting for an appointment, because the telephone connection was not working, the person with whom he had an appointment could not be contacted and for that he had to wait for three hours. This is the position. There is a complete collapse. I hope the Minister would take the matter very seriously and tell us as to what is being done.

MR. SPEAKER: It is my personal experience. From the Calcutta airport you cannot talk to the city.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DAS MUNSI (Calcutta-South): It is for the last three years.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE: What is the good of maintaining such an edifice if it does not work at all? I do not want to charge them of step-motherly treatment. So far as Calcutta is concerned nobody is looking after Calcutta.

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATION (DR. SHANKER DAYAL SHARMA): Before I take up the matter raised by Shri Somnath Chatterjee, I may just mention that we have already conveyed about the position of the airport. There the problem is that there are a large number of telephones working from the same connection. We have suggested that the airport authorities should have separate connection for the VIPs, a separate line which we will provide.

As regards 377, the points raised by Shri Somnath Chatterjee, I would like to say, as the hon. House is aware, telephone connections in Metropolitan Districts are mostly provided through a network of underground telephone cables from the exchanges to the subscribers' premises. There are no separate ducts/trenches for these cables and other underground utility services

such as water pipes, sewer pipes, gas pipes, power cables, etc. and they lie in very close proximity with each other. Whenever footpaths/roads are dug for repair work or new construction works by any of these agencies, the underground telephone cable sheaths are likely to be damaged. The subscribers' connections several through the damaged cables get affected as and when Moisture/water seeps through the damaged sheath breaking down electrical insulation. The localisation of such cable faults and restoration of services is a time-consuming process, particularly so when there is multiple damage on the cable

As the hon. House is aware, for the past several years there has been tremendous development activity going on in Calcutta. Extensive digging of roads and footpaths has been taken up from time to time by various utility services and agencies like Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority, Calcutta Electricity Supply Corporation, Calcutta Corporation, etc. These diggings caused damage to the telephone cables. The extent of damage came to be known only when Calcutta experienced heavy showers during early April and thereafter. A number of cables in various parts of the city broke down affecting telephone services to about 2 per cent subscribers. As soon as the telephone authorities detected the breakdown, they took prompt action for the repair work. The subscribers were kept informed of the position through advertisements in the local newspapers from time to time. There was no attempt to hide anything and we have done this through advertisements in the newspapers. For quicker restoration of the services, the management of Calcutta Telephones have deployed additional staff and temporarily suspended other work such as opening of new telephone lines, laying of new telephone cables etc.

The Calcutta Telephones have spared no efforts in restoring the faulty lines at the earliest.

Some press reports have appeared suggesting a controversy between the Calcutta Metropolitan Authority and the Calcutta Telephone district. However, the statement attributed to the General Manager, Telephones, Calcutta in the news item published in *Amrit Bazar Patrika* of 20th May has, on verification, been found to be not correct. The General Manager, Telephones, Calcutta has already written to the Minister of Public Works and Housing Dept West Bengal, who is also the Chairman of the Calcutta Metropolitan Authority, clarifying the position and emphatically disowning the statement attributed to him.

A cell for coordinating the activities of different agencies and departments engaged in underground works in Calcutta is functioning under the aegis of the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority. This Cell comprises of representatives from different administrations including Calcutta Telephones. The Additional General Manager (Planning) and the Deputy General Manager (External Plan) who are responsible for all underground cable works have been attending the coordination meetings. Some of the meetings were also attended by the General Manager, Telephones. It is felt that but for the useful functioning of this Underground Services Cell, the damages caused to the telephones cables would have been far more numerous.

The Hon. Member has made a reference to the problem of spares for the telephone exchanges in Calcutta. I may mention that the supply position has considerably improved in the recent past. However, there are still a few critical items for which the supplies have not been fully satisfactory. The matter is being vigorously pursued with the Indian Telephone Industries and it is expected that the supply of these items during the current year will further improve. We have decided that so far as the spares are concerned, 10 per cent of the capacity of the ITI would be devoted to spares. During the recent

[Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma]

past several specific measures have been taken for improvement of telephone services including those in the Calcutta Telephone System.

In this connection, I would like to refer to some organisational changes effected in the Calcutta Telephones. One Additional General Manager has been posted in Calcutta to look after the operational aspects of the Telephone System including the maintenance of underground cable network. The Calcutta Telephone District has been divided into six areas each under the direct charge of an Area Manager. These Area Managers have their offices located in the respective areas for closer and better supervision.

Under a crash programme for improving the efficiency of the Calcutta Telephone System, separate teams were set up to systematically analyse deficiencies in the working of exchange equipment as well as external plants.

Remedial actions have also been taken in respect of most of the deficiencies noticed. Survey was also conducted to find out subscribers' satisfaction about the service. The efficiency of the Calcutta Telephone System as measured in terms of effective calls is now of the order of 80 per cent. Five new Exchanges with total equipped capacity of 11,700 lines have been commissioned during 1975-76 and another 16,000 lines are planned for commissioning during the current year. The total number of new connections provided during 1975-76 was about 8,000 and this year the target is 15,000 new connections. With these additions, the efficiency is likely to increase further.

With a view to detect damages to the cables before they developed into electrical failures, technique of gas pressurisation of underground cables has been adopted as a part of maintenance policy for larger telephone networks. In the first instance, it has been planned to pressurise all heavy traffic cables such as junction

and primary cables. This technique would prevent a large-scale disruption as has been experienced in the Calcutta Telephone District now. It is expected that by March, 1977, junction cables on critical routes in Calcutta would be brought under gas pressure. Later on, primary cables will also be gas pressurised. A programme for introduction of cabinets and pillars for underground cable network has already been drawn up and the work is under progress.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE:

May I suggest that a copy of the statement of the Minister be sent to the subscribers so that they can hang it on their walls? Nothing has been said as to what is going to be immediately.

SHRI DINEN BHATTACHARYYA:

May I ask through you, the Minister, whether he will see that till improvement is made, the subscribers will not have to pay the rental for their telephones? Will he kindly look into the matter? (Interruptions).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please. After this statement, no more questions please. As there are a number of 377 matters set up be brief. I hope Shri Banerjee will be brief.

11.29 hrs.

(ii) Takeover of certain mills in Kanpur

SHRI S. M. BANERJEE (Kanpur): Sir, I shall be briefer than the Minister himself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I wish to raise the following matter of urgent public importance involving lives of nearly 11,500 workers of Laxmi Rattan Cotton Mills, Atherton West Mills and Kanpur Jute Udyog of Kanpur.

These Mills are closed since last one year. The workers are facing