

LOK SABHA DEBATES

LOK SABHA

Thursday, April 19, 1990/Chaitra 29, 1912
(Saka)

The Lok Sabha met at Eleven of the Clock

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Concession by UAE in Telephone Call Charges to India

*514 SHRI NARSINGRAO SURYAWANSHI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government of United Arab Emirates has slashed the telephone call charges to India at night and on public holidays.

(b) whether Government of U.A.E. had asked for more cable lines;

(c) if so, the details of the arrangement between the two countries;

(d) whether the concessional charges by U.A.E. Government still continue.

(e) if not, the reasons for these concessions being withdrawn by U.A.E. Government; and

(f) the steps Government of India contemplate to have the concessional telephone charges restored?

THE MINISTER OF SURFACE TRANSPORT AND MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI K.P. UNNIKRISHNAN): (a) The UAE had introduced concessional tariff for India during night and public holidays.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) There are 287 circuits between India and UAE for handling telephone traffic. The switching capacity available in Videsh Sanchar Nigam Gateway Exchange has been fully utilised. It has, therefore, not been possible to augment the number of circuits.

(d) No, Sir.

(e) There was a flood of traffic during the concessional period resulting in severe congestion and poor call completion rate. Since the number of circuits to carry this extra traffic cannot be augmented immediately, the UAE Government has withdrawn the concessional tariff.

(f) Fixing of traffic including concessional rates is the prerogative of each telecom administration. VSNL is taking necessary action to instal additional gateway exchanges and to augment the number of circuits progressively from the last quarter of 1990

SHRI NARSINGRAO SURYAWANSHI: In the reply the Minister has said that installation of additional gateway exchanges and augmenting the number of circuits is in progress. Will the concessional facilities continue till the completion of these additional gateway provisions in the circuits?

SHRI K.P. UNNIKRISHNAN: The concessional tariff was provided not by us but by the UAE administration. It is left to

each state to decide what kind of concessions they want to provide and it is upto them to decide when they should give such a thing. It is under the international agreement that each state has the full sovereign authority to decide these things. And it is difficult for me or anyone else to speculate on this. But all that I can say is that we will augment the switching capacity.

SHRINARSINGRAO SURYAWANSHI:

It is true that it is their problem. But will the Minister take this matter up with that Government because lakhs of our labour force are working there in the industrial fields? So it will help our labour class. Is the Minister going to take this issue up with that Government to settle it?

SHRI K.P. UNNIKRISHNAN: I am as much concerned as the hon. Member is because from my part of the country also, lakhs of people have gone to the towns and cities of UAE. But it is not proper for me as representative of the Government of India or for Government of India to take up this issue. These are the sovereign rights as I have explained. Once again, I assure you that we would augment our switching capacity and certain consequences may follow.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: The hon. Minister in his reply has stated that Videsh Sanchar Nigam Gateway Exchange has reached the saturation point so far as circuits are concerned. For whole of eastern India Calcutta plays a vital role for the international calls. There was a proposal to have a gateway exchange at Calcutta. During our time, we requested the West Bengal Government to give land for it. Subsequently I have heard that land has also been given. In view of this, may I know what is your programme for installing that gateway exchange at Calcutta of Videsh Sanchar because this will not only help Calcutta but whole of north-eastern region, which is in a very bad shape about the international calls, including my present constituency Agartala and previous constituency Silchar?

SHRI K.P. UNNIKRISHNAN: I am grate-

ful to the hon. Member for raising this vital question. Probably since busy as he is always, he must have missed reading newspapers because it came almost in headlines when I went to Calcutta and had announced that these should be made available in this very financial year itself and work is in progress.

[*Translation*]

Post Office Facility in Gujarat Tribal Areas

*515. **SHRI CHANDUBHAI DESHMUKH:** Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of tribal villages in Gujarat which are without post offices; and

(b) the target fixed for providing post office facility in these areas?

[*English*]

THE MINISTER OF SURFACE TRANSPORT AND MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI K.P. UNNIKRISHNAN): (a) and (b). A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT

(a) and (b). In Gujarat, there are 4980 villages covered under Tribal Sub Plan. In addition, 554 villages have been identified as being in pockets of tribal concentration. Taking into account both the types of villages, post offices are at present functioning in 1605 villages, leaving a balance of 3929 villages.

At present, the proposal is to open post offices in 10 more tribal villages.

[*Translation*]

SHRI CHANDUBHAI DESHMUKH: Mr. Speaker, Sir, hon. Minister has stated that the postal distribution facility is not available in 554 tribal villages. It takes 10 to 15 days for