

# ARE YOU LISTENING

T.H. CHOWDARY

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN



# STORES

PUBLIC TELEPHONE  
AVAILABLE  
పబ్లిక్ ఫోన్



Handwritten signature in blue ink, possibly reading "L. J. ...".

Dedicated to the innumerable telecommunications workers,  
telephone users and people in Ahmedabad, Bombay,  
Pune and Andhra Pradesh who inspired me.....

Are You Listening ?

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T.H. Chowdary



1990

**BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN**

Kulapati K.M. Munshi Marg

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## FOREWARD

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Scientific and technological inventions are making ever-more effective and efficient variety of communications media while broadcast radio and television enable one to many, one-way communications, telephone enables any person to communicate with any at his will and comfort and convenience at any time. The telephone networks are worldwide and globally interconnected transcending national boundaries, bridging oceans and crossing deserts and icy wastes. The profound longing and hope of

## वसुधैव कुटुंबकम्

(all the world is one family) can be realised by wisely managed telecommunications networks in all the countries of the world. In the affluent countries telephone service is universal and is becoming the basis for a variety of information and knowledge services. Computers becoming ever so small in size, ever so fast and powerful in processing and increasingly affordable for many, are getting linked together and intercommunicating with one another over telecommunication networks. This synergy of computers and communications opens the prospect for people anywhere, access to the world's store-houses of information and knowledge, enabling us to realise the invocation:

आ नौ भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विभ्रतः

(let noble thoughts come from every side).

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All of us are looking forward to the establishment and growth and development of a communications network over which our people would be able to freely converse, exchange text and not very long from now, see

one another too. Sri. T.H. Chowdary besides being an eminent telecommunication engineer has been a people-sensitive manager. He has held several positions of responsibility in national and international telecom organisations in several cities and states. So his experience and endeavours, initiatives and innovations in transforming traditional rule-administering entities into problem-solving and need-fulfilling enterprises would be of interest for all practitioners of communications and their managers. Sri. Chowdary has been associated with the Bhavan for over two decades. He has been contributing to the Bhavan's Journal. It is therefore with great pleasure that the Bhavan is publishing Sri Chowdary's book "Are you Listening". The ideas and questions in the book are addressed to not only telecommunication people in Government, but to all those who desire that every service should be people-oriented.

S. RAMAKRISHNAN  
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Bombay  
May 20, 1990.

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## TRIPURANENI HANUMAN CHOWDARY

Born in a farmer's family in Angaluru, Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh, in 1931, Tripuraneni Hanuman Chowdary had his high-school education in Gudivada, the Taluk Headquarters and university education in Loyola College, Madras, and the College of Engineering, Guindy, Madras, graduating in Telecommunications in 1952. He joined All India Radio in that very year and then switched over to the Posts & Telegraphs Department (now the Department of Telecommunications) into its Indian Telecommunications Engineering Service (ITES) through an all-India competitive examination conducted by the Union Public Service Commission. He held several executive, operational, planning and managerial posts in Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Pune and Hyderabad. He was in the P&T Directorate twice, once as Assistant Chief Engineer and then as Deputy Director General. In April 1987 he took the plunge, ending his position as a Government officer, to serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the Public Sector Enterprise - Videsh Sanchar Nigam (India's Overseas Communications Corporation), retiring from it in October, 1989.

Influenced by his social reformer grandfather's (Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary, in whose honour a stamp was issued by the Government of India and whose statue adorns the Tank Bund in Hyderabad) literary writings and movements, then by Marxism and Upanishadic and Vedantic Philosophy, his has been a restless spirit of service. Making telecommunications more extensive, improving their quality, making them oriented to meet customer's needs and responsive to their demands, involving the customers and people in the management, ever taking initiatives and introducing innovations with the aim of rendering service and not merely administering rules, he has come to be viewed as an extraordinary person, often appearing to be rule-breaking, but ever getting vindicated by new rules and new instructions based upon the changes already introduced by him. He has written over thirty technical papers in national and international journals and several hundred articles, essays, stories and plays with telecommunications and electronics as the theme. He was given the L.V. Ramaiah Award for the year 1988, for distinguished public service through telecommunications. He is the President of the Institution of Electronics & Telecommunication Engineers (IETE) 1989-90, for the building up of which he has laboured for

## PREFACE

For the last four decades, telecommunications in India are suffering from inadequacy in quantity and quality. As more and more prosperous people and businesses and enterprises are emerging as a result of our planned economic development, telecommunication services under the erstwhile Posts & Telegraphs (P&T), and now under the Department of Telecommunications (DOT), being administered according to rules contained in more than a dozen code-books dating back to more than half a century, have become unequal and irresponsible to the needs of the customers. Persons in Government service would seek a career, and conformance to rules is the safest to practise. Although one sees that as life is changing and as new situations are arising, rules codified in a different era and under a different usage pattern are now no guide and are even irrelevant, few would take initiatives to render service when rules and precedents and practices are not there or are ambiguous. They are apt to make references to higher and higher authorities for whom they become cases for disposal rather than the initiation of a new service to meet a new need. The P&T has been recruiting excellent engineers into its Indian Telecommunications Engineering Service (ITES). It is a matter of amazement that all their brilliance as engineers and technical persons has not been able to forge a dynamic organisation and practices designed to meet customer needs. The reason appears to be that there has been no realisation that management is different from administration of rules, especially the management of a utility service like the telecommunications, so crucial a consumption element for the efficient and effective conduct increasingly of every enterprise. Even if management training is given I wonder how, while remaining as part of a civil service and as a Government Department, a totally customer-oriented and problem-solving management is possible.

From my college days, I have been having a questing spirit. It has very much to do with my forebear, Kaviraju Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary, who was iconoclastic, a social reformer and a rebel against formalised religion and social practices. Contacts and association with Communists in my youth and in college further sharpened my social conscience. Even in the DOT, I had the inspiring leadership of great enablers and achievers like Shri J.R. Sengupta, who is no more, Shri D.F.D. Joshi, Shri K.D. Vaidya, and two IAS Directors-General of the P&T, Shri J.A. Dave and Shri S.K. Ghosh, both of whom are no more. I have been a voracious reader of politics, economics and social philosophy

over a decade and a half. He is a worker for the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and the Chairman of its Hyderabad Kendra, establishing schools and organising cultural, literary and other activities for it. His work in telecommunications took him to over thirty countries, ranging from the U.S.A., U.S.S.R., China, U.K., and France to Mauritius, Guyana and New Zealand. He was Governor on the Board of Governors of the International Telecommunications Satellite Organisation (INTELSAT), Washington, and a member of the Executive Council of the International Maritime Satellite Organisation (INMARSAT), London. He worked as a Senior Expert in Guyana for the International Telecommunications Union.

In this volume, he recalls some of the adventurous deeds he undertook in furtherance of the objective of making telecommunications people-oriented, need-fulfilling and problem-solving.

*"I shall be telling with a sigh  
somewhere ages and ages hence  
Two roads diverged in the woods and I  
I took the one less travelled by  
And that has made all the difference  
- Robert Frost*

and history. I have come to the conclusion that if one has not made money, if the Government is not put to loss, and if the customer's cause is advanced, the breaking of irrational rules may be a technical violation of civil service conduct, but a socially desirable and necessary initiative, required in every right-thinking, service-oriented officer. I very much remember the advice given by the late Sir S.V. Ramamoorthy, ICS, to a new entrant into the service: "*Don't break a rule. Neither should you seek one where it doesn't exist.*" While I have very scrupulously followed the latter part, I had to very often twist or break or disregard irrational, irrelevant, or invalid rules, taking the precaution, however, of reporting my actions to the higher authorities. In my perpetual quest for customer-oriented and problem-ameliorating practices, I had taken many initiatives, bold in their time and apparently very ordinary a decade thereafter. I have the satisfaction that many of my "*unruly*" actions and decisions have later on become rules and prescribed procedures. A list, not a very exhaustive one, of the initiatives and innovations that I indulged in, can be seen in the Appendix.

This book narrates some of the actions that I have taken over a period of 37 years since the 10th of October, 1952 when I first entered into the service of the Government of India in the All India Radio in New Delhi, and later in the DOT which I joined in September 1956. Working alongside Mazdoors, Technicians, Wiremen and Cable Joiners in the telephone installations in Calcutta, and in the Railway Electrification Project (Rourkela to Kharagpur via Jamshedpur), and planning, operating, maintaining and managing the telecommunications systems of cities and States, and then India's international telecommunications in the final phase of my service, has been a profoundly exhilarating, rewarding and satisfying job. The events that I have narrated necessarily bring in some of the persons who were either facilitating or frustrating my actions. I have not been very generous in describing the attitudes and actions of the frustrators, for, twice in my career have the manipulations of these people led my actions to the scrutiny of the Public Accounts Committee, in the sequel of which I had come out unscathed.

I believe that the narrations in this book would not only primarily benefit all officers in Telecommunications, but would also be of general and path-breaking interest to everyone in Government service with a social conscience and determination that a Government Servant is a servant of the people and not their master, that Government is an instrument of Society to do good to the governed, and that even if ill-paid,

a Government Servant has much larger opportunity to do good to the people, especially when one remembers that in developing countries, Governments, at least in the initial decades, concern themselves with several, often too many, aspects of a citizen's life and striving.

I am working upon a companion book, expounding as to how telecommunications in India had become inadequate, and proposing how they should be restructured. I have the pleasure of having participated in the endeavours to refashion the telecom organisation through memoranda, through talks, and through articles and papers. I believe that a glorious future and a tremendous transformation awaits, in fact, is in being, for Indian telecommunications. It is said that those who do not learn from history are doomed to relive it. The doom can be avoided by definitely learning or being acquainted with some part of the story of my experience in Indian telecommunications. It is in this spirit that I have written this tract and am writing the other.

There is one person owing to whose indefatigable industry and total devotion this book has been possible. It is Shri S. Mahesh, my Personal Secretary in the Videsh Sanchar Nigam. He has taken dictation for hours at a stretch. He has been able to transcribe the dictations without the need for a single correction, sometimes rephrasing and even using better expressions than myself. His work has been greatly facilitated by that modern contraption, the "*WordProcessor*", the use of which I am insisting upon in every office. The usual office work itself has been requiring him to work on every Saturday and Sunday and stay upto 8 p.m. at least. But, for this work, many have been the nights when he stayed well past 10 p.m. May his tribe increase!

My wife, Mani, has silently suffered my addiction to work. The loneliness I have inflicted upon her by depriving her of my company throughout my career, has been great, but being of indomitable spirit, she has understood and respected my commitment to work, concentrating herself on the upbringing of my two sons, the elder, a doctor married to another doctor, and the younger, an engineer-businessman, married to a lawyer. She encouraged me in writing this book. In the later stages, she insisted that I must complete this as a fitting finale to the hundreds of articles that I have written, the scores of talks that I have delivered, and the dozens of memoranda that I have composed in defence of my actions, in furtherance of the cause of taking telecommunications to the people, and in trying to transform the structure of Indian telecommunications.

Sri S. Ramakrishnan, Executive Secretary of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan graciously suggested that this work of mine should be published by the Bhavan. His suggestions are almost commands to me for his total devotion to the Bhavan is what inspires me to work for the Bhavan. I am grateful to him for making this book a Bhavan's publication. This further binds me to the Bhavan, its causes and activities for inspiring our countrymen to noble deeds.

Lastly, I hope that my young colleagues, with all the technical talent that they have, will also have the wisdom to become leaders, transformers and achievers - the achievement of universal, affordable telephone and information services for the people of India.

Hyderabad,  
May 15th, 1990.

T.H. CHOWDARY

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*"The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew".*

- Abraham Lincoln

## TELEPHONING THE RURAL AREAS OF ANDHRA PRADESH

Till the first few years of Independence, telephone service was established only if it was remunerative. Even if a Public Telephone was to be installed in a town or a village, its capital cost and the annual recurring expenditure (including, depreciation and interest on capital) was calculated, and only if the revenues were more than the annual recurring expenditure, would the Public Telephone or Telephone Exchange be installed. However, as the Five-Year Plans progressed, and as the voice of the rural people through their representatives in legislatures and Parliament became more and more demanding, policies were adopted to provide Public Telephones, with population, backwardness, inaccessibility (hilly areas) and tribal habitations as criteria for opening a Public Telephone or Telephone Exchange in the rural areas. Of the more than thirty years work in tele-communications that I have put in, the one that has given me utmost satisfaction, and which would be remembered by me and the beneficiaries for long, is the very rapid establishment and extension of the telephone network to the rural areas of Andhra Pradesh. During my five-and-a-half years tenure (1978-83) in Andhra Pradesh Telecommunications, about 700 telephone Exchanges were opened in the State, and over 30% of its villages were telephoned. The latter figure is in contrast to less than 10% of India's villages that have a telephone. Andhra Pradesh stands first in the country in this respect (the exception is Kerala, whose population spread is a continuous sprawl, and where there is hardly any separation between one populated area and the other). Of the over 13,000 telephone Exchanges in the country, more than 2,000 are in Andhra Pradesh. Of course, these high percentages are nowadays militating against further telephoning of the State.

Coming from a farmer's family in a poor but well-educated village in Krishna District of Andhra Pradesh, and having myself engaged in farming operations till I left the engineering college, I knew what a great

boon a telephone would be in the villages. As soon as I took over as the General Manager, Telecommunications of Andhra Pradesh, I visited the Headquarters of every Telecom Division and talked to all ranks of telecom persons from Linemen to Divisional Engineers, placing before them the objective of rapidly and zealously implementing Government's policies for telephoning the rural areas. We had set out targets, Sub-Division and Division-wise, with the aim of creating a Telecommunication Division for every revenue district i.e., an increase from 12 to 26 Divisions in five years. The Census was taken as the basis, and every village that qualified according to the Government policy for a Public Telephone, irrespective of loss, was identified. Now the question before us was where should the Public Telephones be placed? It involved a lot of open-wire line construction (telephone posts, iron brackets, galvanised iron wires and insulators). The average length of line to be constructed was, in the initial stages, very long, because there were few Exchanges. But if the Exchanges went on increasing, the average length of line construction would come down. So, the objective dictated by economics was to stimulate the demand for more and more Telephone Exchanges in the rural areas. If Exchanges on a remunerative basis could not be opened, then we could go in for Public Telephone line concentrators. The technically available concentrator was no different from the MAX III (a class of Rural Exchange) which, in the first instance, was designed as a Rural Exchange. So, the thing was to install a MAX III as a concentrator, and while it reduced the length of the open-wire line to be constructed and got justified on the basis of policy-satisfying population, it could also be utilised for giving telephone connections, revenue from which would reduce the unremunerativeness of the whole system. The clear perception of this principle enabled us to have an economic system-design for each revenue district.

In order to get as many paying users as possible, the telephone persons were lectured, either in person or through newsletters and house journals, the whole concept and the part that everyone of us had to play. Persons in the lowest ranks viz., Linemen, Telephone Inspectors and Operators, were all enthused and, indeed, were exhorted to fan out into the villages, talk about the benefits of telephones and get applications for telephone connections. For doing this extra-ordinary work, they were paid honorarium. The villagers themselves were surprised that while in

earlier times they had to petition several times and in groups and wait for long to get a telephone, public or private, now the officials themselves were soliciting applications! We also met with the Sarpanchs, MLAs and MPs, and requested them to put in applications and also help us in several ways in support of our construction, maintenance and operation programmes. We had explained the limitation of the network that we were putting in, but made it clear that unless a beginning was made, there was no question of any improvement. Just as the top of a canal bank, unmetalled and unpaved, starts off as a "bullock-cartable" road and, then, with the passage of time and the insistence of the people is upgraded into a metalled road, then a tarred road, and finally widened, so would the elementary telecom network that we were establishing, be upgraded in course of time, as its usage and benefits increase, and the people's pressure demands better and more reliable facilities. In the light of these initial explanations, the poor service that is usually witnessed in the rural areas, was not seriously complained of. But, requests were incessant for their upgradation, and many of them did get up-graded and were made better serviceable.

There used to be a terrible material shortage. Once it was the cast-iron sockets. At another time brackets were in short supply. Yet another time, it was galvanised iron wire itself. All these were of very low technology. They were all being procured by the General Manager (Stores) in Calcutta from sources in and around that city, and these were being allotted by the P & T Directorate to different telecom units on the basis of their demands and estimated requirement of quantities. I felt that as the availability was artificially depressed, it should be possible to make the sockets and the brackets from very low-class establishments. We invited and helped entrepreneurs to supply these. In a matter of two to three years, the shortages were thus overcome, and when the shortages persisted, we were not daunted, for local initiatives were used. RCC pipes were used in place of cast-iron sockets with a change in the construction method for placing the tube in the socket. When galvanised telephone posts were in short supply, we set up RCC pole-casting yards in Hyderabad, Nellore and Visakhapatnam, to feed the three regions of Andhra Pradesh. These RCC posts were cheaper than steel tubular posts, but difficult to transport. But if one depended only upon the easy way, then there would be no achievement. That was

why, since we were convinced that we were doing the right thing, we established these polecasting yards within our own powers with the help of our Civil Wing. When brackets were in short supply, we used wooden brackets, which were later replaced by mild-steel brackets.

The MAX IIs, which are the work-horses of rural telephony, were not allotted to us in the numbers that we wanted. In the first ten months of a year, we would not get many but we knew that there were so many States which would not fully utilise their allotments. So, in the months of February and March, we used to collect more than our allotment of the MAX IIs from the Indian Telephone Industries (ITI) which was only too eager to sell them, because it too, had sales targets. When there was the threat of insufficient budgets, we induced the villagers to contribute money to buy the Exchanges. This had an interesting sequel of an encounter with the Director-General, P & T, and the Communications Minister, which is narrated in the Chapter, "*Before the Public Accounts Committee*".

Many things militated against the proper working of the exchanges. The villages did not have electric power for long, and when it was available, the voltage used to go down to as low as 170 Volts. Power would not be available for sufficient duration to charge the batteries. The batteries would go on deteriorating. The equipments were located in rented premises, and these were houses with tiled roofs and sometimes, even with thatched roofs. Dirt and dust, humidity and heat, would freely enter. In another portion, the landlord would be cooking, and the smoke from his stove would also be coming into the Exchange. Carts, laden high with hay or other farm produce would get tangled with the overhead wires, snapping them, and the single Lineman in the area would be hard put to repair them, taking too long a time. To reach spare-parts and repair-men, especially technicians, would take long, because of transport difficulties. The enthusiasm for Public Telephones or Telephone Exchanges was so great that we had installed Exchanges even when there was no power at all, the Exchange running all the while on batteries with the need to charge them periodically. There were villages which could be approached (and the people of which insisted upon my going there to open Exchanges) only after an arduous journey - by rail, followed by road, then by boat, then by cycle and finally on a

tractor! That was in the forest agency areas of East Godavari and Khammam Districts. In the villages in the estuary of the Krishna and Godavari rivers, men and material had to be transported by boat, and all this was done with great pleasure and excitement, for the villagers used to greet us and treat us as great benefactors. In respect of every other service, whether it be electricity or bus or school, the villagers had to petition various ranks of Government officials, whereas here was Telecommunications, which was going to them to confer on them a facility! We wanted that for better performance, the Exchanges should be located in appropriate shelters, and that could only be in cement and concrete buildings. For this we required sites. We invoked the principle of "Bhoodan", i.e., donation of about 600 Sq.m. of land in a village, which was no great matter. Neither is its payment a burden for the Department. But this is a partnership between the people, who are the beneficiaries, and the Department (I have described the other benefits of this partnership in the Chapter, "*Involving People and Commemorating the Great*"). We had about 220 sites in villages donated for telephone Exchanges. There were instances of good landlords donating buildings even. Then, to make the Lineman really interested in the upkeep of the Exchange, we had to make him a partner in our prosperity, i.e., in the revenues earned. So, we allowed every Lineman in charge of an Exchange to book trunk-calls for those who did not have a telephone in their premises. A certain percentage of the revenue was given to the Lineman as commission. We taught the wife and other family members of the Lineman to book and put through trunk-calls, so that, when the Lineman went out to repair a line, this facility did not go unavailed. I got this idea from a story that one of the greatest telecom persons, the late Shri J.R.Sengupta, told me. It was in the 1930s. There was a manual Exchange in Kanpur and it was operated entirely by the members of a family: the wife, son and daughter took turns along with the operator. I did not ask him how they were all paid, but he was a man who knew how to pay them despite "rules". Later, the lineman and his family members were taught to book and deliver telegrams. Some persons in the Unions used to object to this and my way of dealing with them was to inform them that it was not at all compulsory for any telecom person to do any one of these things which are reported to be outside the rules. Only those who volunteered would be permitted to do such things. And which Lineman would not like to increase his earnings by doing these

extra jobs instead of whiling away his time? In the process, he was endearing himself to the villagers. We found that wherever this commission system was introduced, there were less outages of the line and the equipment, because the longer they worked, the more were the chances of more calls and, hence, larger commissions.

As the use of the Public Telephone or the Exchange increased because of better maintenance, the Public Telephones used to blossom into Telephone Exchanges, and the partially filled Exchanges used to be better filled up. However, all of them had to depend upon the operators in the nearby town for their so-called trunk-calls, for every call beyond 5 Kms., is called a trunk-call. The town operators were not so attentive, nor so sympathetic sometimes, and, therefore, the calls used to get delayed. That was the first complaint. Knowing that any call which fetched a revenue of less than Rs.4 or Rs.5 was incurring a loss (and this is up to 50 Kms.), we applied a technical solution, again as a response to a local challenge. We designed and fabricated equipment to permit direct dialling from the village Exchange into the nearby town's Automatic Exchange. Being less than 20 Kms, this came in the local call rate structure. Since travel up and down the distance would cost more than one or two rupees, whereas a telephone call of unlimited duration was costing only 40 paise, many people found it cheaper to have telephones. The demand increased, and so did the "fill" of the Exchange, i.e., its utilisation and, therefore, its remunerativeness. This required more circuits from the village to the town. That led to the placement of open-wire carrier systems (involving electronics) in the villages, requiring a higher level of skill to maintain. The town's people complained that if a villager made a call, he was charged the unit fee like a local call, i.e., untimed, whereas if they made a call, they had to go through an operator and pay as for a trunk-call. In a little while, equipment was designed or modified to permit both-way dialling, and that further led to the enablement of groups of Exchanges dialling to one another. Andhra Pradesh Telecommunications are pioneers in giving this facility to the village customers. There are over 800 village Exchanges in groups ranging from two to ten, which are able to dial among themselves. 50% to 60% of their telecommunication needs are thus satisfied instantaneously at very little cost. What an example this is of technology making things cheaper for the users! I am happy that this has enthused emulation, first, in

neighbouring Tamilnadu, and then in Kerala, and this practice is slowly spreading to other nearby States Karnataka and Maharashtra.

Another great adventure and unprecedented thing was the introduction of direct dialling i.e., Subscriber Trunk Dialling (STD) even from manual Exchanges. Everybody thinks that only if we have got an automatic Exchange, we can have STD. Operators in the country-side are very difficult to deal with, and are the most unionist. If they stop work or go slow, the customers will be thoroughly inconvenienced. Both to overcome this as well as carry more satisfaction to the customers, my colleagues were spurred to design and fabricate equipments which would facilitate outgoing STD calls to be made even from manual Exchanges. Customers wanting such a service were given instruments with dials. When a customer lifted the hand-set, the operator would ask, "Number please!". The customer would say "STD". The operator would use the appropriate calling cord to plug the caller into a jack, which extended him to trunk dialling equipment, from where the customer would get a dial-tone. The customer could then call anywhere in the country. Metering pulses would come from the Trunk Automatic Exchange (TAX) which gave him the call, and these would be registered in the subscriber's meter. First started in Eluru, it was extended to such big manual Exchanges like Kurnool, Tenali, Nizamabad, etc. This was an expedient till these large Exchanges were automatized, and when they were automatized, the equipment was recovered and re-installed in other Exchanges. We called it OADD - Operator-Assisted Direct Dialling. When papers were published on this development, Kerala also adopted this, calling it MSTD - Manual Subscriber Trunk Dialling.

This led to another interesting experiment. The output of trunk operators is quite low, because they have to prepare tickets, time the calls and note down so many things. All these are later used for the preparation of bills, where all trunk-calls have to be separately listed. This process is expensive. So, I had my colleagues design and fabricate equipment for what we called Metered Demand Service (MDS). This was introduced in such of those automatic Exchanges which were not brought on to the STD network. The customer would dial a particular code instead of the trunk-booking code "180", and say "MDS to so and so station". For example, from Vizianagaram to Visakhapatnam, the

operator would keep the caller on line and dial the distant subscriber's number on the single link or multi-link operator dialling circuits. When the called party answered, metering pulses would be automatically applied at designed intervals. In operation, such a call is no different from a local assistance call. The operator's output would go up four to five times. Even STD-barréd subscribers can utilise such a service. We used to make these relay plates in Andhra Pradesh. For this we had to buy relays from several sources, again an "unusual" practice. We had reported these ideas and practices to the Directorate in the hope that the Telecom Research Centre (TRC) would adopt these, and get the equipment manufactured on a large scale for adoption all over India. Unfortunately this did not happen, for, this was all "low technology" for the highly qualified, international-conference-and-seminar-participating "researchers". When I went to the Directorate as Deputy Director General, I tried to "standardise" all these, with a view to get them manufactured in the Indian Telephone Industries (ITI). There was a lot of cold-shouldering. Eventually, I appointed a Committee under my own authority, consisting among others, one of my Directors. The representative from the TRC was lukewarm, and the labour of this Committee never saw the light of day, especially because I had left the Directorate. It is a pity that the day-to-day problems of the field units are of no concern in the very high quarters. The running after and questing for hi-tech and glittering pursuits is condemning the "low-tech" field operations to inefficiency, dis-economies and customer dis-satisfaction. The proper course is that the General Managers must be specifically empowered and told that their problems should be solvable by themselves, and if they needed the assistance of some people from the TRC, the latter should be seconded to work with the General Manager who is solving the problem in his unit. We in Andhra Pradesh did not want any mighty help from anybody, because we felt that we too were engineers, equal to anybody else, excepting that we could not import some equipments or purchase some in the quantities we required. However, this principle has come to be slowly recognised indirectly when the TRC was split into two units. One is the Telecom Engineering Centre (TEC), which is supposed to address itself to operational problems without having to "research" and develop as the TRC would. But, here again, if the proper spirit is not there, it would lead to the creation of some more posts as in the past, without any achievement. Andhra Pradesh, then, Kerala and, then Tamilnadu and,

recently, Karnataka, are the only telecom units that have shown the vigour and the initiative to solve problems locally by locally developed equipments and practices. However, the highbrows in the Directorate and the TRC would dismiss all these as "non-standard". What is standard for them is inaction and imported, hi-tech systems, whether they perform in the particular situations or not. The over-centralisation in the Directorate and in the TRC, and the great love of many a person to take to easy recourse like making references, making suggestions, talking in assemblies and preferring to stay in non-operational duties like in the Directorate and the TRC, are what are corroding the service.

Around big cities like Bombay, Hyderabad and Delhi, upto a radius of 50-100 Kms., there are a number of small town and rural Exchanges, all of which have a very large community interested in making trunk-calls into the city. Some of these Exchanges are manual and some are MAX IIIs from which calls cannot be dialled because they were not planned, no transmission medium is available and traditional technology does not permit direct dialling from such Exchanges with pulse metering (of course, this has been overcome by local initiative in Andhra Pradesh). One solution we adopted before STD from manual Exchanges and group dialling from MAX IIIs were introduced (or even when available could not be implemented for some reasons), was the setting up of a separate trunk Exchange called RMTX (Rural Manual Trunk Exchange). The telecommunications in these big cities are entities separate from the rest of the telecommunications organisation in the States. The Hyderabad Telephones has a General Manager, and the Telecommunications, Andhra Pradesh, has another General Manager. The operators in the big cities are hard pressed to cope up with the trunk-calls emanating from their own customers. Calls coming from the rest of the State are not cared for. They are usually neglected, and when absenteeism is high the first positions to be depleted of staff will be those catering to these short-distance, non-home trunk traffic. As a result, while a call booked by a Hyderabad Telephones subscriber to Madras may be obtained in half-an-hour, a call booked by a village or a small town subscriber, just about 25 Kms., away from Hyderabad, into Hyderabad, may take several hours and in fact, may not materialise. This was leading to the criticism that it would take much less time to go to Hyderabad and come back than

to get a trunk-call. Any amount of orders and instructions would not solve this problem. Therefore, when I was the General Manager in Andhra Pradesh, we hit upon the idea of RMTXs to be established separately in the cities whose telecom administrations were entities different from the rest of the State. We had also taken the precaution that these RMTXs were not in the charge of the city telecom administration, but under the Divisional Engineer of the rest of the territory. The traffic comes from the Divisional Engineer's territory and it would be his responsibility to handle it expeditiously. Given an independent status, the RMTX would have to show its own efficiency and the surveillance was greater and therefore, the productivity higher. The result was far better satisfaction for the customers in areas surrounding a big city. The first such installation was in Vijayawada. Later it was put up in Hyderabad City also. Another attraction for this idea existed from the employees point of view also. Operators from the small towns had wishes to go and work in the main city. But, since these were two different administrative units, it just was not possible. But when the RMTX was opened in the jurisdiction of the officer in charge of the territory surrounding the city, the operators from that territory could be transferred to the city. This gave them a chance for four to five years of work in the city instead of having of for ever work in rural areas. The effective percentage of rural calls into and out of the city used to be less than 60%, but with the existence of the RMTX, they were hitting 80%. Calls were quicker to come through. How much I wish that this innovation was adopted with conviction and drive everywhere in India. When I went to the Directorate as Deputy Director General, we did issue a circular about the RMTX. But hardly was it implemented in any other State.

I am happy, and so are my colleagues in Telecommunications, Andhra Pradesh, that we are all considered as benefactors of the people. It is a great comfort, consolation, and pleasure for me that in Andhra Pradesh, many villagers, many publicmen, and the State Government officers have great affection for me. I am told that many are the occasions when Government Officers, dishing out the usual "no, no" to my sons, immediately dropped all objections when they knew I was their father and went out of their way to help them, very affectionately and reverently recalling some good that I had done to them, to their village

or to their relative. This is what I have been telling my colleagues in the Telecommunications. Let us render good service, let us be open, let us explain our limitations, and if we can establish our sincerity, then all faults, all shortcomings will be forgiven and we will be looked upon as well-wishers and benefactors of the people and there would be ways in which we and our families would be compensated. I know many an instance when by mentioning the name of Telecommunications, Andhra Pradesh, or its General Manager, many of my employees have obtained admissions in schools for their wards, employment in private companies, and discounts in many a shop. What greater satisfaction and recognition can there be for honest work? I have felt and I do hold that the establishment of telecommunications in the rural areas is not a purely commercial work. It is part of the developmental process, and that would succeed only with total commitment on the part of the providers and with the widespread involvement of the intended benefactors. The compensations of work in rural areas are intangible, just as the benefits of telecommunications in those areas are intangible. We cannot place monetary value on the love, affection and regard that people have for us, for giving them a beneficent service like telecommunications. That you are looked upon as a friend, as a well-wisher, and as part of the community, is in itself a great comfort and inspiration for better industry and initiative.

*"Let him have the courage to be impatient.... let him have the patience to be brave, teach him to have faith in his own ideas even if every one tells him they are wrong. Because only the test of fire makes fine steel...."*

*- Abraham Lincoln's letter to his son's school teacher.*

## WHERE SHOULD PUBLIC TELEPHONES BE PLACED ?

There are not enough telephones for all those who need them, and there are huge waiting lists for several years in almost all our towns and cities. Despite larger investments and more telephones being given year after year, the dearth would continue for the next two to three decades at least. How do those who do not have a telephone in their office or in their home make a telephone call when they need to make one?

Even when one has a telephone, if he is moving, shopping, or commuting, and wants to make a call, how does he make it? The shopkeepers may not allow him to make calls. In Singapore, where every home and office has a telephone, there are still about 35,000 Public Telephones. These help people on the move, away from their homes or offices, to make calls.

Our villages are not affluent, but they are being slowly drawn into economic exchanges with the rest of the country. Some people, especially those connected with development and the marketing of agricultural surpluses, do need telephones. Poultry and dairy are uplifting the economy of these areas. Besides, with the migration of the educated from the villages to the cities and towns, parents and children need to talk to one another sometimes. Accidents like fire, or emergencies arising out of ill-health, too, require immediate contact with the nearest town. An egalitarian society desires that the benefits of science and technology, in the form of telephones, should reach the rural communities also. The Government, therefore, has been extending the telephone facilities to village communities, irrespective of whether there is justifiable revenue or not, through a series of increasingly sufferable revenue deficits, and to ever smaller and remoter villages with every successive Five Year Plan. These Public Telephones, irrespective of whether they generate any revenue, have been placed, first, in all the villages which have got a Community Development Office, then in those which have a Police Thana, then

in those which have a population of more than 10,000 people, then in villages with a population of more than 5,000 people and then in the remote and inaccessible tribal areas in a place which, including a cluster of villages over a radius of 10 kilometres, has more than 3,000 population and finally, in every area of a hexagon of 5 kilometres side. In the rural areas, since there are few calls, and the calls generate little revenue, the maintenance is apt to be neglected. Because the telephone does not work when it is needed, people don't have faith in its use, which further depresses the revenues and increases the neglect. If the Public Telephone does not work, and if it is not used by the people, the purpose of the Government's capital expenditure in extending telephone to a village would be defeated.

Although hailing from a village and from a farmer's family, till 1978 I had worked only in the cities, in charge of city telephone systems. In 1978, I took charge of the entire telecommunications in the State of Andhra Pradesh, as the General Manager. In those days, there was more emphasis on village development, including provision of telephones, than in earlier years. Excepting half-a-dozen cities, most of the towns in Andhra Pradesh are really rural in the sense that they serve the surrounding rural communities, providing them markets for their agricultural produce, fertiliser, insecticide, agricultural machinery and tools, and acting as junctions for transport. Telephoning these areas is an exhilarating experience. In the cities, customers are apt to take the telephone service as a matter of right, and even if it is given, they would not feel any reason to be thankful. On the contrary, in the rural areas, people are more thankful even for the small benefits given to them, even if they be their rights. That is the nature of rural communities.

In Andhra Pradesh, irrigation and electricity are being extended to the rural areas. The farmers there are enterprising. Many have taken to poultry and dairying, especially in the coastal areas. People's participation in the political process and in the governance through their representatives is markedly high. They were demanding and getting roads and market-yards. The Chief Minister, Dr. Chenna Reddy, himself hailing from a rural agricultural family, was also enthusiastically promoting rural development. He conceived a great scheme of short-distance bus services around all big cities to go to the villages so that the villagers could bring their produce (vegetables, milk, fruits, eggs etc.) for sale in the markets. Another scheme was that every village should have a bus

coming to it at least once a day. This great rural development activity and my own social origin, as well as enthusiasm for the extension and improvement of telecommunications, generated a challenge - how soon and how well could the villages be telephoned? First, there had to be a Community Telephone, and then, if it worked well, may be many more people would take telephones in their own homes.

I addressed the telecom workers in every District and placed before them the perspective for the next five years. 500 to 1,000 villages must be given a Public Telephone every year. 100 to 200 new exchanges must be opened, and all these must be serviceable for the longest length of time. Telecom workers must go into the villages, contact the people and their representatives, bring petitions for a Public Telephone or for a Telephone Exchange, and those who brought in ten applications or more would be given honoraria ranging upwards of Rs.100. Those Telecom Sub-Divisions and Divisions which gave the largest number of Public Telephones, opened the largest number of Exchanges and gave the largest number of new connections, would be honoured. I told them that we had to excel what the Chief Minister had planned for the villages. The question to ask was whether it would be the bus or the telephone which would go to the village first. If materials were short, we had to improvise, I told them. If money was short, we had to raise it from the villagers themselves. If the allotments of Exchange were short, we would purchase the equipments from the sources if they were willing to give us. So, no excuses or shortages would be accepted as reason for not setting high targets and fulfilling them.

We prepared an analysis, tabulated the District-wise and Region-wise population, the number of towns and villages, how many of them had telephone Exchanges and public or private telephones, what percentage of villages had a telephone and what ought to be our plan for the next five years. There were regional imbalances as to the percentage of villages telephoned. Telengana (the erstwhile Nizam's dominions) had the least, followed by Rayalaseema. One of our objectives was to reduce this gap. The fact that, in the backward areas, the criterion for a public telephone, irrespective of revenue, was a population of 3,000, while it was 5,000 in the developed areas, was fully exploited, because the whole of Telengana and Rayalaseema were centrally recognised backward areas. To overcome the shortage of telephone posts, RCC Pole casting yards were set up in three regions (Nellore, Hyderabad and

Visakhapatnam). Wooden poles were also utilised. There was a tremendous surge of activity and 20 to 25% of the total number of Exchanges and Public Telephones opened in the country in the years 1978-83 was in Andhra Pradesh. The opening of more and more Exchanges reduced the length of line to be constructed to reach the un-telephoned villages. That meant the reduction of capital costs. If the Public Telephones worked well, more and more people would start using them. And, when they realised the benefits, the affluent farmers could be made to need a telephone in their own homes for their private use to enhance their convenience, comfort and, quite often, their status in the villages.

Wherever a Public Telephone was opened and it worked well, by about the third year there were demands from 10 to 15 persons for a private telephone. That meant a Telephone Exchange could be opened. For opening such Exchanges also, Government gave many relaxations, the chief of which was that we could incur a certain amount of loss for the opening of an Exchange, if the demand from that Exchange was above a certain number. Utilising this Government concession, more and more Exchanges were sanctioned, because more Exchanges meant lesser length of line for reaching the un-telephoned villages, as well as the entitlement of these Exchanges to an Engineering Officer, which facilitated their better maintenance. Quite a number of Exchanges which would ordinarily be reckoned unremunerative or loss-involving, got over both difficulties, because the cost of connecting them to the nearest town was not a cost element in the project, as the line and wire already existed for opening Public Telephones in those very villages. The extra cost was only on the Switching equipment and on the lines and wires within the villages. Ordinarily, the cost of junction line would be upwards of Rs.100,000, whereas the cost of the rural Telephone Exchange and 10 to 15 lines and wires was only about Rs. 40,000, and to prove its remunerativeness, not more than 15 to 18 subscribers would be needed. It could be justified from another angle viz., that the capital cost of opening long-distance Public Telephones as a matter of policy was becoming less because of these Exchanges. In fact, some of these Exchanges were a type of Contractor for opening Public Telephones in a group of villages. Giving private connections was incidental, and the revenues from them reduced the deficits to the extent of the revenues. Therefore, the whole concept of giving Public Telephones to the villages in fulfilment of Government policy was becoming easily realisable by the clarity in thinking and in

project formulation - cost would be least, new line length to be erected would be least; it would be so if there was an Exchange very near; the nearness would increase if the number of Exchanges increased; Exchanges would get justified because the cost of the junction to the nearest town had already been incurred while opening the Public Telephone and, therefore, could be excluded in the calculation of remunerativeness; if there were very few people wanting private connections, the Exchange could be justified on cost-effective basis for opening more Public Telephones and the revenue deficit would get reduced if such Public Telephone "Concentrators" also served private subscribers.

The Exchange that was available was the rugged electromechanical 25-line RAX i.e., about the minimum size available. The next one was the 50-line Exchange, capable of being extended by another unit upto 100 lines. Hardly any village would require more than a 50-line unit. Villagers hardly have any need to call one another on a telephone. That is, there are no local calls. Most of their calls are to the nearby towns which serve them or to other villages. If the distance is more than 5 kilometres, the calls are treated as Trunk Calls. The MAX III type of Rural Exchange was not ordinarily suitable to introduce direct dialling, because there were no meters to register the calls. If the village subscribers depended upon the town Operators to put their Trunk Calls through, there were great delays. In the small towns, the Operators are nearly the bosses. There is hardly anybody above them. Quite often, especially at night, the Operators just won't answer any calls, either sleeping or resting or attending to their own private chores. As more Public Telephones and Exchanges were opened in the rural areas, complaints mounted saying that the calls were getting delayed, and sometimes were only selectively put through. Users and subscribers were also complaining that the Public Telephones were ornaments, museum pieces, and were of no practical use. The advance rentals that subscribers paid were impositions without compensation. Panchayat Chairmen, Members of the Legislative Assembly, and even Members of Parliament, started voicing these complaints. I felt that this was all very good as, for the first time, there was a volume of opinion, of criticism, and of requests which were new and strident, and would require creative solutions.

The first aspect to be addressed was how could the telephone be more useful. We had to analyse where the calls were going from the village Public Telephones and Exchanges in the small towns. How could

these be automated? Analysis showed that 50% to 70% of the calls were within a radius of about 20 kilometres i.e., within their own Tehsil; about 80% to 85% within their own District and villages in the adjacent District. Up to 98% were within the State. If an Operator handled the call, upto 20 kilometres the charge would be only Rs.2. But the cost of handling and billing was more than Rs.4.50. So, on every call put through, the Department was normally losing Rs.2.50. There was an STD (Subscriber Trunk Dialling) tariff which said that if the calls were within a radius of 20 kilometres, there should be a unit fee and untimed i.e., like for a local call. This meant that in these Exchanges, there had to be meters to register the customers, calls. Then, it should be possible for calls to go out of the Exchanges and come into them. The 25 and 50-line Class III Exchanges had never before been used in this fashion. Engineering modifications were done to permit all these. So, straightaway, what has come to be known as "Group Dialling" was introduced. All the village Exchanges which were within 20 kilometres of a small town, could dial into the towns, and the town's people could dial out into the villages. If the villages in this cluster were all within 20 kilometres, every village could dial every other village through the town's Exchange. The latter had to be modified, new designs had to be developed and equipment had to be fabricated locally. For this purpose, a design group, as well as fabrication facilities were set up in Hyderabad. Usually, the officers would write to the Directorate. There would be no replies. But the attitude that we adopted was that if we were capable of doing it, we should do it. No new principle had to be invented either in rules. The policies already promulgated had to be creatively interpreted to establish a network which would meet most of the needs of the customers in the first instance. Group Dialling was introduced and extended in three phases. It was easiest for the village subscribers from the MAX III Exchanges to dial into town. It meant that while a villager calling into town had to pay only a unit fee and could talk for any length of time, if a townsman wanted to call the village he had to go through an Operator and have a Trunk Call. This led to criticism, and the criticism led to creativity by generating an urgency to design and modify the town Exchange. This was done.

In the second phase, the village Exchange and the town's subscribers could dial one another and these calls were charged as though they were local calls, because they were within 20 kilometres. We called this "STD". No rules were flouted. Then the villagers wanted to dial

other villages also which were within 20 kilometres of them. To facilitate this, the town's Exchanges were modified to permit transiting from one Exchange to another through them. This is the full-fledged Group Dialling scheme. All the engineering and equipment required had been developed and obtained locally. This accomplishment greatly enthused the engineers, enhanced their self-confidence and they started feeling proud that they were accomplishing something great, being appreciated by the customers. Clusters of Group Dialling schemes emerged in the entire State around the rural towns which had a Class II or Class I type of Exchange. Whichever villages had this Group Dialling facility were giving more value to the telephone users. Therefore, the demand for telephones went on increasing. When every subscriber had to book a Trunk Call and there was no semblance of any direct dialling, the demand was the least, and the threat of closure of the Exchange for want of connections, highest. But when Group Dialling facilitated the reaching out over several villages and to the town by just paying a unit fee, the demand increased. People were making more calls. If one had to depend upon the Operator, the calls per subscriber, per day ranged between 0.5 and 1. When direct dialling over a group of villages was given, it soared to between 5 and 12. The loss-involving Exchanges became "paying" ones.

This led to customer complaints. On an open-wire line, with iron wires, two or three junctions or trunk circuits to the nearest town could be given. This meant that no more than that many calls could be in progress. If the next man lifted his hand-set and dialled, he would get a "busy" tone. So the customers would say, "What is the use of this? All the time, all the lines are engaged!" little realising that since calls were no longer Trunk Calls charged every three minutes, they were talking longer. But we could not tell them either to restrict the calls or to cut down on speech. The answer was to increase the number of circuits. We could not go on adding more and more iron wire pairs, because the lines are weak and in any gale they would snap. Putting more posts and strengthening them would be quite costly. Moreover, these posts and wires were required for opening up more villages for telephony. So, we started putting 3-channel open-wire systems (in which, by application of electronic equipments, three telephone circuits can be obtained from one physical pair of wires). This was feasible if the iron-wires were no longer than 20 kilometres.

Traditionally, the 3-channel and 8-channel carrier systems were put on copper wires and used to connect towns to cities and cities themselves. Now, if this carrier telephony was to go into the villages, new equipments, involving use of electronics, had to go into the villages. This meant that newer skills also had to go there. The 3-channel systems were in short supply all over the country to the extent of thousands. But, the only way of removing the live customers complaints was to increase their facility. Therefore, Andhra Pradesh had to get more than its usual share of the 3-channel open-wire carrier systems. Such are the compulsions of development. Where there is no demand, you create a demand. When the facility provided is primitive, it would generate complaints, and to remove the complaints you have to upgrade the facility. So the whole thing is in a perpetual state of change and complaint and response. This can be handled only if one has a philosophy, an objective and a commitment. Otherwise, the traditional passivity is most peaceful and safe. Do not create any demand. If there is one, go on saying that there is no equipment. So, there is only one type of complaint and not several. But, if you give it, then you have several types of complaints - telephone services are interrupted; operators do not respond; bills are heavy; telephones are always engaged, and so on. The management of this was thrilling.

This led to another question. How do we increase the availability of equipment? When we were locally fabricating equipments required for Group Dialling, we needed lots of relays. First we started salvaging scrap. When they were exhausted, we collected all condemned equipments from the nearby States and re-conditioned them. They were insufficient. Then we encouraged a local entrepreneur to go into the production of relays. He started supplying us. He got orders from the ITI, too. The next question was how to get carrier equipments. We got the Andhra Pradesh Electronics Development Corporation interested in its production and made them seek the ITI's transfer of know-how. So, these challenges and shortages led me to address the larger question of increasing the production and multisourcing the production.

One of the most intriguing situations we had to face was the serviceability of the much publicised village Public Telephone. The villagers loved it, valued it, and, therefore, celebrated its debut in the village. Now, where do we place it? Traditionally in the Post Office. But Post Offices work only for a few hours, and many of them are entrusted

to extra-Departmental agents who work for a few hours and get a lumpsum monthly payment. Their working hours are related to the arrival and departure of a bus or train in the villages. The need to make a call or receive a call might, on the other hand, be at any time of the day or night. If any telephone call had to be made or received outside the working hours of the Post Office, there was an extra charge of a Rupee (called the late fee), and this Rupee would go to the pocket of the Post Master, because he was required to do "extra work". If there was a call meant for a villager, the Post Master would send a messenger to inform the villager, and collect another Rupee from the called party. In many cases, the "late fee" and the "messenger fee" would be as much as the cost of the Trunk Call itself, a depressant of calls.

There was another undesirable tendency. In the greed for collecting this late fee and messenger fee which went not to the coffers of the Government, but into the pockets of the Post Master, the Post Master was apt to declare the Public Telephone line to be out of order during his working hours, and say that it had become okay after the working hours, with a view to force a needy customer to place his call outside the working hours and thereby fill his pockets. Quite often, on incoming calls, his wife or some child was apt to say that the called party was not available, just because the extra Departmental agent was not in the house but was away attending to his other duties, he being a rich farmer or a tutor. This set me thinking. A Public Telephone which was placed at a very high cost and was bringing losses to the Department (by way of depreciation, interest and maintenance), and which was so highly valued, and of which much was expected by the villages, was becoming useless or less serviceable, because of its location. The extra Departmental agents were, in some regions of the State, from the higher strata of society. They would treat the telephone as though it belonged to them and deny its use to many sections in the society. In some cases, this was bringing in complaints from political quarters. When these were discussed in the annual conference of the General Managers and the Post Masters General, the response from the Post Office Section of the Department was very quick and characteristic: 'All right! We will increase the working hours of these Post Offices by two or more hours. Then the complaints may largely disappear.' I knew this was a trap. But, as no other General Manager was interested in this problem as they opened very few Public Telephones and were, perhaps, not much concerned with their good

working, I could not go on arguing, as it would be a nuisance. By the time the next conference was held, the evil consequences were clear.

The extra Departmental agents, for the extra two hours work they were doing, were to be given Rs.50 per month. Not only that, the Post Offices they were running were upgraded into Sub Offices. For so many Sub Offices, there would be a Head Post Office, and for so many Head Post Offices, there would be a Superintendent of Post Offices. How great is the genius of bureaucracy to utilise every opportunity for self-advancement! Firstly, hardly any Public Telephone was earning Rs.50 a month. And, because of the complaint that they were earning less as the working hours were less, these were increased, and the Post Offices with a Public Telephone were collecting Rs.50 from the Telecom Department. This meant that the Telecom Department would incur more expenses. What was worse was that while it was the telecom personnel who were extending the lines and incurring the capital expenditure, the benefits of promotion were going to the postal officials because of the upgradation of the extra-Departmental Post Offices into Sub-Offices and so on. While the Telecom Wing was struggling to get a few more engineers and Sub-Divisional Officers because of the extension of the network, the Post Offices and the postal officers were benefited by doing nothing. In fact, by increasing the losses of the Telecom Department by upgrading themselves, they were getting more Head Post Masters and Superintendents and new Postal Divisions! I raised this issue in the next conference of the General Managers and Post Masters General. But, the dominant perceptions, including the so-called Financial Advisers being postal officers, my objections and submissions were characterised as "inter-Departmental bickering". I did not make much headway by way of some guidance and change of rules from the P & T Directorate. This was insufferable. So I took the initiative.

I asked my telecom people to remove the Public Telephones from the Post Offices and place them in the village grocer's shop. In the towns also, I started removing them from the Post Offices and placing them in some shop just nearby. The rationale was like this. Every village with a population of more than 3,000, at least in Andhra Pradesh, has a grocer. Bigger villages, especially the prosperous ones, have even Hotels and small restaurants. The grocer shops and the restaurants were opening at about 6 O'clock in the morning and closing only at about 9 O'clock in the night. That is, they worked 15 hours a day,

as opposed to 4 to 6 hours of the Post Offices. These grocer shops and restaurants were owned not by the richest class, but by not so well-to-do classes. Unlike the rich classes, these grocers were not feudal, but service-oriented. In Andhra Pradesh these are mostly from the "Komit" sect. They are most obedient, never cantankerous, ever serviceable, and no village has more than four or five of such families. They were socially not dominant and, therefore, would not refuse to serve other castes. In the beginning, when we wanted to place these telephones in the grocer shops, the grocers were hesitant. They felt that all types of people would come to their shops, and their women folk might come under glare. We had to request them to try keeping a telephone. We said that from the time a call was booked till it came, it might take half-an-hour to one hour, and during that waiting period, the caller might buy beedies or cigarettes or some other items and, therefore, his sales might increase. Not only that, because of the telephone, he might attract more customers. We also explained that if a call came from outside, it would be very easy for him to send for the called party, because in villages, time hangs heavy, and any boy or girl coming to the shop or passing by or happening to be nearby could be prevailed upon to fetch the called party just by offering a toffee or a few peppermints. The children or other villagers who come to the grocer shop would deem it a great social service if they could fetch the wanted party to the telephone.

I arrived at this arrangement of using the village grocer for public telephone service from my childhood experience. My paternal grand parents are from a village, Boothimillipadu, in Andhra Pradesh. This village had no Post Office or Railway Station. The nearest railway station was in another village, Tarigoppula, about 4 Kms. away from Boothimillipadu. There was no road from Boothimillipadu to the railway station. Letters meant for the villages in Boothimillipadu used to be addressed to a grocer in Tarigoppula, which has a railway station and which also had a Post Office. This grocer used to receive all the letters and keep them with him. The villagers from Boothimillipadu had to come to this grocer in Tarigoppula for their groceries. Whenever anybody from Boothimillipadu came to the grocer, the latter used to hand over all the letters meant for Boothimillipadu to him for distribution there. Everybody, including the grocer, was benefiting from this arrangement and this was a kind of social service too.

Our Linemen and Telephone Inspectors had to do this type of social convincing, selling the idea to the grocers. After a lot of hesitation they agreed to let us place the Public Telephones in their shops. Soon, the grocers found that they were becoming important. They were becoming more popular, and their business also started increasing. Indeed, if a village had more than one grocer, the other grocers, not having a Public Telephone, started complaining that we were favouring one grocer against the others. In other words, the telephone, if put in a grocer's shop, was more workable and more useful than if it were placed in a Post Office. The callers had to pay no late fees and the called parties had to pay no messenger fees. Now, what was the grocer getting? Nothing! In sharp contrast, when the telephone was with the extra-Departmental agent, the Telecom Department was paying the agent Rs.50 more, and even then the extra-Departmental agent forced the customers to place the call outside the working hours in order to collect late fees. In some villages, when there were complaints that one grocer was being favoured against the others, we had to "quction" the Public Telephone, in the sense that we would place it with that grocer who guaranteed more revenue than the others and more working hours than the rest. The grocers and their families were taught as to how to keep records of telephone calls placed, collections to be made, accounts to be maintained, and money to be remitted. In return, they were getting nothing excepting good-will and increased sales. I used to invite the Ministers, Shri Brijlal Verma of the Janatha Party, and, later on, Shri C.M. Stephen of the Congress (I) to the State quite often and used to show them these "Grocer Public Telephones". They were convinced of the correctness of the new scheme.

Then started retaliation. The Post Offices felt that their importance was getting threatened. The postal officers thought that their promotions would be affected. They reported to the Directorate that we were removing the Public Telephones from the Post Offices. The Financial Adviser, who once was a postal officer, was lending them a sympathetic ear. That the Andhra Pradesh Telecoms and I were becoming more and more popular and were getting letters of appreciation, year after year, from the Director-General and the Ministers of Communications, apparently did not please some of the senior officers. We were standing first in the matter of expansion, as well as in service quality. So, explanations were called for from the Headquarters as to why we were doing this. At

the field level, the postal officers and the postmen were inciting the MLAs and MPs to write complaints that the public were being inconvenienced due to the removal of the Public Telephones from the Post Offices. In certain villages in the Rayalaseema area, the rich community to which belonged most of the extra-Departmental agents, felt its social position threatened. In a few villages where the public telephone was placed in the village tailor's or grocer's shop, it was burned. We developed another strategy of placing the Public Telephone in such caste-dominated villages in a Harijan's house. Our reasoning was that if a Harijan was attacked, or if his house was burned, or if the telephone line was in any way tampered, it would become a case of Harijan against the rest and, therefore, the Public Telephone would be safe. In other words, the Telecoms had to play what others would call, "politics". But, that was inevitable when development had to be taken to the villagers and certain dominant sections, as well as vested interests were getting affected. This required lot of guts and stamina and the ability to stand up to blackmail, political pressures and carping from within and without.

We used to disburse the pay of the telecom officials in the rural areas by Service Money-Orders (no Money-Order Commission). The Post Masters refused to book or deliver Service Money-Orders. My officers were aghast as to how to send the pay, because if the pay did not reach in time, there would be trouble from the Unions. My Accounts-Officers were also apprehensive, because their bosses in the P & T Directorate had their roots in the Postal cadre. (This itself is strange that engineers accept postal people as Financial Advisers, having veto power, and later on would not want telecom engineers from their own public sector enterprises and who belonged to their own cadre, in the Telecom Commission!). I was not to be deterred by this type of onslaught from any quarter. In fact, the postal officers encouraged the Postal Unions to mount an attack upon the telecoms (and me). I held several meetings of my telecom engineers and officers in the Districts. We produced a pamphlet, "Why This Furore About Public Telephones?" in Telugu language and had it distributed extensively in the villages among the people's representatives, politicians and the Unions. We explained that the Public Telephone was meant to be used by the people and not for creation of jobs or for improving the promotional prospects of Government Servants. We told them that the Public Telephone was an instrument of development and the people were entitled to its use for the longest hours

at the least cost. What could ensure this is the placement of the Public Telephone not in the Post Offices which work for a few hours only, and in which users have to pay late fees and messenger fees, but in the grocer shops. If any grocer discriminated, we would take prompt action. People were convinced that the telecom action was right. Nobody ever imagined that we would produce pamphlets, hold meetings and explain things directly to the public. Through newspaper interviews and advertisements, I smothered the reaction from the postal side. When I was asked to explain under what orders I was placing the Public Telephones in grocer shops, I counter-asked the Directorate to furnish me a copy of any order which prescribed that the Public Telephone should be placed only in the Post Offices. There, in fact, was no such order. So we did not have to answer any such charge-sheet. On the other hand, we started billing the Post Masters and the Superintendents for calls that emanated from their lines. In the towns and in every village where there was a Public Telephone still in a Post Office, we put a meter and the number of calls made was noted. We calculated the amount due to its usage. We compared that with the amount that the Post Offices were crediting to the telecoms. If there was a shortfall, I issued a bill. This had to be paid. If it was not paid, the telephones were disconnected. They had the choice of certifying that the difference was due to the service calls (on Government business) that they made. We wanted such certificates of the Post Masters to be countersigned by the Superintendents of Post Offices. None dared to do so. This incidentally put an end to another type of malpractice also.

Wherever in the towns there were ordinary instrument type of Public Telephones, the postal people would collect the money in advance from the caller, dial the call, and ask him to go and speak from a booth. The customer, after having made the call, would never care to go back and ask for a receipt. He would go away and the money would be pocketed by the Postal Assistant. It was the loss of this income that enraged them and incited them to launch an attack on me and telecoms when they were either billed, or when the Public Telephones were removed when the bills were not paid. In order to counter the generated complaint that people were suffering for want of Public Telephones in the Post Offices, we saw to it that the Public Telephone was installed in a shop just near the Post Office, opposite to it, and also put a big notice in the Post Office, or near to it if not permitted to be placed there, saying that the Public Telephone was available in so and so shop.

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Once the Public Telephones had been removed from the extra-Departmental-agent-operated Post Offices, there was no justification for the extra two hours working. As a result, the extra-Departmental Post Offices could not get the Rs.50 for the extra work, and they could no longer be classified as Head Post Offices. So the Audit started questioning and insisted upon down-grading all the extra-Departmental Head Post Offices. When they were down-graded, the number of Head Post Offices came down and the justification for the extra Postal Divisions and promotions fell through. Meanwhile, a very clever postal officer had utilised the fact that these Sub-Offices justified a "Packer" and a "Delivery Boy". So the extra-Departmental Post Offices which were upgraded as Sub-Offices at the cost of the telegrams by getting Rs.50 more per month, had started engaging two extra hands, each paid more than Rs.150 per month. This extra expense had also to be paid by the Telecom Wing, because in the combined Department, all the postal deficits were being met by the Telecom Wing. It meant that by the mere placement of a Public Telephone, which in any case the postal officers were saying was never working, the Postal Wing provided employment for two people and incurred an extra expense of Rs.350, taking it from the Telecom Wing! This could well have been the reason for the increase in telephone rates, because all the rentals and call charges have to cover the costs and the costs were to generate employment in the Post Office and give promotion to postal officers. We, therefore, started another movement to arouse the public against the high charges that they had to pay for their telephones, because the Post Office which was becoming profligate, had to be financially supported by the Telecom.

Thousands of petitions were printed and distributed among the public for signing and posting to the Government. The Members of Parliament from Andhra Pradesh were met with periodically and informed about all these facts. Letters were addressed to MLAs. Because of this openness and the periodical meetings - formal and informal - and the answering of all types of questions with absolute frankness, we could sustain our campaign of placing new Public Telephones invariably only in proper shops and removing the existing ones progressively from the Post Offices. It is a matter of great satisfaction and pride to me that although I was tormented and had to give explanations to the Directorate and face the onslaught of the Postal Unions, postal officers and even people who were ill-disposed to me for having the Public Telephones

removed from the Post Offices and placing them in grocers' shops, today it is a policy of the Department of Telecommunications that Public Telephones should be placed in grocers' shops! This order has come ten years after it was first put into practice by me in Andhra Pradesh and I was not a little amused when the (Engineer) Secretary to the Department of Telecommunications was claiming "fatherhood" for the new order without mentioning that this had already been done as a matter of policy on personal responsibility by me ten years ago in Andhra Pradesh. What matters to me is the result.

The Public Telephones in cities also have their own problems. There are coin-collecting type of boxes. Some of them are called "Guaranteed" ones, and are placed in hotels and shops. I had a lot of these in Ahmedabad, when I was the District Manager, Telephones, there. The rule was that the hirer would guarantee a minimum amount. Quite a number of people had found out a way of using them as private telephones. If the line is tapped skilfully or artfully, and an ordinary instrument is secretly used by the hirer, he could make calls without dropping coins. He could make free calls and make money also. Suppose a person guaranteed Rs.50 a month and the actual collection was, say, Rs.200, every month. The Phone Inspector would go and open the coin-box, count the coins, and the unscrupulous ones would credit, say, Rs.90 to the Department and share the rest equally between the guaranteeing private party and himself. There would be no complaint. The Department would be happy that it got more than the guaranteed minimum; the hirer and the official would be happier to make money - all happiness by robbing the Department. The telephone meter for the coin-box type of Public Telephone would indicate so many calls having been made. But the actual collection from the guarantor was much less. How would this be explained? It was true that the telephone meter would operate the moment the called party answered. For conversation to be two-way, the caller had to put coins in the box. But if he got a wrong number or if he recognised the voice at the other end to be that of a party that he didn't want, he would not put in a coin. So the number of metered calls would be more than what was actually paid for. This excuse was utilised by the unscrupulous guarantors and Phone Inspectors to pocket the money. In worse cases, the guarantor would put a parallel instrument on the line before it entered the coin-box. He would keep it for himself. Whenever he made a call, because it was not connected to the coin-box mechanism, he could talk without putting any coin. So, the Public

Telephone lines became private property and without any rent to the Department.

I discovered this during my intensive inspections, as well as because of my public involvement with the citizens of Ahmedabad. Some people used to come and give me the names of the unscrupulous hirers, as well as the Telephone Inspectors. I caught a number of them red-handed. Out of this I evolved a new principle. We would hand over the key of the instrument, as well as the coin-box to the hirer himself. He had to pay me for every call that was registered in the telephone exchange. My argument was that the instrument was placed in his care, and therefore, he was responsible for every call. If somebody went away without putting the coins, it was his duty to prevent it. If it was due to a wrong number, he could put in a claim to us and we would give a rebate after investigations. This was fiercely resisted by a large number of people. In fact, one of them happened to be the manager of a restaurant chain, and every one of these restaurants had these Public Telephones serving private parties and also generating money for him. He knew my Minister (Mr. H.N. Bahuguna at that time), and he wanted to complain about me to him. I was not the usual Government servant. I was doing all these things openly, and also publicising them. So, I took the initiative. As soon as the Minister came to Ahmedabad, I met him and told him that he could expect so and so to come to him and complain against me, and told him the whole story. As expected, the proprietor of the restaurant chain wanted to meet the Minister. The Minister straightaway told him that he knew the whole story and there was no need to meet him and what I was doing was correct. The Directorate said that I was flouting rules by giving away the instrument and coin-box keys without orders. In such cases my reply was very simple. Would the Directorate want me to stop the practice? I would announce it to the public and also place it on record so that the auditors also would be aware of it. The Directorate never asked me to withhold my practice as the dangers were obvious.

While in Pune (1974-76), I had to find a solution for another vexing problem. While the Public Telephones that were in private premises like hotels could be taken care of by the guarantors both against misuse and for prompt restoration of faults, what would happen to the coin-collecting type of Public Telephones that were placed in Railway Stations, Bus Depots, hospitals, colleges etc? The coins that are collected

are always an attraction for vandals, who would like to tamper and pilfer the coins. Since these are used by several persons, often uninformed and unfamiliar as to how to use them, the Public Telephones are quite often mishandled. If the coins are put and there is no speech or other malfunctioning, people bang against it and kick it, and in anger may even cut off the wires and go away. Unless these are put under surveillance by motor vehicle-mounted telecom officials, to ensure their working most of the time is very difficult. The instrument itself is not robust. Very often, the coins get stuck up and the telephone is rendered out of service. Who would report against it? Public property is nobody's. It would be restored only when the repair men or maintenance men inspect it.

I had to go to Bombay very often when I was the District Manager of Pune Telephones. At the Pune Cantonment Railway Station, I used to stand and observe the use of the coin-collecting type of Public Telephone. Many people were losing money both by way of coins getting stuck up as well as by way of getting wrong numbers. They would express their anger by banging against the instrument. I called one of my enterprising Sub-Divisional Officers and asked him: "Why don't we put one of our Linemen and an ordinary instrument and operate the Public Telephone? The ordinary instrument is much less prone to mis-operation than the coin-collecting type." But, this solution was difficult because we could not keep our people there round-the-clock. The Union would object to their being posted like that. Moreover, if there was misappropriation, there would be trouble for us. Together, we struck upon the idea of getting some disabled person sponsored by the Rotary Club or such other organisation, to look after the Public Telephone. We would give him an ordinary instrument. We would also continue the coin-collecting type of instrument. The disabled person whom we would call an Attendant, would be allowed to keep 10 paise for every call that was made. He would keep a register, ask the caller to enter the number he wanted, but dial the call himself. After satisfying himself that the right number was obtained, he would hand over the handset to the caller. We implemented this right away without seeking anybody's orders. We kept a Suggestion Book. We encouraged people to write to us. The Sub-Divisional Officer and the Junior Engineer themselves made frequent visits to the place and interrogated the users. Every survey revealed that people were very, very happy. The Attendant was giving us a feedback. We took a census of the calls and found that if there was an

Attendant from about 6.30 in the morning to about 9 in the night, there would be about 90% satisfaction, as it was during this period that 90% of the calls were being made. For the rest of the time, in any case, the collecting type of Public Telephone was there. We compared the amounts that should come to us as indicated by the number of calls registered in the telephone meter in the exchange on this public line and the actual amount that the disabled person was crediting to us. We found that he was recording some calls as wrong numbers. We explained to the Attendant that we were also monitoring the calls and would know the extent of wrong numbers in the telephone system. We could at best give him an allowance and not more.

We found that the Attended Public Telephone at the Pune Railway Station was very well received. We put up a big notice describing its working, and requesting users to write or call us and give their reactions. The Press and the public and the intelligentsia commended us and wanted that this should be extended to other places, which we started doing. Once, the then Communications Minister, Shri Shankar Dayal Sharma, (1987-92) who is now the Vice-President of India, came to Pune to inaugurate an Exchange. When he was going back, I showed to him this Attended Public Telephone and the appreciations that were recorded in the note book kept there and the notice itself. He interrogated the Attendant in the presence of a large number of persons. He was thoroughly satisfied and convinced that this was the right way and this type of Public Telephone should be opened at important places. He went to Delhi and told the then Director-General, P & T, about what he saw, and desired that what was done in Pune should be done everywhere else in the country. The Director-General rang me up faulting me. He asked me as to who gave me the authority to give 10 paise to the Attendant and why I opened it without the Directorate's sanction. I told him that I was the Head of a Circle. I was in charge of delivering service and I was the Manager, and what was right could and should be done by me. So I did it. On the question of payment of the 10 paise, I quoted certain rules in the rule books and said I was not violating any rule. Then he asked me why I did not inform the Directorate. I told him that in the monthly letters that I wrote to him personally, I had mentioned this not on one occasion, but on several occasions, and I was sorry that he didn't read them, and if he did read them that it didn't register. He then called off in an angry mood, suggesting that he would ask for my explanation and so on. But, within a few days, I was surprised to receive a general order

instructing all General Managers to open such Attended Public Telephones, and give not 10 paise but 20 paise as commission to the Attendants! On receipt of this order, I wrote back to the Director-General saying that I was happy that there was a lot of validity in the old saying that "if never rains, but it pours". I wrote that when I was giving 10 paise as commission he was questioning me as to under what authority I was giving this, but now he was giving 20 paise out of 50 paise as commission! Since then, it has become a rule-allowed practice to open Attended Public Telephones. Not only that, General Managers started competing with one another to open as many Attended Public Telephones as possible.

When Shri C.M. Stephen became the Communications Minister in 1980, I had occasion to explain this incident to him. I further suggested that apart from grocer Public Telephones, in the cities we should give these Attended Public Telephones to the physically disabled persons, which we were already doing in Andhra Pradesh by getting them sponsored by the Rotary Club and other philanthropic organisations, which were even building booths for them, and in order to supplement their income these physically disabled persons were even given some capital advances and grants so that besides putting through calls they could sell cigarettes, tooth-paste, etc.

Reverting to the rural telephone scene in Andhra Pradesh, another practice initiated deserves to be mentioned. Every Public Telephone in a village Post Office also acted as a Telegraph Office. It was called "PHONOCOM". If anybody went there he could hand over a telegram. The Post Masters would read it out to the nearest Telegraph Office from where it used to be handled by the telegraphists. So the postal officers went on saying that the public were being deprived of the telegraph facilities because of the Public Telephones being removed from the Post Offices. This was anticipated and tackled. We taught the grocers to do whatever the village Post Master was supposed to do in regard to these telegrams. Besides, we led our Linemen in charge of telephone Exchanges in the rural areas to involve their families in the telecom business. Why should they themselves not act as the Public Telephone and Phonocom office? The family members of the willing Linemen were assembled in places and given training as to how to book and charge for telegrams and deliver them in the village. They were remunerated for this. The Linemen in charge

of the telephone exchanges have always telephones for themselves. We authorised them to book Trunk Calls and receive them and call the wanted parties. We gave a commission by way of honoraria. This produced excellent results, because this commission was extra remuneration for them. This would go on increasing if the telephone line and Exchange worked better and for longer hours. So the Linemen had a stake in seeing that the junctions to the nearest town worked well. There were many instances when a Lineman had to go away from the Exchange. On such occasions, his wife or other family members would book the Trunk Calls and put them through. There were instances in some places where they were earning Rs.50 to Rs.100 extra per month. This was honest earning, out of their own sweat and toil, and net ill-gotten gain. In the beginning, the Unions were opposed to this. But the beneficiaries disregarded the Unions and said that they were doing this work voluntarily. The Management also made it very clear that only those who were willing would be given training. But, if there is an opportunity, which Government Servant would not like to earn money honestly instead of dishonestly?

All these practices used to earn a lot of good-will and very great esteem for me. Telecom people, because of extended service, improved service and service-orientation came to be esteemed by the public and treated as friends of the people. In Ahmedabad, the Socialists and Communists, the Bharatiya Jana Sanghis called us the "People's Telephones". In Andhra Pradesh, every political party used to respect us. I remember a number of tribal villages in Andhra Pradesh where we opened Public Telephones and the chiefs insisted that the Public Telephones should not start working until I myself came. In one case, in order to reach a tribal village, I had to travel first by train, then by jeep, then by boat, then by bicycle and bullock cart, and finally on foot. This remote village was in East Godavari District in the Bhadrachalam forest area. In another tribal village in Khammam District, the tribals donated land and wanted an Exchange to be constructed. It was in the month of March, and as I could not be present everywhere, I wanted to have it inaugurated by a Lambadi woman Doctor of Khammam town. But the tribals would not have it. In the event, it could be inaugurated only in April. This village could be reached only by bullock cart and a number of tribals from the village brought a very gaily decorated bullock cart to lead me to their village. The first call was made to a Lambadi Doctor kinswoman in Khammam.

These incidents show that in the rural areas if we are to extend telephony, it has to be out of social commitment and with a resolution that we would apply solutions immediately to the different varieties of needs and problems. If this is done, telecom persons will be greatly respected. Many years later, in 1989, when Sir Bryan V. Carsberg, Director-General, Office of Telecommunications of the Government of United Kingdom came to India to deliver the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Telecom Lectures in Bombay and Delhi, he was asked as to how the British Telecom Workers felt after privatisation, after they lost their Government status. His answer was quick, unambiguous and surprising to the listeners, but not to me. He said that all of them felt greater satisfaction and pride than when they were Government servants. Asked to explain, he said that since the service was improving, customers were showing more respect for British Telecom employees, and that was measurable and they felt it. That is why the British Telecom workers, after privatisation, had a higher self-esteem.

I felt the same in Ahmedabad, where, before I went, it was a shame to be called a telephone man. Within six months, when we were coming up and up and service was picking, the telephone persons were proud that they belonged to Ahmedabad Telephones. The citizens respected them and many were the acts of affection and recompense that satisfied customers bestowed upon me and my men. Even in Andhra Pradesh, for the very many Welfare Centres that were established for telecom workers, the local citizens and their organisations donated sewing machines, typewriters, radios and television sets, because they genuinely felt that the telecom persons were now striving better, were more communicative and more honest. It was the transparent sincerity that invited affection and esteem.

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"Oh God! Save me from my friends. I shall deal with my enemies myself."

- Voltaire

## THE MONSOONS AND DISRUPTION OF TELEPHONE SERVICES

Year after year, thousands of telephones go dead, as extensively as the intensity of rains in the monsoon season (June to September). It is a wonder how the telephone service should so much be subject to the monsoons, just as the crop prospects in India depend upon the monsoons. When I first took over as the Deputy General Manager, Bombay Telephones, in April, 1968, within two months I had to undergo the excruciating experience of tackling hundreds of cable breakdowns involving tens of thousand of telephones and inter-Exchange junctions. We had to work day and night. All development operations would be suspended, the vehicles and the Cable Joints and officers would be mobilised and put on shift duties, first to find out where exactly the damage had taken place, and then to repair and restore the dead telephones. There used to be periods when every available repair party was working on some cable breakdowns, and the rest of the breakdowns had simply to wait until a repair party became free. Added to our misery was the lack of any testing instruments which could pin-point the spot where a cable was damaged. The reasons were very simple - ancient methods of cable laying, and non-professional work practices.

While all theories say that the cables underground, through which telephone services are given, should be laid to have a capacity to meet the future needs from three to ten years, we have never been able to implement the theory, because we have never had (nor do we have now) enough cables or enough money to invest for the future. What we are actually doing is clearing the waiting lists accumulated for the last five to ten years. Therefore, expansions in every Exchange are more or less every year, or in alternate years. While in a Switch room, equipment could be added under utmost care without detriment to existing service, the external plant work, comprising of laying of cables under the pavements and along streets would inevitably lead to disruptions. Along the same streets, telephone cables are being laid, sometimes every year, at

other times once in two years the electricity and water authorities would also dig up the same streets, but at other times that are convenient to them, depending upon when they received their cables or pipes. It is, therefore, not unusual to see that the same roads are dug up by different parties at different times in the same year. In Bombay, no digging is allowed during the rainy season, from 1st June to 30th September. So, all cable laying activity for the entire year had to be carried out within eight months. Those who actually carry out the work in the field are illiterate workers (daily-rated Mazdoors). Despite being cautioned orally and by warning bricks over the telephone cables, they would simply dig, and in the process, their pick-axes or shovels would cut into the cables that were already underground. Since the operations are carried out in the fair season, unless the conductors are severed, not enough moisture would enter the cables to destroy the insulation provided by the paper wrapping over the copper conductors. Unless the conductors also are severed, and that too, many of them, nobody would notice it to be a cable puncture. The fair season would pass off without any problem, if there is only a small puncture in the sheath of the telephone cable. There will be several such punctures on different cables, all of which had been exposed while laying the new cables. When the monsoon rains pour down, the top-most cables with the biggest punctures, are the first to be affected and after a few days and a few rains, when water has percolated deeper, the cables in the lower layers would also be affected through their punctures. In Bombay, the first rains are furious, incessant and intensive. Many streets would be flooded and when you trench, even if there is no rain, the sub-soil water would go on collecting. Since there were not any sophisticated fault-locating instruments which are copiously available elsewhere in the world, a primitive electrical test would be taken, which would indicate the cable fault within about 500 to 1,000 metres. Then, joints would be opened and tests would again be taken from the field to reduce the suspected section and finally, another field test would be taken between two successive joints which may be dug up, and physical examination would reveal where the cable puncture is. In this process, days would pass, more water would have entered through the puncture, and a larger length of the cable would be destroyed to be replaced. Since a number of joints would be opened and remade, in the rainy season when moisture is highest, there would be further damage to the cable's health, because some moisture would enter the cable and reduce the insulation, may be not to the degree that

services are immediately interrupted, but over a period of time, the insulation would be degraded, leading to cross-talk, and, in very bad cases, wrong numbers. In the hurried jointing, many conductor pairs would be wrongly connected or not spliced at all and would be abandoned as having been lost. In some bad cases, as much as 20% to 40% of the cable pairs had thus been abandoned over a period of time - a grievous loss when cables are so costly and so little available.

Why does this large-scale cable breakdown not happen in other countries? Beginning in the 1920s itself, in all the advanced countries, the practice of burying cables directly in the ground had been abandoned. They had constructed permanent underground ducts, using glazed earthenware pipes, and then low-density asbestos cement pipes and, finally, high-density polyethylene pipes. At regular intervals, there would be manholes. These ducts are permanent underground pathways through which telephone cables can be pulled at any time, without digging the roads. But these are very costly and huge capital will have to be sunk for the requirement of ten to twenty years hence. When the Indian telephones are not able to find money and materials for demands that arose 10 years ago, where would they find money for constructing permanent underground ducts, at great cost, for the next 20 years? For example, directly burying a cable and making good the damaged road or pavement surface may cost from Rs.20 to Rs.60 per metre (in the 1960s; now upwards of Rs.100 in a city like Bombay). If a permanent underground ductway is to be constructed, in the 1960s it was costing Rs.400 to Rs.600, and in the 1980s it is Rs.1,500 to Rs.2,000 per running metre. Calculations, taking into account the loss of revenues due to interrupted telephone service, cost of repairs, and annual laying and reinstatement charges show that it would be economical to construct ductways. But this is theory, just as it is theory that it is economic to lay cables sufficient for the next 10 years requirements. The limitation was the availability of money and even if a little could be made available, it was difficult to carry the Finance and Accounts people (who were and even now the seniors at least are postal people). I felt that unless a beginning was made, the situation would be catastrophic, and the customers who are increasing annually by tens of thousands would be so vocal, that the telephone organisation's credibility as a responsible organisation would be destroyed. So ducts had to be constructed. But we did not have the experience. The powers of the General Managers were seriously limited. As is my wont, I disregarded all these and persuaded the General

Manager of the Bombay Telephones (Shri D.F.D.Joshi at that time and later, Shri K.D.Vaidya), to sanction purchase within our powers, and construct the duct with the knowledge that we had.

The first duct using high-density polyethylene pipes, with eight of them in a pipe nest, was designed and constructed from the Burmah Shell Bridge on the Eastern Express Highway towards the Chembur Exchange, for a length of a few kilometres, during one working season from November to May. We had to have the manholes designed and construct them. People were saying that this must be entrusted to the Civil Wing of the P & T (now Department of Telecommunications), which was having most of the seniors as deputationists from the CPWD (Central Public Works Department), for whom the standards for staff were based on the cost of works and not on the physical quantity of work. I reasoned that the costs would be very high because there was a vested interest in their being very high. I got the manholes designed by a Civil Engineering Professor and undertook the construction by my own staff. We had to develop a method for jointing the PVC pipes, so that they would be air-tight. We had to develop a method by which, from manhole to manhole, we could keep the PVC pipes under pressure for several hours to test whether there were any leaks and then reinstate by pouring concrete above them and between the pipes, to make the whole pipe-nest immune to diggers' ravages. We had to find materials and develop others to plug the mouths of the PVC pipes at either end, so that, in the rainy season, when the manholes are full of water, the pipes are also not filled up with water. The danger was that if they got filled up with water, even though the water could be emptied, mud and sludge would be deposited in the pipes, restricting the availability of space for pulling a cable and also making the pulling difficult because of the increased friction, which is more between clay and cable, compared to PVC pipe and cable. Then, for the first time, we had to also develop a method for pulling a cable through a PVC pipe. In all other countries, there is machinery, but in India everything had to be done manually and devices had to be developed. To pull a cable, we had to attach a cable-eye which should not come out under pressure. So, we had to experiment with different epoxy resins to bind the mild steel cable eye to the conductors and make it also air-tight. Several combinations of epoxy resins, setting times had to be experimented and the strengths ascertained by destructive testing. The cable was pulled by a steel wire rope. But to pull the steel wire rope, we had to put a nylon string. And how do we draw the

nylon string from one end to the other up to about 200 metres? We tied a very thin string to the tail of a rat and pushed the rat into one open end of the PVC pipe and went on making noise, so that the rat would run to the other end drawing the thin string along with it and then with the thin string we would pull the thicker nylon string, which in turn would pull the steel wire rope and the steel wire rope would pull the cable eventually. But to get rats and use them again and again was difficult and there could be moody rats which would not move at all, staying still somewhere in the pipe. So we obtained a small, battery-operated toy car, several of them, to pull the first string. All these experiments and trials used to be thrilling to the several people who were engaged for the first time in the work and when the job was completed, all of us were complimented by the Member concerned of the P & T Board. We wrote several papers and circulated them, so that other Telephone Districts would also embark upon this activity. We prepared city-wide plans for "ductification", so that in future, the cables would not have to be buried directly in the ground - the fundamental reason for repeated damage to the cables and disruption of telephone service in the rainy season. Many of my appeals and propositions to the Directorate could not result in a general policy, although everybody has agreed that this was the correct method. Wherever I was the Head of the Telephones i.e., in Ahmedabad and Pune, and then in Andhra Pradesh, I went on constructing cable ducts within my powers. Many people wanted to find fault with me, first saying why such work should not be entrusted to the Civil Wing, and why the telecom engineers themselves should do all this. I said that this was no engineering feat, requiring extra-ordinary engineering knowledge. Digging and placing pipes and constructing manholes and pouring cement concrete are all done cheaper by the telecom engineers departmentally, rather than through the Civil Wing Engineers, who would give it to contractors. In Andhra Pradesh, cable ducts were constructed even in District Towns like Warangal, Guntur, Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam, while, at that time, not even big cities like Calcutta were undertaking this work. By the mid-1980s, however, it had become the policy of the Department, as by that time, the public uproar over telephone service disruption in the rainy season was shaming the Department into action. What was started in 1968, became standard practice 12 to 15 years afterwards. But unfortunately, these works are being entrusted to the Civil Wing, which gives them on contract to private parties and that is one of the

reasons why the costs are high and the quality of the work is also poor, because when the telecoms are "acceptance-testing" the works, they have another Wing of the same Department to defend the work of a Contractor!

Since the mid-1970s, PCM (Pulse Code Modulation) systems have become available within India also. On two pairs of copper conductors, by using the PCM equipment, fifteen times more circuits can be obtained. In other words, theoretically the number of cable conductors that would be required can be cut down to a fraction in the inter-Exchange cables. If 10 years ago we had estimated that along a particular street, 20 to 40 ducts would be required, now because of new technology the requirement of ducts has come down drastically. More startling than this is, if instead of copper conductor cables, optical fibre cables are used, over a pair of such fibres thousands of circuits can be derived. Perhaps, only one or two ducts would be sufficient. From this, it is evident that we pay heavy penalties for not doing the right thing at the right time and investments may also be mis-applied. Nobody is going to pull out the existing cables from the existing ductways as long as they are serviceable. But, if all the ductways are full of cables, what would one do? No further ductways could be constructed on top of the existing ones or by the side, as the top-soil or side space available may be little. And if there are no alternate roads, as in many parts of Bombay, one may get stuck. Of course, it is possible to burn the paper insulation over the copper conductors in a cable (which has lead and not plastic sheath) by certain techniques. Then all the copper conductors can be pulled out in a bundle from joint to joint, and through the embedded cable sheaths, thinner optical fibre cables can be drawn as has been done in several countries in the West.

While cable ducts involve costs and advance sinking of capital, how do we protect the existing, directly buried cables? Here again, the time-tested and decades-old practice in all the good telephone systems elsewhere in the world is "pressurisation". The telephone cables have copper conductors with paper (or polyethylene) insulation. All the conductors in use are formed into a core and the core is wrapped with paper (dry core), over which, as a moisture barrier a lead sheath is extruded. Dry air under pressure of 0.7 Kgs. per sq.cm., is pumped into the length of the cable closed leak-proof at the two ends where it is terminated. If there is a sheath puncture anywhere, the air escapes.

There are methods of monitoring the pressure at various points along the length of the cable and if the pressure falls at any point below a certain value, an alarm can go off at the Exchange. As and when a sheath puncture occurs, the pressure would fall and the alarm would sound. In a properly designed and installed pressurised cable with an appropriate alarm system, the mechanical damage to the sheath could be detected before it leads to an electrical damage by ingress of moisture or water. Because there is dry air, the insulation of the cable conductors would remain high. When digging is taking place in the fair season and if physical damages had occurred, they would be detected in the fair season itself when air is not moist and repairs are carried in the best of ambient environments - no rain, no water oozing in the pits, no high moisture in the air.

For several years, there had been talk of pressurisation, any number of arguments had been advanced, propositions made and pedantic talks and schemes had been going on: Would we get pneumatic resistors? Do we have sensitive pressure gauges? Do we have compressor drier systems? How many people would be required? Could we make air-tight seals? How leaky are the cables? How many of them are worth pressurising? All this I felt was "gassing" and nowhere near pressurisation. But my experience of one monsoon in 1968 has convinced me that it is better to do something rather than going on saying that something should be done. While undergoing the excruciating experience of constantly living with cable breakdowns with thousands of subscribers cursing the system and hundreds of telephone men slogging day and night, I was reminded of Harindranath Chattopadhyay's beautiful words:

*"A woman, while going through the pangs of giving birth to a child, vows in pain that never, never again would she sleep with the man who was responsible for such pain. But, the wonder is that all this pain is forgotten soon thereafter and the pleasure which may lead to an even greater pain, would be soon indulged in."*

During the monsoon season there are exertions to repair the cable breakdowns and the tensions and all the cable men would be pledging that in the coming fair season they would take every possible step, so that the faults won't repeat. But the tiredness and the exhaustion which they had undergone during that period would make them relax in the

fair season, to be faced again with the same killing experience. I did not want to be one among the crowd, for I loved the substance of the poem,

*"You can follow the crowd  
There is not much cheer  
In always looking  
At some one's rear."*

Also, in my view, it is easier to tread the path of mediocrity which follows conventions. To be unconventional, one has to have both vision and courage. I have therefore decided to abandon the beaten track and devise my own, as long as it produces the desired results, while, simultaneously ensuring that there is no flagrant violation of the spirit - if not the letter of the laws and rules that govern the administrative machinery. On this score, I derived inspiration from the master poet, Kalidasa, who, in the introduction to his first drama, "*Malavikagnimitra*", proclaimed:

*"Just because something is traditional or old, it need not necessarily be valid or justified."*

To those critical of my methods, my answer is to echo, once again, the poet's words:

*"The wise always test and accept the validity; it is fools who are constantly guided by the wisdom of others."*

We used to have one gentleman who was considered an expert on cable pressurisation and cables. Discussions with him only produced more arguments, more impossibilities, more unknowns, all leading to helplessness, because nothing was coming out of them. I bade goodbye to this intelligent "*Pandit*", but useless experimenter or initiator. With some other "*plodder*", we got in touch with CIBA and Mahindra Ugine, requesting them to give us epoxy compounds with which we could make gas pressure tight seals in the cables. The resin and the filler should percolate in the spaces between the paper insulation and the conductor and between all the paper-insulated conductors and the paper cores and sheath. Various combinations of resins, thinners, fillers etc., had to be tried and at last, we succeeded in hitting upon a formula. We trained people in making the gas blocks. When once the gas blocks were made, the question was how to fill up the cable with dry air. We had no air

compressor driers which every telephone Administration abroad has. M/s Pure Gas Company of the United States is the leader in such equipments. There was no possibility of importing them easily and it would take time. So we used to take high-pressure (about 2000 lbs. per sq. inch) compressor air cylinders and fit them with regulator/reduction valves. The cylinders contained compressed air at over 2000 lbs. per sq. inch pressure and through the regulator/reduction valve it could be fed into the sheaths at 7 lbs. to 10 lbs. per sq. inch. We had to attach pneumatic (Shraeder) valves (much like the bicycle tubes have) to the cable sheaths through which we could feed in the low pressure dry air. After a lot of experimentation, we found out how to fix these Shraeder valves. The cylinders were mechanically transported and the air was fed. But it wouldn't go far because many were the leaky joints and many were the very small holes. So, the gas was leaking away. To locate the leaks was another challenge. We obtained a few halide gas leak detectors and learned the technique of using them for approximately locating the holes in the sheaths or joints. So, slowly but steadily, and with increasing confidence, in a period of three or four months, many sheath punctures and leaky joints had been repaired, pressure-tested at site by methods improvised and finally we could obtain 5 Kms. to 8 Kms. of a gas tight cable. That increased our confidence. We developed a plan and a scheme for systematically preparing cables to be pressurised by installing, at regular intervals, pneumatic valves and pressure monitoring arrangements and then charging the cables with dry air. In the second year of our experimentation, we were able to pressurise about 100 Kms. We repaired several incipient cable sheath damages and leaky joints, all discovered during the fair working season. This meant that this many cable breakdowns were aborted during the following monsoon. We built up a system of having high pressure air cylinders to be regularly supplied, refilled and accounted. We produced several articles and papers and in fact, a book. We once for all demolished the state of dependency and also our helpless dependence upon unavailable, imported devices for cable pressurisation. The success in Bombay created enough enthusiasm and awareness in the Telecom Research Centre in Delhi to take up the experimentation, development and standardisation of cable pressurisation and monitoring and alarm systems. In order to keep up the pressure on the Department for its adoption, as soon as I went to Ahmedabad in 1971, I undertook this work there too and within two-and-a half years, hundreds of kilometres of sheath were pressurised.

Building upon the experience in Bombay and incorporating the experience in Ahmedabad, one more booklet, "Keep the Cables Dry", was published. It is a matter of great gratification to me that several Assistant Engineers and Divisional Engineers have become experts in cable pressurisation and ducting under my guidance and leadership. When I went to Andhra Pradesh, as I was convinced that pressurisation is needed not only in big cities but everywhere, I got this work initiated in Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam and other places. Now in 1989, 20 years after its initiation and development, cable pressurisation has come to stay and is one of the things for which targets are being set in all big cities. Of all systems, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Pune, Hyderabad and Vijayawada are having the largest percentage of pressurised cables and the benefits are very much evident.

A few simple but very effective practices were also initiated for proper laying and testing and protection of the cables. We started them in Bombay. Whenever a trench was dug and a cable was exposed, we used to flood it with water. For this purpose, we had a rate contract with suppliers of water in tankers. We used to make a telephone call and the tanker used to come and flood that trench. The idea was, if there was a cable sheath damaged, the water would enter and would lead to a service failure. We would immediately know where the fault was and we would repair it then and there, instead of allowing it to be accumulated and be revealed through a long-time-to-detect cable damage in the worst of the monsoon season.

All the spare cable pairs used to be tested during the fair season, one month before the onset of the monsoon, and how many pairs are lost and in which sections used to be recorded. The idea was that during the rainy season, if this cable came to be handled in any breakdown, as many of the lost pairs as possible should be retrieved during the cable repair operations. A few thousand such pairs were retrieved for use.

In the same trench, year after year, several cables are laid. Many of them are of the same size. If by electrical testing, we know that a cable is damaged and is to be operated, how do we pick up in the trench the particular cable? Unfortunately, we had no electrical testers which other countries have to pick up the damaged cable by tests taken in the Telephone Exchange. To alleviate this difficulty, we started putting

identification lead collars on the sheaths and, later on, plastic identification collars. So, every new cable that was laid was fitted with the identification collars at intervals, on which the cable designation and size were stamped and whenever an already buried cable was picked after identification at any place, a collar was again fitted on it. If these practices are systematically followed, then the problem of identifying or picking up a particular cable from among several similar-looking ones would be easy.

We introduced a system of patrols along all the cable routes. In any telephone system, there are a number of persons who are not useful for any job. Surely, these could be asked to foot-patrol the heavily-cabled roads. Their job was to caution any digger and intimate to the Central Cable Records Section that, at such and such place some digging is going on. They would also watch for any damage and if in doubt, their job was to call for a water-tanker to flood the trench. This is another method of first preventing the cable damages and, if they had occurred or are suspected, to detect them as and when they occurred, by the system of flooding and repairing them before a costly service loss followed.

Both ducting and pressurisation are very ordinary and routine jobs in every advanced country, but they remained illusive for a long time in India, with telling damages. Twenty years after they were initiated, they have also become very simple in India but attempting something which had not been done before and that too, through one's own study and developments, was what gave us the thrill. I believe that in every aspect of work, whether it be in telecommunications or in any other activity of the Government, dedication and application would be able to solve 80% of the difficulties. No new inventions, no new principles and discoveries are usually involved. Ordinary engineering and innovativeness are sufficient.

## 4

### PART-TIME TELEPHONES: FRACTIONAL RENTALS

It was quite common in a number of cities with Crossbar exchanges to have only partial utilisation of the exchange capacity, because the Penta-conta Crossbar exchanges had been under-performing. Their call-handling as well as completion capability was far below the designed figure due to various reasons, including the inability of the maintenance people to keep them in the finest fettle. Call-handling depended upon a few common control equipments and if they did not work, the call completion would be crippled. It would lead to repeated attempts, leading to artificial overload, which, beyond a certain point, seriously brings down the call completion.

But when the project was planned and executed, 95% utilisation was envisaged and so, the underground cable network, which represents 35% to 40% of the investment in a local system, was constructed for that capacity utilisation. In practice, because of the inability of the exchanges, the utilisation was held down to about 70%. 25% of the local cable plant thus remained unproductive. And this was when there were huge waiting lists and customers were hungering for telephone service!

Pune City Exchange was one such. In my interactions with the citizens, intellectuals and businessmen, I found that there were quite a good number of people who would be willing to have telephone service for part of the day. I reasoned that giving part-time working telephones would serve two purposes viz., earning some return on the investments already made and carrying some satisfaction to people thirsting for telephone service.

Any telephone exchange has a "busy" hour for traffic. If we look at a city's road traffic, we find that between 9.30 and 10.30 in the morning, and again, between 5.00 and 7.00 in the evening, it is heaviest. The

roads are clogged with vehicles. The speed of the vehicles would come down very significantly. In the non-busy hours, the travel speed would be higher, and therefore, more people could be transported. For the telephone Exchanges also, it is the busy hour which determines how many calls could be put through. When the telephone "busyness" comes down, there could be more persons making calls. But the number of calls per hour would be less than what the Exchange can handle. In the Crossbar Exchanges, there is an intelligence which can be exploited to see that some subscribers cannot make calls or receive calls during certain times. So I decided to utilise this faculty of the Switch to partially benefit by it. I introduced a new class of service, "From 7 p.m. to 8 a.m. only". I reasoned that since customers are having partial service, they should pay only partial rent and the number of calls that are given free for any charging period should also be partial. There were no rules for such a service. Neither was it prohibited. I reasoned that if I send this proposal to the P & T Directorate, it would never be sanctioned. I applied the three tests:

- Is the customer's cause advanced?

- Is the Government put to loss?

- Am I personally making any money out of it?

"Yes", was the answer to the first question, and "No", to the last two. I decided to go ahead under another principle of mine: "Where there are no rules, don't seek them". A few hundred connections were given with the specific understanding that when the telephone Exchange capacity was improved, these would be withdrawn with due notice.

In Pune, there was another Exchange in a similar situation in the industrial area of Pimpri-Chinchwad. Here there was a Class-II type of Strowger Exchange called, "MAX-II", which had very little traffic-handling capacity. The customers were all industrialists, most of them wanting to call Pune City in the busy hours. There was traffic, mostly from 9.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. and afterwards there was hardly any. The Exchange was loaded to the extent of 50%, and there were more waiting applicants than serviced customers. The underground cable network was remaining unutilised. The Exchange did not have intelligence to have different classes of customers, like, for example, those to whom service was available part of the day. A number of people like local businessmen and shops and establishments were willing to take "night only" connections. A few hundred connections were given with half the rentals and

half the rebates. At 7.00 p.m., all the customers were "energised", and at 8.00 a.m., they were "de-energised" by mechanical arrangements.

There were Crossbar Trunk Automatic Exchanges (TAXs) using Penta-Conta type of equipment. These also were very much under-performing. But, in the night time, when the load was less, more subscribers could be handled by them. Because of the under-performance and capacity limitation, the number of cities that could be connected for was limited. I reasoned that in the night time, there are far fewer calls and, hence, less load. So, more cities could be brought on to the Subscriber Trunk Dialling (STD) service during night only. If any customer attempted a "night only" city in the day time, his call would not progress. If I had written to the Directorate they would not have permitted it. I got a sympathetic General Manager of Bombay Telephones, under whose jurisdiction the Trunk Automatic Exchange was. I pleaded with him to allow Pune to have direct dialling through Bombay TAX to Delhi during night time (7.00 p.m. to 8.00 a.m.) only. He permitted it and, within a few weeks, word spread. It was also realised that there were no ill effects and the customers' satisfaction increased. Besides, the Department got more revenues. The then Director-General saw the rationale, although such a service was unprecedented. Luckily, he ruled that such a service should be extended in many more places also.

This type of customer-oriented service, beneficial alround, was very much appreciated and discerning intellectuals did point out the boldness involved in introducing such a service. Information reached the P & T Directorate, and whispering/carping started from expected quarters. I had openly and boldly told them that this was absolutely correct, and if the Directorate thought otherwise, they could issue the order for its discontinuance. They dared not. I was succeeded by an officer who was much junior to me and who had no reason to be envious of me. Therefore, the system continued until both the Exchanges got relief and there was no need for that class of customers, "night only" ones.

## TELEPHONE BILLS WITH MESSAGES

We are in the business of telephones, helping people to communicate with one another. But, we do not communicate well with the customers. Many are our rules. More are the regulations. Very often, these are changed. There are good practices in the use of telephones which, if followed, can reduce irritations, wrong numbers, and improve the effectiveness of telephone calls. Advertisements are costly and may be available to be seen only for a day. Information printed in the telephone Directories is good, but not often seen or remembered.

In Ahmedabad, again in my interactions and conversations with customers, I came to realise that we could have a very good means of communicating with our customers through our telephone bills. We could convey messages through slogans and attractive exhortations, putting them in a box. These could be one-line slogans like *"Are you displaying your current, correct telephone number on your letter-head, business card and sign-board?"* I got the telephone bills printed with slogans and messages from the telephones to the customers. These bills then used to go once a month for Trunk Calls, and once in three months for local and STD calls. So, frequent could be the exposure of the customers to our communications.

Some customers which were businesses, immediately noticed this and said they themselves could give printed bill stationery carrying our messages plus their messages. The stationery would be free. When, this suggestion was put up to the Directorate, it turned it down, again on the advice of the same *"financial wizard"* in the Directorate (about whom I have mentioned earlier) who was the Deputy Director-General (Finance), and later the Member (Finance). However, I realised the mistake of referring to the Directorate and after a few months, got freely printed bill stationery in return for allowing the suppliers small messages of their own in addition to our own messages. In those days (1971-74), advertising from Government was considered not proper. But now, we

have advertisements over All India Radio and Doordarshan. The fact is that whatever we do in Government is late, too late, and sometimes too little. That is how, private Companies and sometimes too little. That is how, private Companies and businesses, being market-oriented, are more efficient, innovative, and so can make profits. This is one of the reasons why a commercial organisation and a service like the telephones should not be provided by a Government Department.

## Telecom Slogans on Walls

While in Hyderabad (1978-83), I noticed that almost all the walls were defaced by all varieties of slogans ranging from advertisements and cinema posters to political slogans like, *"Power flows from the barrel of a gun"*. I thought the telephones also could use its own wall spaces for communicating its ideas and messages to the people. I standardised a set of slogans\* and got them written on all exposed wall spaces of our telecom buildings, including compound walls. This was commented upon by the newspapers very favourably. My own official bungalow at the junction of Sardar Patel Road and Mahatma Gandhi Road in Secunderabad was in a very conspicuous place. All over the walls, expressive messages were written and I myself noticed many people waiting for a bus or walking by or bicycling, stopping and reading the slogans. My house was called by newspapermen *"Information Bungalow"*.

Once, the Radical Students' Union (RSU) wrote a slogan, *"join the RSU"* and some more words on our wall. I erased the letters "RSU" and substituted the word *"Telecom"*. The message read.

JOIN THE TELECOM!

If you are a brilliant boy,

No recommendation!

No Bribing!

No influence!

Just read well, be in the first ranks, pocket a telecom job!

Once the People's Liberties Union pasted a poster on our wall, over our messages. I rang up its Secretary, a Communist Front worker, and asked him: *"Are you wanting liberties and freedom only for you and not for us? Why did you have to put up your poster over our own messages? Why do you encroach upon our right and liberty in our own*

property? I would appreciate if you remove the poster and compensate us for re-writing our own slogan." He was quite sportive. He got the poster removed, cleaned up the wall, and had our original message re-written, for which I thanked him.

#### Standardised Set of Slogans\*

- \* "DIAL BEFORE YOU DIG!

A severed telephone cable means hundreds of telephones going dead. Call us before you dig, to take protective and preventive action for the telephone cables."

- \* "Building a House?  
Buying a Flat?  
Bringing up a Business?  
You need a Phone?"

\* May be after five years. But we take no less than that time to plan, install and provide a telephone for you. So apply today!"

- \* "USING SOMEBODY ELSE'S TELEPHONE?  
You can do so legally by informing us and paying the necessary charges. You could get an additional listing in the Telephone Directory so that you can openly display your telephone number".

\* "Take long cords, sockets and plugs and parallel telephones. They make it easier for you to call and be called."

- \* "Answer your telephones promptly. Signal your culture and politeness. Say 'Namaskar' and disclose your name or telephone number."

#### "RIGHT NUMBER, WRONG PERSON!"

Numbers are like flats, permanent.

"Telephone customers are like tenants, temporary. Flats and numbers are constant, users change. If there is an enquiry, you would give the address and whereabouts of the previous occupant of your flat/house. Similarly, you can give the new telephone number of the customer who was having your present telephone number."

I had issued circulars, both under my General Managership and as the Deputy Director-General (MS) in the Directorate, on this subject. Whenever a number is allotted to a customer, he has to be told that this number was working for so and so person, whose current number is such and such. If he received a call on this number for the previous customer, he was requested not to say "Wrong Number", because it was actually the right number, but the wrong person. He should give the caller the new number of the old customer.

#### "SLEEP WELL!

Telephone girls keep awake to wake you up when you want. Book a wake-up call."

#### "Calling Directory Enquiry?"

Why waste your time and spend money?  
Keep a personal list of telephone numbers often used and update it. Intimate your changed number to all your business and social associates."

#### HE IS ENGAGED!"

She can't dis-engage! If a person is talking on the telephone and you find his number busy, the 199 Operator also will find him busy. She can't dis-engage. Space your trials at three to five minute intervals when encountering "busy".

#### Vehicles Carrying Slogans

The telecoms, especially in the metropolitan cities, have a few hundred vehicles. Many public passenger-transport buses carry advertisements, both inside and outside the vehicle. I reasoned that telephone exhortations and messages could also be displayed on our vehicles, especially on the rear and left-side of the vehicles. This could be as frequently as there was occasion for delivering a new message.

#### Enquiries Answered Promptly

In all the big towns and cities, persons waiting for a telephone constitute 35% of those who are having. They are waiting for upto 5 years and in some cases more. Even if one waiting applicant makes one

enquiry a year, it will be thousands if not tens of thousands (in Bombay, in 1989 March, there were 220,000 applicants). Many a time they ask when they would get a telephone. Sometimes these are not answered, giving a very bad image. Sometimes they are answered very late. All these enquiries are considered receipts, and for so many receipts so many clerks are justified. This is absolutely unproductive work.

While in Pune, after consulting the customers and media in a number of meetings, I adopted the following practice. I prepared a Stamp with the following message: *"In the Exchange area where your address falls, in the Category that you have applied, applications upto so and so date have been cleared. According to the present plans, you are likely to get a telephone in so and so month and year."* This message was stamped on the enquirers' letters and returned. If there was no space on the letters to put the stamp, a piece of paper with this stamp used to be attached to the enquiry and sent to the customer within about 48 hours of the enquiry being received.

#### On-The-Spot Registration For Applications

The usual procedure is, an applicant purchases a prescribed form. After a few days he comes. He is given a Demand Note for the amount of the application deposit. He has to pay this amount in a Post Office and bring the receipt along with the application. Weeks or months afterwards, a registration number would be given in the particular Exchange under the particular Category. Between the time a person takes the Demand Note and pays the amount, to the time he gets a registration number, it could be weeks and months, keeping the applicant in suspense.

In Ahmedabad and Pune cities, I introduced a system of on-the-spot registration. An applicant could collect the form, fill it up, pay the amount at the cash counter in our office and bring the receipt. A preliminary check would be exercised and registration number would be given then and there. There would be no difficulty if the application was in the General or OYT Category. If it was in the Special Category, certain documents to justify "special" had to be produced. He could be registered in the General Category provisionally and when he brought the prescribed documents, the registration could be changed. But this

would affect less than 10% of the applicants.

For this purpose, the Registration Clerk had to know in which Exchange area the address of the applicant was falling, because the Registration Number was to be given with respect to the Exchange area. We trained the Registration Clerks who were given maps of the Exchange areas. In border-line cases, if a Clerk had a doubt, he could ring up the Sub Divisional Officer. This is a very simple method which would carry a lot of satisfaction to the applicant and improve the image of the Telephones.

In the villages and the rural areas, the procedure is an abomination. A villager has to write a letter to a Sub Divisional Officer or a Divisional Engineer. He will have to send a Postal Order for Rs.10 to get the application form. The office then sends him the application form. He fills it up and sends it again to the office, by post or in person. A demand Note would be issued, asking him to go to some Post Office, pay the amount and send the receipt. Then after months or so, when all these procedures are completed, he would get a Registration Number. The procedure is city-oriented, even where it is tortuous and could be shortened by on-the-spot registrations. In the rural areas, where the villages are in one place and the Sub Divisional Office tens of kilometres away, this is excruciatingly painful and costly and alienative of the customer. That is why I simply gave application forms as imprest to the Linemen. I also authorised them to collect Crossed Postal Orders drawn in favour of the Divisional or Sub-Divisional Officer. Coupled with the honorarium of Rs.10 for every application gathered, this made the telecom people acceptable and likeable to the villagers. I have already said elsewhere that in the villages, telephone service could be extended, maintained, improved and made beneficial only if it is treated as a mission and officials are service oriented and not power-wielding and power-displaying.

#### Directory Group In The Circle Headquarters Abolished

Rules are made usually keeping city telephone systems in view. The city systems are growing quite fast and new numbers are added and old numbers changed. For the convenience of the customers, it is necessary to produce Directories periodically. Once upon a time, it was once in six months. As the system sizes grew, it was impossible to maintain this

periodicity. Therefore, they have become yearly issues. The telephone Districts comprised of a single city and there was enough work to continuously prepare a corrected manuscript to be given at an appropriate cut-off date for printing the Directory. The standards of Clerks for this work were based upon a six-monthly periodicity and if I remember right, one clerk for two thousand working numbers. Working numbers have absolutely no relationship with the changes that would take place, but it was some sort of standard. When the periodicity was changed from six months to one year, the number of clerks required should have been halved. But no such directive ever came and no General Manager dared to cut the staff in half, afraid to offend the Unions.

In the Circles, i.e., a State, excluding the big city which may have its own city telephone system as an administrative unit, the telephone Directories are produced, one for each Division. A Division may be having from 3,000 to 7,000 telephones distributed in 20-100 Exchanges. The rate of growth is very small. For example, a Division in a year may add 500 to 1,000 telephones. There are hardly any changed numbers because they are all single Exchange areas. Even assuming 1,000 numbers are added, there are about three per day. But the justification is one-and-a-half Clerks. And where are these Clerks located? At the Circle/State Headquarters. I reasoned that with two to three entries to be made per day, no staff was required if the Directory is produced in the Division itself for, after all, it is a Divisional Directory and these days almost every District Headquarters has more than one printing press and some are even having dailies and periodicals published. I issued orders while in Andhra Pradesh that all divisional Directories would be produced by the Divisional Engineers themselves and not at the Circle/State Headquarters. It meant that there was no need for about 30 to 40 Clerks and some Head Clerks at the Headquarters of the Circle. The Administrative Employees' Union was against this and they started demonstrating, shouting and threatening to strike. They accepted my reasoning, but they said I had no authority to de-centralise the publication of the Directory. As is my wont, I said that for doing the right things I needed no order. Actually, when I made the suggestion to the Directorate, they just could not decide anything, because the decision-making process was tortuous and they may want to appoint Committees and the Committee Reports would have to be studied and decided upon. So it would take years. I stood my ground and said that without retrenchment, the surplus persons would be redeployed. The Union argued that this meant

that their promotional prospects would be affected, because the larger the base, the greater is the number of Head Clerks, Superintendents and so on - promotional posts. I said that telephone subscribers could not be expected to pay for promotions of persons, not needed in the first instance. Is the telephone Department an employment-creating and promotion-manipulating Department? I said, "neither".

The Divisional Directories are thin books, not more than about sixty A5 size pages. Anybody could print such a book and actually these were useless. The Rural Exchanges were containing ten to fifty telephones mostly, and some towns were containing some 200 to 600, with the District Headquarters town having 2,000 to 3,000 telephones. For such small systems, a Directory is more ornamental than a need. It was avoidable waste. So I thought I should interest somebody to publish it at no cost to the Department. If I gave a franchise, he should supply the paper. We would give him the manuscript. He should bear the cost of printing, binding and give to us the required number of copies, free. In return for all this, he would be allowed to collect advertisements and put them in the prescribed places. There were no rules for such a procedure. But I again reasoned that this was the right thing and should be done. I persuaded known businesses to take this up first in Visakhapatnam, then in Rajahmundry, and in some other towns. I also suggested to them that if they remunerated our telephonemen, they would get sufficient advertisements, for they knew their customers and have subtle persuasive power also. On the first one or two issues, they made surpluses. But later on they were able to cover up costs, as well as make surpluses. This suggestion was made to the Directorate, and as usual the reply was either "No" or "Under Examination". I feel very happy that now, beginning with the big cities like Delhi and Bombay, the telephone Directories are not being printed by the Telephones themselves, but franchisees are given and the telecoms are making excellent money. The principle is what I had started in Andhra Pradesh in 1980 or 1981. Whatever was said to be "unruly" or "not covered by rules" is now covered by rules.

While on the subject of telephone Directories, I should talk of another practice I introduced - while I was in Bombay and later on in Ahmedabad and Pune. When a new Directory is published, customers are supposed to bring in their old Directory and exchange it for the new one. The only places where the Directories are available are the telephone Exchanges and that too for a few days. Actually, the telephone

system must be interested in seeing that the old, obsolete and un-updated Directories are not in circulation because people would dial the number and even if they get the right number, they may be getting the wrong person, who would say "wrong number". So how do we increase the exchange of the old for the new? Obviously by making the process very easy.

In Bombay, with the consent of the General Manager, I asked all the Indian Oil petrol bunks to distribute our Directories. We would give them a few thousand at a time and any person could go to the petrol station and exchange the old Directory for the new. Simple accounting was introduced and this was advertised. It became an instant success. Year after year, more and more petrol bunks were added to the list.

While in Bombay, Ahmedabad and Pune, one more practice was tried. In the evening, all our vehicles were free. We would load them with telephone Directories, fit each vehicle with a megaphone, go to the multi-storied co-operative housing societies and blare out that people could come down with their old Directories and exchange them for the new ones.

As I have observed in the case of several practices and in several cities, imaginative people elsewhere did this, but rule-only-minded people discontinued these practices also. The message is simple, that a Manager must continuously test the objective of every practice, discard the old and introduce the new, the most effective ones.

*"Life's battles do not always go to the strongest or fastest man. Soon or late the man who wins is the man who thinks he can."*

## 6

### QUALITY OF SERVICE

Nowhere in the world have telephones been held to be fault-free or completely satisfactory. There are write-ups about phone failures in "Time" Magazine in the United States, and in several newspapers in the United Kingdom and Japan, countries which are very often quoted to be very good models of telephone service by foreign-returned customers in India. The fact is, comparisons in telephone service as between one city and another, between one State and another, and between one country and another, are misleading. What customers expect is continuous improvement - Is this month's service better than last month's? Is this year's service better than last year's? And this is a very good criterion. Conditions in no two cities and no two States are similar, whether it is law and order, educational levels, business or prosperity standards, efficiency of workers, or the quality of the equipment itself. In telecommunications, it has always been very easy for a person who has newly taken over charge in a city or State to tell that the service was, in fact, poorer than what the figures show, and that he is initiating measures which will result in improvements.

Telecommunications themselves have a measure of the quality of service. Test calls are made, the percentage of wrong numbers, time taken by the operators to answer, and so on are all ascertained, and, according to these figures, nearly always the service is excellent. However, the perception of the customers is entirely different. For example, customers would complain that there was a large number of wrong numbers. The telecoms will say that their observations show that the percentage of wrong number calls is less than 0.5. Customers complain that the time taken to restore a fault is days and weeks. Telecom figures say that it is less than a few hours. Same is the case with respect to the delay in putting through Trunk Calls, shifting of telephones, giving new connections, the courteousness of operators, and the response from the Telecom Department. The reasons are the methods adopted in measuring. For example, when a telephone is complained of as faulty, the

customer measures the fault period from the time he noticed the defect to the time it is rectified. The Repairman measures it from the time the fault is handed over to him till he rectified it. But hours and days may pass between the time the customer complained, the test was taken, the nature of the fault as identified, and a particular repairman assigned the task of rectifying it. Statistics that are given to the public should be from the public's point of view - how does it satisfy the customer. Other statistics could only be a measure of the internal efficiency of the telecom organisation.

One practice which the customers perceive to be most unjust is the charging for service not rendered. If a telephone is dead, and dead for days and weeks or months together, is the Telecoms justified in charging the rental? It is common knowledge that in cities like Calcutta, and to a lesser extent in other cities, some telephones are dead for weeks and months. Innumerable are the occasions when the customer complains orally, as well as in writing. Many are the assurances that the fault is being attended to. But the painful fact remains that the customer lost the service. Despite the loss of the service and the telephone not working, is charging rental right? The telephone service is subscribed to derive certain value out of it. If the customer is not able to realise that value, he may be suffering business loss or inconvenience, or discomfort. Some may be quantified in terms of Rupees; some may not be. May be, the Telecoms cannot compensate the customer for the loss of his values, for the loss of his business, but the minimum he would expect is not to be charged for service not rendered. The Telephones disconnect the service if a telephone bill is not paid promptly. There is a non-interest-earning, life-long deposit which amounts to at least two years rental, and notwithstanding this deposit being with the Telecoms, for a little delay in the payment of a bill, we use the weapon of disconnecting the service. *"If they could be so prompt and insistent in collecting their bills, why should they not be as prompt in removing the fault and restoring a dead or a faulty telephone?"* ask the customers. What is worse, the rule is that a customer should be rung up before his telephone is disconnected, and to reach the customer three attempts should be made. Innumerable are the instances, especially in Calcutta, when a telephone is declared to be dead due to a cable fault, and the fault would be lasting for weeks or months. It is in the hands of the engineering officials. In the meanwhile, if a telephone bill payment becomes overdue, from the Telephone Revenue Accounts Section, somebody would

ring the defaulting customer. He would get no reply, because when a telephone is actually involved in a cable fault, it will be disconnected at the MDF (Main Distribution Frame). Callers would get a ring back tone, but the called party gets no ring at all, because he is disconnected at the MDF due to engineering reasons (a short circuited cable pair will engage the Exchange equipment). The Telephone Revenue Accounts people will make three attempts, reach nobody, and issue an order for disconnection of the telephone for non-payment. After a few weeks of futile attempts here, and there, when the customer approaches either the Public Relations or the Grievance or the Commercial Section, he would be told that his service is disconnected, because he has not paid the bill. When he says nobody has rung him up, he would be shown proof that three attempts were made, but nobody was replying. There are at least five sections in a big city telephone system which are involved in this mess - the Sub-Divisional Officer, the Cable Department, the Telephone Revenue Accounts, the Commercial Section, and the Grievance/Public Relations Section. The customer may be told by the Cable Repair Section that the cable fault has been removed. He would then go to the Sub-Divisional Officer, who will say that his telephone is not faulty, but that he is not having service because he has been disconnected for non-payment of bills. The Commercial Section may say that they have issued orders for permanently recovering the line because he has not paid the bill.

I had come across several such cases when I first took over as the District Manager of Telephones in Ahmedabad, and later on as Additional General Manager (Operations) in Calcutta Telephones. As I had always held that as a monopoly we were having every right and every safeguard of the power, and as the customer was being treated very badly, I had vowed that wherever I would hold charge, I would not charge rental for service not rendered. The only question was for how much service not rendered. Would the rent rebate be given if the telephone was dead for more than a few hours? Or would it be given if it was dead for days, for weeks or for months? In Ahmedabad, one telephone Exchange got completely disabled due to floods and its restoration took about 15 days. I had decided that for the entire period there was no service, rebate in rental should be given. I had explained to the customers through individual letters that the service was interrupted because the Exchange was flooded and although we could not compensate for the loss that they were suffering for want of telephone service, we would at

least not charge rental for the period during which there was no service. It was a very pleasant surprise for the customers and many complimented me. I had also told them that there would be a pro-rata reduction in the number of calls that were rebated during the billing period. To explain, in those days, there used to be 250 free calls for a quarter. More than that only would be charged. If a telephone was out of order for say, one fortnight, I said that one-sixth of the 250 calls would also not be rebated. They did not think it very unfair, although they would have loved some compensation for the business loss for want of telephone service.

This had a very interesting consequence. The 1974 Ahmedabad Sabarmati floods were followed by floods in Patna and there some telephones were not restored for more than a month. There was a question in Parliament as to why rebate in rental was not given in Patna while it was given in Ahmedabad. I was asked to explain. My explanation was very simple viz., that the District Manager had power to grant the rebate in rental, and I exercised this. I had also mentioned that Government has got to be ethical and therefore, if we were prompt in disconnecting a person's telephone for not paying the bill, we should be as prompt in restoring a fault, and if we were not able to, we had no moral right to charge any rental.

This particular question in the Parliament and the explanation that I gave prompted me to be more aware of fault restoration and the waiver of rental for service lost. So, in Pune, I publicly announced that if any telephone remained out of order for more than 48 hours, there would be a rebate in rental. There were fears among my officers that many people would claim rebate. I said that they would be justified, but now there would be fewer faults lasting for more than 48 hours, because I wanted every officer to explain in respect of every fault as to why it lasted for more than 48 hours and who was responsible for the prolongation of the fault and whether there was any justifiable reason. Every month, every Divisional Engineer was to give a statement of how many faults lasted for more than 48 hours and, therefore, how much rental in rebate had to be given. This responsibility made everyone alive to his duties, and in the entire system the amounts rebated were not more than a few hundred Rupees per month and this went on going down. In Calcutta there were hundreds of cases and the periods for which the telephones were dead were months. So the amount to be rebated would

be running into thousands of Rupees. I was wanting to give these rebates. But the General Manager would not agree unless there was a specific authorisation from the P&T Directorate. I had told him that in a lower rank as the Head of the Telephones in Ahmedabad and Pune, I had given the rebates. Here, although I was higher in rank than in Ahmedabad and Pune and although both the General Manager and I were of the same rank, he being the senior one was the No. one, and his attitude to a problem would prevail. Therefore, despite my conscience and my earlier decisive practices, it was not possible to give rebate in rental. It is true that it would be impossible to discipline the engineers and others, because without the will and the commitment of the No. one, everybody else's action would be undermined or subverted. This rankled me very much.

I went to the P&T Directorate in 1983, and I was determined that I should bring in this rule of rebate in rental for faults not rectified beyond a certain period. A very interesting case came up. In Bombay, an imported telephone Exchange got burnt in a fire and thousands of customers lost their service for months on end. The Minister for Communications was asked by the customers whether they would be charged rental when there was no service. The Minister replied that they would not be charged. This was printed in the newspapers. There were, however, no orders, although the General Manager was also present at the meeting when the Minister gave the assurance to the customers through newspapermen. Bills were issued and customers were being threatened that their telephones would be cut off for non-existent service. But those whose services were restored after long interruptions by transferring them to another Exchange were worried and they were writing to the Directorate. I as the Deputy Director-General (Maintenance switching), was dealing with these questions. I had definitely recorded that we were unjustified in issuing the bills and expecting the customers to pay. But the Finance, which was presided over by one who came to the Telecom Finance from another service for improving his career prospects, gave his financial advice that we must charge rent even if the telephone was not working. Fire was an act of God and the Department also lost equipment. Who would compensate us for the loss of this equipment? Since we were not getting compensated, the so-called Financial Adviser advised that we would not be able to compensate the customers and not even waive the rental. I argued that had we insured the equipment,

we would have got compensation. But since the President's property is not insured, we did not have the benefit. So, it is fair that we should not charge rental. Unfortunately, in the Department, for several General Managers and even the Secretary, the so-called advice from the above "Adviser" was an order itself. They did not have the guts to say that it was "advice", and the decision could be what appeared to them to be fair after having taken the advice into consideration. My Secretary was not prepared to overrule this "financial" advice. So, I went to the Minister (Mr. V.N.Gadgil) and explained to him the entire position, including his predecessor's public commitment that there would be no rental charged. He was surprised at the unjustifiable attitude prevailing in the Telecom Department, and agreed with me, and finally ruled that those who lost their service due to the telephone Exchange being disabled in the fire, need not pay any rentals for the period the service was unavailable to them.

I persisted with my efforts and got a policy decision. But this was really a sham decision. The rental in rebate would be given only if the telephone did not work for more than 60 days. I, however, felt that this was the beginning of the realisation of responsibility, and efforts should be made to bring down this period. When Shri Santosh Mohan Dev was the Minister of State for Communications (Shri Ajjun Singh was the Cabinet Minister), I went on telling him about the inequity that the Department was exhibiting in not giving a rebate in rental at least when the telephone was dead. I submitted that two months was a sham. When the Minister visited Calcutta, hundreds of subscribers complained to him that their telephones were dead for months\* and years, and this

\* There was a very interesting incident. As Deputy Director-General (MS) in the Directorate, I used to visit Calcutta, sometimes to ascertain the quality of service, and some times to collect material for answering audit paras. Everytime I used to look for the "Letters to the Editor" column in the local English Dailies. The Telegraph has at least one letter to the Editor on telephones everyday. One customer wrote that his telephone was dead for more than six months and gave his telephone number also. I rang up that number and there was a reply. I asked him how he wrote that his telephone continued to remain dead, while I was able to converse with him on it. He replied that he had written that letter to The Telegraph months ago, and that his telephone was recently repaired. In jest I said, "If your daily newspapers can take months to print a letter to the Editor, do you think that the Calcutta Telephones are very unfair if they take double that time to repair a telephone?" He understood the humor and then said that in Calcutta everything was slow, everything is inefficient, but unless they complained, things would never be better.

was so for over a decade, and nobody was taking any remedial action despite bogus assurances. The Minister was stunned. He decided that while for the rest of the country it may be two months, in Calcutta it should be 15 days for giving rebate in rental for dead telephones. Recently (March, 1989), I enquired from the General Manager (Operations) of Calcutta as to how many cases there were. He said that there were thousands. I asked him whether we were giving rebates on our own or whether the customers have to claim. It appears that they have to claim, and few could substantiate the claims. This is in contrast to what I did in Pune or Ahmedabad, wherein, from the records we kept, the Divisional Engineer was to advise on his own the Telephone Revenue Accounts Officer, the rebate that should be given and the customer was to get a letter also along with the bill, explaining for what period how much rebate was given. I wonder whether in the whole Department, anybody is giving the rebates on their own. The reasons are very simple. The prevailing philosophy is to administer rules and not to render service. If too many rebates are given, the Audit would ask for fixing up the responsibility and it is almost always impossible to judiciously fix responsibility. This did not trouble me, because I was firm and I used to take the decisions. And when I warned verbally or in writing, people did not protest, because they knew that they were responsible.

One incident would illustrate. The Divisional Engineers, Sub-Divisional Officers and Junior Engineers were required to open Public Telephones at grocers, premises. They were to fix up a monthly minimum, depending upon the average collections from the Public Telephones already opened, mostly in the Post Offices, and go on reviewing it to increase or decrease as the usage varied. The grocers had to remit the collections to the Divisional Office, or alternatively, the telecom staff had to visit these Public Telephones, collect the amounts and credit them to the Divisional Accounts. In one division there were huge uncollected amounts. I ordered instalment retrenchments in the salaries of Junior and Assistant Engineers, Accounts Officer and Divisional Engineers till the total amount in arrears was realised. The Officers Associations, as well as the Officers protested that cutting their pay was not according to any rules. I asked them under what rules they were derelicting to collect the amount due. Was it not their responsibility to realise the Government's dues month after month, and if they did not, I considered it appropriate to order retrenchment from their emoluments.

I had taken upon myself the responsibility of opening the Public Telephones in grocers, premises and delegated the power to the Divisional Engineers. If the delegated powers were not exercised properly and there was dereliction of duty, it was absolutely right on my part to realise the arrears from the emoluments of the officers responsible. I finally persuaded them to accept my decision, because otherwise they would all be held responsible for defrauding the Government. There was retrenchment in their emoluments. But, because of this, within the next two to three months, all the arrears were realised from the grocers operating the Public Telephones. This example also induced more duty consciousness all over the State and stricter measures and greater surveillance were exercised in the matter of opening the Public Telephones, checking their records, realising the amounts and showing proper accounts. This is to say that the Head of the Organisation has to first himself have certain values and the courage of his conviction to impose the realisation of these values. One such value is, "No charges for no service".

When I came to the Videsh Sanchar Nigam, there was one instance. A customer who tendered a message to be sent by Facsimile, complained (in 1989) that his Correspondent had received an absolutely garbled version. He produced it. Within 48 hours, I sent through a person a cheque for the amount charged and had it delivered to the customer. The complainant was stunned that somebody would personally come from the organisation, return his money, and that, too, with a letter of regret! My officers gave all types of reasons for not doing this. But I overruled them, explaining that the credibility of the organisation was important. Customers should see it to be fair and responsive and not a monopolistic, irresponsible, money-grabbing organisation. Even if you are returning the money without good reasons, how much would it amount to? About Rs. 200 for a Company whose income was Rs. 257 Crores! The customer would not keep these incidents to himself. He would be telling it to many people and no amount of advertisement or public relations campaign would be as effective as the goodwill that he would be spreading by word of mouth.

One thing that always troubled me was our self-righteousness in saying that the service was alright by giving our figures of the quality of service - there were hardly any wrong numbers, the billing complaints were less than 0.5%, operator discourtesy hardly existed, all Trunk Calls

were maturing within half-an-hour to two hours, operator's time to answer was within norms of 10 seconds on more than 90% of the calls, 98% of the calls were successful, and so on. When such figures are given to the Press or customers, they would only laugh and wonder why Government Servants have to be congenitally lying. There is nothing more convincing than openness. So, when I was the General Manager Telecommunications, Andhra Pradesh, I had implemented a policy of associating the customers, Pressmen and people's representatives in ascertaining the quality of service. I had told that the office-bearers of the Chamber of Commerce or Merchants or Traders Association or a social service organisation like the Rotary Club, or a Telephone Users' Association, could ask the local Sub-Divisional Officer to depute one or two of his officials along with them and ascertain the quality of service by making test calls from the customers' premises. For example, the Correspondents of the newspapers "The Hindu", "Eenadu" and the "Indian Express" and an office-bearer or official of the Merchants' Chamber in a town, say, Kurnool, would ring up the Sub-Divisional Officer, and tell him, "Today we will go out along with you or your men to various customers' premises and make test telephone calls. We will tabulate the results, summarise them and give out a Press Release and publicise it widely". I instructed my officers that we should make transport available and go with the Correspondents/Officials of the Chamber to whichever customer's premises they wanted us to. The name of the customer and his telephone number used to be noted along with the called number, the operator's service, the result and the observation. If they made some 100 calls, how many were wrong numbers, on how many there was no speech, how many got disconnected during the conversation, and how many calls the operators answered beyond a waiting period of 20 seconds, whether they used the standard greeting, eg., "Namaskar! Trunk Booking", whether they were courteous or rough, all these were noted. A summary would be made and all those who participated in the test would sign it and publicise it. I had this done in town after town. Of course, this depended upon the initiative and the commitment and the good nature of the Sub-Divisional Officers also. However, since I said that I would chastise any person not co-operating with any unofficial body wanting to ascertain the quality of service, many co-operated. In fact, some very good Divisional Officers included it in their programme of superintendence of the telephone network and the service. These results we used to publish in two publications - "Doorvani Sandesh", a

monthly journal meant for customers and "Narada", the house journal meant for the telecom officials. As soon as I gave up my charge of Telecommunications, Andhra Pradesh, this practice was regrettably discontinued as there were no "orders" from above to do such things.

However, while I was in the Directorate as Deputy Director-General (Maintenance Switching), and as I was in charge of the quality of service, I wanted to have such practices introduced. There was tremendous resistance, and I did not succeed for quite some time. Then one person, who like me was a General Manager in Tamil Nadu, became the Member. I appealed to his pride and said that we should issue instructions for a joint survey of the quality of service instead of touting our own figures. He wanted to go cautiously and then issued instructions that every General Manager should ring him up personally and give him the telephone numbers in his charge which were out of order for more than 48 hours. I told him that this was fantastic. First of all, this was not his business. Secondly, if everybody truthfully rang him up, they would not be able to reach him because so many calls would have to come. He however, said that he would field all the telephone calls. He believed that the fact of a Member of the Telecom Board himself wanting such information would make the General Managers see that all faults would be attended before 48 hours. I told him that he would get a report which would please him most, and I would challenge if the contrary happened. Then an instruction was issued and for a few days some General Managers rang up. It was doomed to fail, because who would verify? When I enquired after a few days, he said that in the beginning he received many calls, but now there were very few. "Does it mean that the service has improved?", I asked. He said he would like to think so. Then I said that the best way would be to put an advertisement in all the newspapers saying that in the whole of India there were not more than 10 or 15 numbers out of the 40 lakh customers, whose telephone service was dead for more than 48 hours. If anybody's telephone was dead, could he please write or ring? And, this advertisement was to go in the name of the Member. He shied away from accepting this suggestion. I still persisted. Then the "Mission : Better Communication" was launched under the intervention of Shri Sam Pitroda, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Technology Missions. I took this opportunity and told the then Secretary, that there was no use of our claiming that we were improving the service. The Member (Operations) had already issued instructions and on the basis of very few

calls coming to him there did not appear to be any telephone in India which remained dead for more than 48 hours. That we could not publicly say this was enough condemnation of our false beliefs and claims. I showed him a survey conducted by a magazine, "WHICH", in the United Kingdom about the British Telecom service. The survey reported variation between the claims of British Telecom and the customers' actual experience. I said that we must be able to conduct such surveys. Under my repeated taunting, he accepted, and I was asked to engage the Administrative Staff College of India to evolve a method of customer participation in ascertaining the quality of service.

I held the first meeting in Hyderabad and I wanted the General Manager, Telephones, and his officers to be present in the meeting with the Administrative Staff College of India Professors. At first, they felt outraged at our disbelieving their figures. I clarified that it was not a question of our disbelieving their figures. We wanted that the public should believe their figures, and the best way for this was to demonstrate that our figures could be verified, or figures could be jointly arrived at by associating the customers themselves. Because I was from the Directorate and was carrying out the Secretary's mandate, the Hyderabad Telephone Officers reluctantly joined. I am happy that the project was not dropped and some pilot runs were taken. However, the scheme has not made much progress. It would require an alert customer organisation and the insistence of the Telephone Advisory Committees, members of Parliament and the Legislatures. It is obvious that actually no instructions are required. It is commonsense, it is the duty of any public servant if he is true to his salt to devise such means. I really wonder why any orders are necessary and why cannot any good management strive to carry conviction to the customers whether it is serving them well, and why it should shy away from demonstrating the correctness of what it is doing.

## WORKER WELFARE AND RECOGNISING THE EXCELLENT

The Kathopanishad makes a distinction between "Priya" and "Sreya". The former is what is sweet, what is pleasant for the moment. It may not be good in the long run, just like indulgence in drink. Sreya, on the other hand is what is conducive to lasting good and welfare. It may not be pleasant in the beginning. The Bhagavad Gita, while discussing the "Guna Trayas" i.e., the three characteristics of man, also makes a distinction between "Sattvik", "Rajasic" and "Tamasic" gunas, and says, that which may be like poison in the beginning, but is nectar in the end, is the Sattvik guna, and that which, pleasing the senses, is good in the beginning, but in the end is like poison, is the Rajasic guna. This awareness has made me analyse the various demands that the workers' Unions put forward - are they only of temporary benefit and relief, or are they long-lasting, beneficial things, for which they are not putting any effort? Excepting for overtime-increasing work practices and more post-creating, diminished work outturn standards, the Union leadership generally does not show any interest in more lasting, beneficial measures like family planning, avoidance of indebtedness, dissuading drunkenness, household appliances, acquisition of additional qualifications, buying or building flats or houses, Child Care Centres, and means of adding to the family income by family members acquiring skills to earn in their spare time. I used to talk about these things to the Union leadership, as well as to the workers in general. As long ago as in 1962-64, when I was a Divisional Engineer in Delhi Telephones, inspired by Lokmanya Tilak's "Damdi Fund", I initiated a "Ten Paise Fund". Persons were to contribute a minimum of 10 paise every month. But we officers used to contribute Rs. 2 to Rs. 5. From the accumulation, we used to buy sweets and fireworks and distribute them to the families of the lowest paid employees. We used to give loans to the most needy and deserving for any justified cause. While in Bombay Telephones (1968-71), in the External Plant Wing, we introduced a similar fund. This

time, with more contributions, we were able to give gifts of not only sweets, but low cost domestic appliances like utensils, and for the best Group D official, judged for non-indebtedness, non-drunkenness, punctuality, discipline and limited family, additional gifts used to be given. In Ahmedabad, as the telephone services improved remarkably, the entire business class turned very sympathetic and benevolent to the telephone people. Our Recreation Club used to conduct annual cultural festivals lasting for a few days, to which lots of customers used to be invited. Leading citizens used to be invited as Chief Guests, one for each day. Their businesses showered benefits by way of advertisements and donations. The Recreation Club's library and other activities benefited immensely. Telephone persons were encouraged to approach their officers and me if they required any assistance in getting their children admitted to schools, or in finding employment for them. We were unhesitatingly using our good offices to speak to the managements for help. I encouraged the telecom persons in their house building activities by assisting them in getting sites and also institutional loans.

In Pune, these activities reached a qualitatively new high, based upon the experience and success in Ahmedabad. Here too, intimate involvement of the customers in our quality-improvement and productivity-increasing activities brought about customer munificence for the welfare of the employees. Inextricably linked with this, was also recognising the meritorious and getting them civic recognition. A number of big Companies like Bajaj Auto, Bajaj Tempo and service institutions like the Rotary Club instituted rolling shields and prizes for the best telephone persons. We in the Management, did not want to directly judge them, because some people would wag their tongues that only "chamchas" were being picked up. There used to be a Committee of the public institution which was giving the recognition. It used to take one of our officers into the Committee. The Management co-operated with the public institutions by supplying lists of possible candidates for recognition. The honours were publicly bestowed at impressive functions.

We believed that PBX Telephone Operators and Telex Operators working for big Companies would greatly enhance or spoil the image of the telecom system. Their knowledge and competence and their awareness of how the telecom system works, is very important. While there may be thousands of subscribers, actually less than 10% produce 70% of the traffic and revenues, and it is these who are the large

telecommunications consumers using PBXs and Teleprinters i.e., Telex connections. Year after year, we used to bring them to one or two-day training classes, where we would lecture them about good telephone practices, take them round the telephone Exchanges, instruct them as to how requests for assistance, Trunk Calls, fault removal, directory enquiry, clarification regarding telephone bills etc., were being processed and so on. Our attitude was that the PBX Operators are rather our "daughters" forming part of the users' family, and it was appropriate that our "daughters" are trained and instructed and inspired properly, so that by giving proper service to their employers, they enhance the image of the telephone system. We used to choose very good Operators and give them prizes and certificates. We used to conduct Quiz and other tests to keep up their interest and also improve their knowledge of the telecom system and its working. Whenever I visited or called upon any Company's Chief Executive, I would first visit and meet with the Company's Telephone Operators, talk to them, find out their views and impressions of the telephone system, suggest what they were lacking or what more they could have. Are they having the latest Telephone Directory, are all their keys and cords and headsets in working order, do they know who the telephone officer is where they can complain, are their dials of proper speed, were they inspected by the telephone officials and when etc., and armed with this knowledge, I used to call upon the Chief Executive. This way it was easier to be able to respond to their perceived deficiencies or advocated improvements. Every defect that I would have noticed was ensured to be removed within the next 24 hours. I would personally ring up the PBX Operators, as well as the management, to verify that all the defects were removed and improvements effected. That had a demonstrable effect. All my officers were encouraged to do this and many excelled me, especially in Pune, Ahmedabad, and in some towns in Andhra Pradesh.

In Pune, for the first time in the Department of Telecommunications, we started a Creche in the Cantonment Telephone Exchange. Studies show that many lady Operators are absent (absenteeism could vary from 20% to 40% on any day) just before child birth and afterwards. The post-child birth absenteeism could be largely reduced, and the anxiety of the Operators also could be mitigated if there could be an arrangement in the office to look after their children. Providing space and equipment is one thing, but enabling the mothers to bring their babies to the work place is another. Both have to be taken care of. While we

gave some money from the Welfare Fund, much more was raised by donations from satisfied customers. Raj Kapoor, the well-known film actor himself came to open the Creche and the photo of a baby being lifted and fondled by him adorned our New Year Greeting Cards. The idea originated with my wife, and she took considerable pains in organising and running the Creche. She encouraged the lady Operators to collectively hire a bus and run it on a "no profit, no loss" basis, for collecting the lady Operators from their homes and dropping them. When the idea was first mooted, the ladies used to say, "For us ladies to get into a bus, even single, is difficult. How can we think of bringing with us a three year-old child in a fully packed, un-enterable city bus?". But, in order to make the Creche a success and really be useful to the ladies, we organised the hiring of a bus also. The Unions are prone to demand that the Government should buy a bus and run it through Government-hired drivers. But, I was certain that apart from the costs and it being not sanctioned by the Directorate, even if it was available, on many days it would break down at the convenience of the driver. That is why it has been my firm belief that all good and lasting things must be organised and managed by societies of the workers themselves. Besides, I had another motive. The Unions would ever point at the deficiencies and incapacity and callousness of the General Managers, their methods and their management. If they themselves become Managers, be it of ever so little an enterprise like running a Creche or a bus service or a Co-operative Credit Society, they could become responsible and wise and be moderate in demand-raising and inconvenience-inventing. Indeed, in Pune, I took active interest in enhancing and broadening the activities of the Co-operative Society. I spoke to a number of wholesale merchants and asked them to give foodgrains and pulses and even ladies' apparel on credit and at wholesale prices. The Society had good volunteers to make these Stores really serve the telephone workers. Needless to say, my wife used to spend lots of evenings and holidays with the lady Telephone Operators, listening to their discussions and finally, firmly ruling what should be done. The quarrelling, discussing and dissenting Operators knew that my wife would be able to do more than what I ever would be able to, because I could be opposed by their Union, whereas my wife had no such checks.

The most extensive and lasting welfare measures were undertaken in Andhra Pradesh. Two Creches were founded in Hyderabad and Secunderabad, and one each in Visakhapatnam, Guntur and

Warangal. The latter are much smaller towns. But, in order to spread the idea, these were encouraged and managed by the co-operative efforts of the workers themselves. In Warangal, KG classes were also run for the children. At every Divisional Headquarters (usually the District Headquarters Town), Telecom Women's Associations were started, and through them, Welfare Centres. They were equipped with sewing machines and typewriters, many of them donated by satisfied and benevolent telephone subscribers. Some of these had an expanded scope. Short-hand classes were held. Some had musical instruments and classes in music. Some others had a Hobby Centre, wherein the children of our families could be instructed in the care and repair of household appliances and in making and servicing radios, amplifiers and electrical toys. The intensity and variety of activity would, of course, depend upon the extent of interest that the Divisional Engineer took and the success with which he could transmit his enthusiasm or promote and encourage the enthusiasm displayed by the interested telecom family members themselves. I had made it a point not to give welfare grants to cover fully all the expenses. It was absolutely essential that there should be individual contributions from everybody. Otherwise there would be insatiable demands and grievances. The grants from the Management should be matching. They were all encouraged to put up cultural shows and raise monies. The success with which they could raise money was judged by the participation of the invited customers in their functions. I used to send my drama troupe - Kalavahini - from the State Headquarters to stage plays and give a boost to local effort. Their travelling expenses were to be largely met by the host organisation.

Of utmost satisfaction to me is the promotion of Co-operative Housing Societies and the acquisition by them of sites for colonies. I used to say that Government Servants should not depend upon Government housing, which, in any case, could never be to the extent of 100%. While in service, we will somehow be able to hire some accommodation. But when we retire, not all the gratuity and other terminal benefits would suffice, even to buy a few sq. meters of site, not to talk of enabling us to buy a Flat or build a house. Inflation is so much that not all our pension money would be sufficient to pay the rent for an accommodation. It is therefore, necessary that Government Servants, while in their thirties itself, should at least buy a plot of land for the eventual construction of a

house and undertake the house construction in their forties, so that they would be able to pay off all the loans. In cities, year after year, land is becoming scarce, and prices are sky-rocketing. That is why I wanted them to hasten. We, in the telephones, are greatly in an advantageous position. Because of the scarcity of telephones and the importance of telephone service, many would be obliged to help us in the various processes leading to the acquisition of land and construction of worker-owned housing. In Hyderabad, I was known to every Government Department. Whenever I met with any Government officer, I used to enquire from which village or town he was coming, and whether there was at least a Public Telephone in the village, and if it didn't have one, I used to get it installed within three to four months. So, the entire Secretariat and all the IAS officers came to view the telecoms as an inspired lot. So, if I went with a proposal for land-acquisition for Government purpose or for employees' housing colonies, almost everybody, including the Ministers, used to sincerely help us. In Hyderabad city, when Shri Anjaiah was the Chief Minister, we could get 40 acres of land almost for a song, 20 acres of which were set apart for a Regional Telecom Training Centre, and the rest divided into plots. About 200 people, ranging from Peons and Drivers to senior officers, benefited. In Secunderabad, about 30 acres of land were obtained in the Cantonment area. Tens of people have already built their quarters. Some have given it away to their daughters at the time of their marriage. For example, in one colony, a Clerk put in about Rs. 10,000 for a 200 sq. yard plot. Within five years, its value rose to Rs. 2 lakhs, and when his daughter got married, it was given away as dowry for that amount. What a blessing it was! Some others sold away at this price and went away to smaller towns to buy plot, as well as build a house in the amount. In Kurnool, over 20 acres of land was obtained. In Visakhapatnam, Anantapur, Kakinada, Vijayawada, Guntur and several other places, sites were obtained for Co-operative Housing Societies of telecom employees and in many cases, I had used all my influence in obtaining the lands. I did not hesitate to use my influence again for getting them loans from the Housing Development & Finance Corporation or Co-operative Credit Societies and banks. Of course, there were the congenial detractors who would think that if I was not personally benefiting, why should I be indulging in all these activities. Seldom had they come across any General Manager who was initiating such schemes, encouraging,

enthusing and enlisting the employees in forming Co-operative Housing Societies and other activities.

I felt that these welfare measures must be linked to the productivity and good performance of the telecom persons. So, whichever telephone Exchanges were fulfilling or over-fulfilling their targets, were given "group bonuses". For example, if the effective percentage of Trunk Calls in a particular city was 75%, and if I set a target that it could be 80%, to be maintained for not less than three consecutive months, and if they fulfilled the target, we used to give radio sets, public address systems or a film projector or some indoor sports material. Another gift was subsidised excursion to a place of pilgrimage or sight-seeing. All these activities were publicised. Some Unions, of course, were taken by surprise. They felt that these were all threats to their primacy in leading the workers, often by dis-affecting them. There used to be continuous carping from professionals and traders in unionism that everything that we were doing was wrong, motivated, official bribery. To some people, the honoured were the "chamchas" of the Management. This type of criticism has to be expected, because no vested interest would ever like its own interest to be undermined. If the telecom workers were finding true welfare in Management-assisted and Management-initiated welfare programmes of a lasting nature, to that extent, dis-affection would reduce and hence, militancy. So notwithstanding all criticism, the welfare activities were stepped up. The useless professional grievance-generators and demand-raisers (the more useless they are, the fiercer and more frequent are their criticisms) used to attack the officers promoting these activities. I used to firmly defend them.

Another important activity which related to welfare, as well as promotion of excellence, was the holding of training classes. In the Telecom Department, the Linemen are recruited only from daily-rated Mazdoors. There are tests which they have to pass. Similarly, in the rank of Operators, Clerks and Technicians, a certain quota is set apart for Linemen i.e, ex-Mazdoors. They, too, have to pass departmental examinations. Any Clerk or Telegraphist can write examinations and qualify as a Junior Engineer against a quota that is set apart for departmental candidates. I used to tell that instead of demanding promotions by seniority, people should migrate from one cadre to another by acquiring additional qualifications, competing in the departmental

examinations, and then occupying superior posts. This is more honourable for them and very desirable for the Department than simply creating promotional avenues just because persons were aging. I maintained that for aging persons who are not acquiring additional qualifications but are continuing in the same cadre increments are meant as compensation for expected improvement in proficiency in doing the same job. Accelerated promotions are available by acquiring additional qualifications. Why should not the Unions themselves, if they were interested in the lasting welfare of their members, hold training classes and prepare the members for competitive examinations? No, they would often not do. (Some used to reprint question papers and even guide-books. That is good). Instead, they would ask for degraded standards, moderation in examinations, non-punishment for copying, and some of the leaders would even approach the valuers in very questionable ways for benefiting individuals by peddling their influence, or by threat of industrial action. I had openly encouraged, through letters, circulars and conversations, all my officers and Junior Engineers to hold classes well in advance of the departmental examinations. I would give one or two hours off duty for those who would like to learn. Similarly, I used to call for volunteers to teach groups of persons preparing for the departmental examinations. For the recruitment of Linemen from Mazdoors, the qualification should be at least 5th Standard. But the departmental examinations were not even of 2nd Standard quality. If really 5th Standard was insisted, lots of them would fail and there would be agitations and allegations of corruption in selections. I decided, after due notice, that the coming examinations would be held really equal to 5th Standard. I circulated model question papers in Arithmetic, Essay Writing etc., When the examinations were held strictly to the standards, in some Divisions over 90% failed, and the vacancies remained unfilled. There were Union protests and demonstrations. I held my ground. I asked the Union leaders, why they did not, if they really wanted the welfare of the workers, conduct the classes. Since they failed in doing this duty, but were only meekly pandering to popular but unmerited advancement, the Management itself would conduct these classes. I wanted that the standard of even our Junior Engineers should improve. After consultations with their Unions, month after month, we set question papers to be answered voluntarily by all the Junior Engineers. The answer papers used to be published and circulated. Such were the schemes for improving proficiency.

I instituted Awards for the best Operator, best Lineman etc., in each Division. When these were selected, of course, the Unions would protest, saying that a "*chamcha*" was selected. Certificates of Merit and honoraria used to be given to the best. When I went to the Telecom Directorate, I wanted that this should be institutionalised. Shri V.N.Gadgil was the Minister for Communications at that time. He himself was also thinking of recognising the meritorious in the Department to induce excellence. I had mentioned to him what we were doing in Pune and Andhra Pradesh. Then emerged the Department's practice of giving "*Sanchar Doot*" Awards. I had the pleasure of organising the first Awards in 1984 (or 1985). The instructions as to what should be the criteria, how they should be selected Statewise, and how the finalists would be selected, was laid down by me, and the first function was a glittering one in New Delhi. The recognition for the Awards was also worked out by me. Everyone would receive a citation, a scroll and a cash award. The journey fare, to and from Delhi, would be at the cost of the Department. The next year, I felt that there should be not only all India recognitions, but State level recognitions also. These Awards were instituted and named as, "*Sanchar Shree*", and in the Department of Telecommunications, year after year, on World Telecommunications Day (May 17th), or another important day, these Awards are being given for several ranks in every telecom unit. When I came to the Videsh Sanchar Nigam, I introduced these Awards, calling them, "*Sanchar Vaibhav*" (Ornament to Telecommunications). As in the rest of the Department, here, too, the Unions were lukewarm, alleging that "*chamchas*" would be selected. I floated the idea, taking the cue from the Overseas Telecom Commission of Australia, that the candidates for the Awards could be nominated and selected through poll. This, too, was opposed and therefore, we reverted to a far more broadbased method of selecting the best for the Sanchar Vaibhav Awards. In the Videsh Sanchar Nigam, too, the Awardees are given a citation, a plaque and a cash award of Rs. 1,000.

I wish to stress at the cost of repetition that the Management must have a wholly integrated outlook. Those who are interested in a routine manner, following and administering rules, do unfortunately, have a very good time. But, I wonder whether that would satisfy their souls. Everybody lives, but does one live with distinction? Does one's work satisfy his soul? Could one, at the end of his every tenure and at the end of his service, look back and say, "*These are the things I initiated. This is the good that I have done to my charges. This is the*

*improvement I have effected. This is the enhancement and benefit that the customers got."* It gives me great pleasure that many a person writes to me or tells me that I have done such and such good turn to him. To them, I tell that one should always forget the good that he has done, and remember the bad that he has unfortunately done. I recall with great feeling, Lenin's words:

*"Comrades, life is given to us to live but on ..., and we must so live, that, at the end of it, we should be able to say that we have given it for the noblest cause - the freedom and prosperity of humanity."*

I would only say that serving Government has given me an opportunity to do much more good to the workers and the people at large, than if I had indulged in my own self-advancement. Indeed, many had been the offers since the year 1974, for me to join private Companies with extra-ordinarily good emoluments and perks. Every time I used to cogitate the offers with my wife and children, and it is a great satisfaction to me that none of my family members was ever moved by the prospect of more money. They recognised that my love and adventure was not in doing merely the ordinary and the routine, but in always being creative, and useful to ever larger numbers of people. I had been greatly sustained by my wife's unflinching faith that the good that we do will be rewarded by God, by way of our children becoming good mannered, developing good character, becoming selfreliant, and coming up well in life. It has been her unshakeable faith and her ability to take all my worries, that helped me in caring for my workers and the customers equally. It has been her lot to bring up my children and take care of my obligations to my relatives. Telephone Operators, especially the ladies, Linemen, Peons and Mazdoors ever merited her care.

## MYSELF AND THE UNIONS

When I was studying in the high school, I had a maternal uncle who was a Communist. He used to talk to us about politics. But for reasons I am not able to recall, I became a member of the Students' Congress, and not of the Students' Federation. The former is the Students' wing of the Indian National Congress and the latter that of the Communist Party of India.

However, when I went to the University (Loyola College, Madras, and College of Engineering, Guindy, Madras), I came under the influence of Communists. I read a lot of Marxist literature - books by Karl Marx, Engels, Stalin, Mao Ze Dong, and Liu Shu Chi. S.A.Dange's, *India from Primitive Communism to Modern Slavery*, and Sundarayya's speeches were all avidly read by me. In the last two years of my Engineering College days, I had come to be increasingly identified as a Communist. In fact, the leaders of the Madras Students' Organisation (MSO), the Students' front organisation of the Communists, used to court us. There used to be Sunday classes wherein some Professors used to include us in discussions on Marxist, Communist interpretations of events taking place in India. I was put up as a candidate by a coalition of the Communist led MSO and the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) for the Presidency of the Engineering College Students' Union. I defeated the Principal's candidate, as well as another. That was great news because, for the first time in the College, a leftist candidate had won. The Principal had misgivings, but very soon found that I was not involving myself in any revolutionary activity. Of course, for the first time, Communist intellectuals were being invited to the College for many functions. Mohan Kumaramangalam was one such person. To balance, I invited Dr. Pattabhi Seetharamayya, the President of the Indian National Congress also to address our Students' Union. A Soviet Film Artistes' Delegation was invited to the College and given a reception.

In January, 1952, there were elections to the Madras Legislative Assembly and in the Malabar and Andhra regions, the Congress was

routed by the Communists. The Telugu students of the College of Engineering, Guindy, held a reception for the Communist MLAs from the Telugu region of the then Madras Presidency. I little realised that all this would be reported by the Intelligence to the Government. I joined the All India Radio in October, 1952, four months after I finished College. When the time for confirming me came, the police verification was reporting that I had Communist leanings. When I appeared for the U.P.S.C. (Union Public Service Commission) conducted Central Engineering Services Examination and came successful, my appointment in the Class I Service was in jeopardy, as again, some of the police reports were mentioning that I was a Communist. The All India Radio was transferring me from office to office, and I was passing the UPSC examination year after year, but without getting into the Class I Service! I still had Communist sympathies in the beginning, but Kruschev's speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1954, was shattering. I had by then read George Orwell's *Nineteen-eighty-Four*; and Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* and *The God that Failed*. My own analysis and understanding of events was also generating doubts about the infallibility of Communist dogma. I used to feel that while at the very time I was losing faith in Communism, my few years in the Communist movement were coming in the way of my joining the elite Class I Service in the Government.

The police reports were absolutely funny. Those emanating from my native Krishna District and Vijayawada were saying that I was harmless, because during my highschool days I was with the Students' Congress. And my village knew that I was very much differing from my brother who was an active Communist. In fact, he later became the Secretary of the Srikakulam District Communist Party and had gone underground during the period 1949-1951. My associations with the Students' Federation in Madras were not known in my native district. The police in Madras foolishly reported that I was related to T. Nagi Reddy, the then famous Communist revolutionary. Prof. N.G.Ranga, who was then with the Congress (and who would soon be leaving it to found the Krishikar Lok Party), knew me. He loved me for coming out successful in the UPSC examinations year after year. When I told him that I was not getting the appointment, he understood the problem and took it up with the Home Ministers, Pandit Pant and B.N.Datar, Minister of State (Home). He said that if a person like him, who was known to be the most anti-Communist in the country said that Chowdary was not a Communist and could not be harmful to the Government, why should

the stupid Government depend upon police reports, and that, too, the most astounding one of a Chowdary being a relative of a Reddy?! Those were the days of stalwarts. And Pandit Pant himself decided that I was not a Communist and that I should be given my due appointment. Prof. N.G.Ranga, infact, told him that either he had to accept me as his faithful servant in Government, or as a formidable foe in Parliament, where he would place me through the 1957 elections! My belief in the Marxist method of analysis and values like non-exploitation, egalitarian society etc., are all still valid and I cherish them. My days with the Madras Students' Organisation and my reading of the Communist literature have given me an excellent economic and social vision.

When I was in Ahmedabad Telephones which was my first full management charge, I had practised many of the egalitarian principles contained in Marxism, or for that matter in any socialist ideology. I was demanding excellence from my workers and I was conferring upon them commensurate benefits. When the Minister or the Director General came, I used to be the leader of the Unions to place before the authorities the reasonableness of all the demands. At the same time, I used to tell my workers that I would not plead nor allow them to plead any useless demands which were more ideological than economic or egalitarian. The Minister, H.N.Bahuguna, used to call me "*Comrade*", and the then Director-General, N.V.Shenoy, used to call me a "*Communist*", and many of my colleagues believed that I was a "*Fellow Traveller*" or at least an ex-Communist, notwithstanding my increasingly distancing myself from certain Communist positions and gravitating towards the "*Swatantra*" view of life and Government, economics and free enterprise. My days as the Head of the Telephones, both in Ahmedabad and Pune, and later on in Calcutta, had all spread the impression in the workers that although I was in Government, I was Communist. I believed it and initiated a number of welfare measures, and helped everyone with a genuine cause. But I insisted upon increasing productivity, absolute discipline and customer-oriented service.

When after 26 years of my leaving Andhra Pradesh, I returned to the State, on first posting as the General Manager, Telecommunications, all the Union leaders felt elated that their erstwhile comrade had come back as the General Manager. Some of them had even started telling the workers that they had brought me there and there would be a "*People's rule*" in the Telecommunications now. I neither affirmed nor

denied my affiliations or sympathies. However, I was insisting upon discipline, higher productivity and increasing sensitivity and response to customer needs and expectations. I was however resisting demands for the creation of more posts, liberal overtime and compassionate appointments of the under-qualified survivors of deceased Government employees. I used to tell that Marxism or Communism never taught anybody to be lazy, idle, exploitative of the position that one is in, or inefficient. On the contrary, both emphasised hard work, non-exploitation and discipline. I never saw the Government of India as capitalist and exploitative and myself as an instrument of a capitalist or a bourgeois class, inimical by definition to labour.

The Unions were led by a person who was a "*Card*"-carrying Communist, a Junior Engineer risen from the ranks. Most workers and their parents and relatives knew me and my family, especially my brother. One of my sisters-in-law had her father shot dead, and another sister-in-law her husband, during the Telengana strife. So, most workers knew that by my origin and by relationship and by my past, I could not be anti-working-class. When some of the demands of the Union leader like punishments were not being agreed to by me, he thought he should have a showdown. I had accommodated him for quite some time, but I felt that it was not he who should be ruling, managing the Telecommunications, but me. The Government had to be stronger than the Unions. Both were waiting for an occasion to demonstrate their strength.

In May, 1979, there was a very untimely cyclone which hit Ongole and Nellore Districts very badly. There is a rule in Government that employees can be given loans called, "*Cyclone Advance*" or "*Flood Advance*". A few weeks later came the Godavari "*Pushkaram*" Festival. Employees from all over the State were applying for Flood and Pushkaram Festival Advances. I told my officers that they should be firm, and none of the employees, excepting those in Nellore and Ongole, should be given any Flood Advance. Employees as far away as in Adilabad (400 Kms.) used to apply, saying that their relatives' property had been lost and they had an obligation to help them. The Unions and the Union leaders were backing up all these applications which were all rejected. They produced certificates from MLAs, all of which I held as invalid, notwithstanding the Department's instructions. The Union gave a call for a strike. The rival Union took the lead on the matter of Pushkaram Festival Advance, and also called for a strike. I spoke to the Communist MLAs who were

known to me and who were giving certificates about the loss of property. I questioned them as to how they could sign untruthful certificates. "Should I publish their names?", I asked. They innocently said that they were told that these were just non-interest bearing advances which the workers would in any case pay back to the Government, and what harm could be there if these advances were given to the poor workers? I replied that no Marxism ever taught that money should be obtained by telling lies like this and I was determined to resist. I asked them not to intervene and they agreed.

The strike was spreading from Ongole and Nellore to the Northern Districts. I did not give in. On the other hand, I put a big advertisement in the newspapers saying that we were sorry that the strike may affect the telephone services. The reason for the strike was that the employees were asking for Cyclone Advances. Hundreds of them had signed cyclostypled applications. The applications were coming not only from the employees in the cyclone-affected areas, but from all over the State. It was these applications which were being rejected. The reasons given in the cyclostypled applications were three. Some said that their family members were going to Tirupathi when they were caught in the cyclone, and so lost their personal effects, clothes and baggages. The second set of reasons was that they had sent their cattle for grazing in their friends' and relatives' fields in Ongole and Nellore Districts, and they were washed away. The third set of reasons was that their children were going for an interview for some appointment in Madras. On their way, they were caught in the Cyclone and their personal effects and properties were lost. I said that I could not believe any one of these, nor the certificates given by the MLAs. I asked how a person in Adilabad could ever send his cattle for grazing in Nellore, or his children for an interview in Madras. The employees were saying that since Government rules provided for the disbursement of Cyclone Advance on the basis of MLA's Certificate, the General Manager's disregarding them was wrong, dictatorial and anti-labour. I requested the people to be judges and requested them to put up with us.

I closed down my Training Centre and sent hundreds of trainees to the affected Exchanges to maintain the services as best as they could. I invited the engineers and their families to man the Telephone Exchanges and work as Operators. Through advertisements, I appealed to the Public to take charge of the Exchanges and if anyone of them

knew how to operate them or anything technical, they were well come to take over the Exchanges from the striking employees. Calls placed with the telephone Operators only were getting affected in some places. But in the automatic Exchanges, service was as usual. The public was quite hostile, especially after they had read my advertisements and the hand-bills that I produced and distributed in copious numbers. Days passed. The central Union leaders in Delhi were asking the Member (Administration), Telecom Board, to intervene. He used to ring me up and enquire what was happening. I told him that he should keep his hands off and if he had no trust in me he should transfer me. Otherwise, I should be allowed to handle the strike in the manner I liked to, and I was competent to do what I was doing. He knew my mettle, and excepting for regularly making enquiries, was not interfering. The Secretary-General of the Unions was also my friend and he knew that I would do no wrong. He told the local leaders that he would not intervene. He told me that he would, however, come with a stretcher to give first-aid to the bruised and punished colleagues of his in the State.

Days went on rolling, but I did not budge and the subscribers were not complaining. I was touring the places, meeting the customers and telling them to put up with the inconvenience. The Union wanted to negotiate. "The imperialist, capitalist, exploitative. Government would now collapse under the righteous and united efforts of the telecom workers of Andhra Pradesh, and I wanted the Government to collapse, and the workers' Government and Kingdom to be established", I told them. There was nothing to negotiate. We would all wait for this happy end to come. That was what I was telling them. Seeing no end, the leader came to me saying that if there was an assurance of no victimisation, he would call off the strike. I said there would be no negotiations, no victimisation. Only rules would be followed. He knew what it meant. The strike period would be treated as "dies non", no wages. There would be a break in service. Those who participated in the strike would lose the Leave Travel Concession benefits. They would be debarred from appearing for the Departmental promotional examinations. I said that all these would apply. In the next few days, there were to be examinations in which a thousand and more were to appear. On the 13th or 14th day, the Unions begged me to negotiate and give them some face-saving device. I refused and went on reiterating that the Government would collapse and the

workers' kingdom would be established. Seeing me firm, they called off the strike unconditionally and distributed pamphlets saying, "Ex-Communists are the worst enemies of the working-class". More than 2,500 people, the followers of the Comrade, incurred all the disabilities I mentioned, and all for a few hundred Rupees of advance which they were asked to apply for most unjustifiably, and which they had to pay back eventually.

The rank and file started revolting against the leader. In their annual conference soon after, they passed a "No Confidence" resolution and removed him as their Secretary. This man was there for 17 years. The General Managers who were reported to be "tigers" and were dreaded, could not do anything to him before. His was the rule. His honour and esteem suffered. He wanted to quit Government service. He had till then managed to be on "deputation" - a facility given by the P&T Department to its Union leaders, who will continue to hold lien in the Government and do full-time work for the Union. Such "deputations" are paid by the Unions. They have only to give pension contributions to the Government.

Removed from Secretaryship, the Comrade wanted to join duty. I posted him to a place which is usually unwelcome. He immediately proceeded on leave and submitted a letter for premature retirement. In the meanwhile, word was spread that this Comrade, who preached high and mighty, was unwilling to serve in a remote area and was prepared to be on duty only in a city area, exposing the hollowness of his service-mindedness. The Comrade did not expect that his request for retirement would be accepted. But, on the crucial day, it was accepted. Shocked, he filed a writ petition to argue that it was wrongly accepted. He also managed for the petition to come before a Judge, who was an ex-fellow traveller and who was known to me and him also. Word was sent to the Judge by friends about the doings of this great Comrade. When the case came up, to the utter shock of the Union leader, it was not admitted, and he had to retire. Thus ended his career in the Union as well as in the Government. He lamented that never, never did he expect this end. Officers who were terrors could not tame him. He had humbled many. But it was only because Chowdary was an ex-Communist that he could bring him to such a pass. All the middle rank Union leaders and the rank and file of the workers were very, very happy at his inglorious end, and for the next four years and over there was no Union activity which

was disturbing or disrupting the Government or the telephone service. I was not against the Unions or against labour. But I was determined to let the strike take its time and reach its inexorable conclusion, to tell the workers that trade in Unions is ruinous, and while we managers were being democratic, a careerist (a self-centred one at that), in the name of the Communist Party and the Unions, was exploiting them to their detriment and bringing a bad name to Communism and to Trade Union activity. They should realise this.

There were tense moments during the strike. 25 years after I left the State, I was back there and it was only 18 months since I had come. May be, I had to prepare for another transfer, and that may be it would be in defeat. I held council with my family who said that they would not mind the transfer, but succumb I should not to the blackmail or threat of any person, be it the Union or any other. I was right and I should fight. My sister-in-law Dronavilli Anasuyamma, a Naxalite, came to my house. She had collected all the facts and verified them from sources she trusted. She felt that the strike was unjust. She, in fact, spoke to the Secretary-General of the Communist Party of India, for whose glory the P&T Union leader was waging the strike. But because of his antipathy to the Naxalites, although the two were comrades in arms during the Telengana days, he did not intervene. She only wished me good luck and said that right would win and went away. In the event, she felt happy that I had stood firmly by what I believed and taught a lesson to the opportunistic elements who had made leadership a profession, and who in the process had amassed wealth. I knew that the Union leader and those close to him were making a lot of money by bringing in representations for transfers, against transfers, and for some other favours. Even if the representations were disposed of on their merits, these people would parade that it was they who managed to get it done and would collect money from the applicants. There were, however, a few fanatics, and it was they who were suffering, while the leaders were thriving. One principle I adopted was to punish those who allowed themselves to be misled and to seldom touch the leaders themselves. This made the rank and file realise that suffering would come to them and not to their leaders. This led to their loss of belief, loss of faith in the so-called leaders who, without doing anything but by just shouting, were getting all their dues. But they, on the contrary, were taking the punishments and were having to do the work, gaining nothing. In other words, by making a profession of leadership, some were gaining. It was this that I

wanted the workers to realise, and realise they did, the culmination of which was the throwing out of the 17-year-long Secretary from the Union and from the Department.

In the States, in the rural towns where there are manual Exchanges, the telephone Operators are indeed the masters. At night, there is hardly any service, the Operators would lock up the doors of the Exchange and very often go to sleep. If any customer lifts his hand-set, a light comes on, but this will not be seen by the sleeping Operator. A bell, too, is supposed to ring, which is called a "night alarm bell". But the Operators would switch it off. So there would be no service at all in the night. Investigations would reveal nothing, because they would all be post-mortem investigations, and by that time everything would be fine. Once, a subscriber who was running a lorry service, lifted his hand-set in the night. There was no answer. He simply walked to the Exchange, broke open the door, found the Operator sleeping, beat him up and went away. The next day, the Operators declared a strike. Their demand was that the customer's telephone must be disconnected and a case filed against him. I said that I would tolerate a few hours work stoppage, but not a strike. Anybody trespassing into the Exchange was illegal, and would be dealt with by the due process of law. There should also be a due process of law before a telephone subscriber was disconnected, I told them. Disconnection in revenge or in retaliation for trespassing into the Exchange was illegal, and I wouldn't do it. The strike went on. Then, a number of subscribers surrounded the Exchange i.e., "gheraoed" it and started shouting, "Operator Lanja Koduku Murdabad". The Operators on duty called me on Trunks and said that their life was being threatened and that I should call the police and seek police intervention. I said nothing would be done. They should not be afraid. They could also shout back appropriately. They said they were afraid and asked me whether I could not hear the shouting of the customers. I said I could hear them. Once when I was alone, and scores of workers surrounded me and shouted slogans, I was not afraid. How could they, heroic people, who were in a group, be afraid? Why should they be timid and cowardly in facing a few customers? I knew they were heroes and they had heroically demonstrated against me. I told them that they should display the same heroism and courage against the customers. The customers could definitely not be more menacing than the Operators. I told them that if there was any law and order problem, if anybody trespassed into the Exchange and assaulted the Operators, I would definitely call the Collector and the

police. But, if the customers were just demonstrating and shouting slogans, I would not intervene. I would not request anybody's help, because they, the heroic Operators, themselves had told me once that shouting and demonstrating was their birthright, I reminded them. I believed that it was the birthright of the customers also. In fact, the customers who surrounded the Exchange did not allow any Operator to get in or out, nor any meals to come in or out. This was what once the Operators, led by a sinister Union leader, did to me, not allowing food to come in, nor allowing my Peon to go out and bring food. Obviously, the Union's prattle about this achievement must have come to the knowledge of the customers, who repeated it against the striking Operators themselves. The strike was called off with the inexorable consequence of punishment for those who stopped the work. This type of firm handling put an end to all guerilla activity of the Unions.

In the measure that the guerilla activity of the Unions was handled firmly, welfare measures were also promoted. At every District Head quarters, we established a Welfare Centre, wherein we put typewriters and sewing machines, and arranged for typing, short-hand, and sewing classes. In some places, we started Creches to take care of the children of the working mothers. In some places, we even started nursery schools. I encouraged my engineers to hold tutorial classes for persons preparing for Departmental promotional examinations. For the telephone Exchanges which were giving higher than the targetted effective percentage of Trunk Calls, gifts by way of appliances for use in the Clubs, were given. I encouraged the Divisional Engineers to help the employees get admission for their children into schools and also to help them in finding jobs. We encouraged Co-operative Housing Societies, and, by active involvement, obtained several sites - in Hyderabad City about 40 acres, in Kurnool about 20 acres, in Guntur, Kakinada, Visakhapatnam and so on. These welfare measures, which bring in lasting benefits, in contrast to more overtime or less work, were more appealing in the long run to the workers. This, together with the public esteem we were gaining because of rapid expansion and improvement of service, changed the perception and the attitude of many a worker. They could see that the rapid expansion of the telephone service was creating new job opportunities, as well as avenues for promotion. With the passage of time, they were looking back at what was done in 5 years in a cyclonic fashion. It makes them wonder about those days, and they have fond remembrances of those glorious days and they despair that those days would never again come back.

Another incident occurred when I was in the Videsh Sanchar Nigam in Bombay. One employee of the Calcutta Branch had behaved very violently. He had beaten up a few other employees years ago in Calcutta. An Inquiry Committee was instituted, and the inquiry dragged on. Punishments given were set aside, and his conduct was ordered to be inquired into again by myself, i.e., the Chairman & Managing Director of the Videsh Sanchar Nigam, although I never knew this person and I was a Company employee and not a Government officer (unlike the erring employee who was a Government servant belonging to the erstwhile Overseas Communications Service, and who was on deputation to the Videsh Sanchar Nigam). The President of India, who has powers to appoint anybody to take disciplinary action, ordered that I, as the Chairman & Managing Director, inquire into the case, and it was in that capacity that I inquired and gave the punishment of dismissal from service to the employee. As soon as the order was signed, a few hundred people collected together in the Headquarters in Bombay (where my office was) and started shouting and demonstrating, intent upon "gheraoing" me. I was unfazed and unmoved. I told them that if they believed that a "gherao" would lead to the reinstatement of the dismissed employee, they were most welcome to nourish that hope, but it would be a forlorn one. I was prepared to be "gheraoed" for any length of time, but I would not change my decision. On the other hand, the rules prescribed the procedure of appeal, and if the official concerned put in an appeal to the Board of Directors of the Company, it would be considered, and an appropriate view would be taken. I told them that I had gone by the facts established. The mills of justice grind slow, but they grind exceedingly fine, both for the affected person as well as the person and procedure awarding the punishment. In the event, the crowds went away. I believe that firmness and your faith in the justice that you have done, would be understood, even if there is a mob atmosphere prevailing. I dared to address this shouting and gesticulating crowd and explain to them at length the background of the case, the reasons for my decision, and how the decision could be properly appealed against. The absence of bias and ill-will was plainly perceived by the staff and that was one of the reasons why they had retreated.

## WITH UNIONS AND MINISTERS

How the staff, officers and Union leaders can collude to frustrate the realisation of the objectives of the Government in taking the administration nearer to the people, to the customers who are to be served, would be illustrated from the following event.

The whole of the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh had just one Telecommunications Division when it was merged with the rest of the Telecommunications in Andhra Pradesh. The city's telephone system was a Telephone Division, with the jurisdiction confined to the twin cities themselves. Over the years, as the telecom facilities were extended and the plant size increased, according to the prevailing standards, the Secunderabad Telecom Division (as it was known) was to be bifurcated into two Divisions. The newly created Division was to have its Headquarters in Warangal, the town with the second largest population and importance in the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh. All the Divisional staff i.e., mostly the Clerks and Accountants are to be at the Headquarters of the Division. The customers would be where they are, and so also the Linemen, Telephone Operators, Technicians, in fact, all other ranks. It was only half of the clerical and accounts staff that had to move from Hyderabad to Warangal, alongwith a new Divisional Engineer. The low paid line staff and others would welcome the shift of the Divisional Headquarters, for they would be nearer to the new Headquarters, where their personal claims are all attended to. The telephone customers in Warangal and other surrounding areas would surely find the Divisional Headquarters more accessible at less expense.

But the staff, including the Divisional Engineer, advanced the specious plea that there was no suitable accommodation in Warangal, and a move in the middle of the academic year would be against the interests of the Divisional staff and, therefore, the shift should be postponed. Initially, it was not somewhat invalid, although as soon as the proposal for the bifurcation of the Division was made, the Divisional Engineer

should, in all fairness, have looked for suitable accommodation and also given advance warning of the move to the staff that were affected. Next year when the actual shift was to be done, again it was postponed under the plea that there was no suitable accommodation. The new Division was called, "Warangal Telecom Division at Secunderabad". In the meanwhile, new posts were created, freshers were recruited, and all of them also started working at the *Divisional Headquarters, Warangal*, in Secunderabad. As years rolled by, this appeared to be normal. The word "Warangal" was dropped and it was called, "Secunderabad Division". Perhaps, this continued for about 10 years like that.

When I took over as the General Manager, Telecommunications, of Andhra Pradesh, I did not, in the beginning, know about this. As expansions were undertaken rapidly, Division after Division was bifurcated to create new Divisions. In the Telengana region itself, from out of Hyderabad were carved out Mahboobnagar and Nizamabad Divisions, from out of Secunderabad were carved out Warangal and Nalgonda, and what remained out of the Secunderabad Division was almost nothing contiguous to Secunderabad. The territory was in the Khammam Revenue District, adjacent to Vijayawada, and more than 100 kms. away from Secunderabad. It appeared to me to be absolutely anomalous. I wanted to shift the Divisional Headquarters from Secunderabad, calling it Khammam Division, to be located in Khammam City. Whenever a Division was bifurcated, it was the junior most people who were sent to the Headquarters of the newly created Division. In this case it meant that the persons who were to have gone away more than 10 years ago would continue to remain in Secunderabad (actually located in Abids, Hyderabad, not even in Secunderabad, but simply called, "Secunderabad Division"), whereas the later recruits had to go to Warangal and Nalgonda, and later on, even to Karimnagar. And it is the old timers who are the so-called "defenders" of the staff interest, in other words, their own interest to be taken up by the Union. I had explained to the line staff and others the advantages of the Divisional Headquarters being located in their midst and not hundreds of kilometres away. I told them that a Divisional Headquarters is not to serve the staff there, who were about 10% to 15% of the total Divisional staff, but to serve the customers for whom this Division was meant, and also to serve the staff working in the Division in the territory. However, Union leadership always comes from those who work in the nice comfort of Head Offices, having to work only between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., enjoying all holidays, and never having

to carry out any field responsibilities like putting through a call, or erecting posts, and giving new lines, or repairing the Exchanges. They can read newspapers, they can develop elocution, they can go on reading all the rules and be familiar with them and develop nice arguments in favour of whatever they want. I disregarded all their specious arguments and decided that the Divisional Headquarters would be moved. The Divisional Engineer himself was not wanting to move, and had surreptitiously incited the staff not to move and to represent in all ways through every possible quarter. A date was fixed for the shifting, and the Divisional Engineer was warned that if he did not move, he would be transferred from the Khammam Division in Hyderabad to Srikakulam, the north-eastern most town, about 600 kms. away from Hyderabad.

Incited by the Divisional Engineer and in furtherance of their own interest, some staff members belonging to the Scheduled Caste and so-called "Backward Communities", gave a representation to Shri Shivashankar, saying that the shift of the Headquarters of the Division would adversely affect the staff belonging to the Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes. He should intervene, they prayed. That was in 1980 when Smt. Indira Gandhi came back as Prime Minister and Shri Shivashankar became a Minister and was reputed to be very near to the Prime Minister. The Communications Minister at that time was Shri C.M. Stephen. It appears that Shri Shivashankar spoke to Shri Stephen, requesting him to stay the shift of the Divisional Headquarters from Hyderabad to Khammam. I was rung up from the Directorate to this effect. I knew Shri Shivashankar very well and I was sure that if I explained the matter to him, the truth would be known. I went to Delhi and met Shri Shivashankar in his Chamber in the Parliament House. I explained to him how the shifting of the Headquarters of this Telecom Division was sabotaged for over 10 years, and how the customers, as well as over 80% of the staff were being inconvenienced, and that there were more Backward Class and Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe staff members in Khammam Telecom Division than in the Division's Headquarters in Hyderabad. How could the interests of the staff, who are meant to serve the customers, be placed above those of the latter? Shri Shivashankar immediately stated that he was misled. He felt very sorry and he said that he would immediately make amends. He rang up Shri C.M. Stephen in a nearby room and took me there. He explained to Shri Stephen that his earlier request for staying the shift of the Headquarters of the Telecom Division was based upon incomplete

information, and he urged the Communications Minister to allow the shift as planned by the General Manager. Shri Stephen spoke very few words and told me that I could go ahead. From Parliament House, I went back to my Director-General and the Member (Operations) concerned to report what happened. That very evening I returned to Hyderabad.

I was determined that no time should be lost. I came to know that the staff was collecting money to move the High Court to get a Stay. I am not a person to allow grass to grow under my feet. I called upon one of the judges of the High Court, briefed him about the contemplated move, and requested him not to countenance my staff in this regard without giving a proper hearing to the Management. The entire background and the history of 10 years up to the latest event, was explained to him. I then planned for a swift move. Through a separate channel, I contracted ten lorries to be available by 5 p.m. at the Headquarters of the Telecom Division in Hyderabad. About 50 Mazdoors were also contracted. I had authorised one of the officers at the State Telecom Headquarters to draw a huge amount of cash. I cyclostyled application forms for advance of Transfer Travelling allowance and other admissible amounts. I got the transfer orders prepared with everybody's name filled up. I called the Divisional Engineer at 3.30 p.m. to my office and told him that at 4.30 p.m. he had to serve all the transfer orders on everyone of the staff, and nobody should be granted leave or allowed to move out of the building without receiving the transfer orders. All the files and furniture would be bundled and loaded up by the Mazdoors into the lorries between 4.30 p.m. and 5.30 p.m. on as is where is basis, and everybody would be given the advance of Transfer Travelling allowance then and there itself. Exactly at 4.30 p.m., the 10 lorries and 50 Mazdoors appeared on the scene and they started loading up everything into the lorries. The Divisional Engineer was accompanied by a few officers from the Headquarters to serve the transfer orders and also distribute the money to whosoever was prepared to take it. The plan was kept so secret and execution was so swift that everything happened within an hour. There was no time for anybody to demonstrate or to run away or to go to Court and get a Stay Order. That was a Saturday evening. The Divisional Engineer and some Clerks were all ordered to move in the lorries to Khammam and give me a report, whatever be the time, after they had reached Khammam and unloaded the files and the furniture. At about 2 a.m., I got a ring that all this had been completed. I ordered the Divi-

sional Engineer and the Head Clerks not to return to Headquarters until the office opened on Monday. There was a Sub-Division located in Khammam and the few Assistants and others who were in that office were drafted to the Divisional Headquarters.

The whole office was stunned that this had happened in a matter of hours. Word went to the Directorate, including telegrams, describing the action as very high-handed, dictatorial and so .... The Member (Administration) called me on Monday, and I told him that there was nothing left. What should have been done 10 or 12 years ago, had, at long last, been done. This particular person, Shri K.V.Srinivasan, was earlier a Director in the State Telecom Headquarters, and during his time also the Division could not be shifted. People reputed to be very brave and audacious had preceded me. But because of political intervention, they could never act. I had always reckoned that political intervention could be made ineffective by counter-intervention. Usually, Civil Servants do not do this, excepting in regard to their own transfer or promotion. When I was convinced that a particular thing had to be done, and since I was sure that nothing of my self-interest was involved, I was determined and I was confident that I would be able to convince the political leadership also. And this event clearly demonstrates that politicians, if properly approached and explained to, would not be unreasonable, and would, in fact, come to the help of an honest, confident and determined administration. This incident which was within a few months of the strike that was launched for getting unjustified cyclone and unauthorised festival advances (see the Chapter, "*Myself and The Unions*") and coming so soon after the first determined action, proved that the Management was stronger than the Unions, and that it is the business of the Management to manage, and not that of the Unions.

Towards the end of 1982, and the beginning of 1983, I was racing to open more and more telephone Exchanges and Public Telephones in the villages of Andhra Pradesh. Instructions were received that we should not spend the entire amount that was allocated for development, because of budgetary constraints. However, we had by then whipped up so much enthusiasm, and about 70 villages were promised Exchanges, in expectation of which the villagers had filled in applications and deposited the money and were counting the weeks when they would get the telephone service. Several hundred more villages were expecting Public Telephones. If money was not to be spent, all their expectations would be

dashed, and the Management would be miserably failing in keeping its promises. In a conversation with pressmen in Vijayawada, I said that if we could not get money from the Government, we would still go ahead. We would collect money from the people and open telephone Exchanges. This was flashed in headlines in the local newspapers. One political person, who was not so well disposed to me, wrote a letter to the Minister for Communications, Shri V.N.Gadgil at that time. The politician enquired from the Minister whether the General Manager was authorised to introduce such new policies and whether he could collect money from the people and open telephone Exchanges. The Minister enquired about it with the then Member (Operations), Shri Thomas Kora, who later became the Director-General. Shri Kora rang me up and asked me whether I had made such a statement. I said that I had. He then asked me how I could make such a statement. I told him that just as we have the "Own Your Telephone" (OYT) Scheme, there is also a Scheme called, "Own Your Exchange" Scheme. This is what I would be operating. He did not seem to know about this and he desired that I should go to Delhi and explain the matter.

I had been reading all the Annual Reports of the P & T Department from 1946 onwards. A few of them were kept by me. I went to Delhi, went to the Library in Sanchar Bhavan, picked up three or four Annual Reports of 1950-54. They spoke of the "Own Your Exchange" Scheme, and year after year they mentioned the names of the Exchanges that were opened under the Scheme. The Scheme was introduced by the late Shri Rafi Ahmed Kidwai. Briefly, if any body came forward with Rs.50,000, the Department would open a small telephone Exchange on priority basis. A little earlier, or about that time, the Department had also introduced a Scheme called, "Own Your Telephone", according to which, if an individual paid up as advance the prescribed deposit, he would get a telephone in preference to the General Category applicants, because there was a certain quota reserved for OYT category of applicants. While everybody was aware of the OYT Scheme, many had forgotten about the Own Your Exchange Scheme. I was reasonably certain that it would not have been withdrawn. I had also collected the 30-year-old file concerning the Scheme. I read all the notes that were written by Shri Chintamani D. Deshmukh, then Secretary (Finance), and some South Indian gentleman who was the Accountant General, all arguing against the introduction of the Own Your Exchange Scheme. After the

file went up and down, the Personal Secretary to Shri Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, the then Communications Minister, recorded that the Minister had taken all the notes into account and had decided that the Scheme must be introduced, and the Secretaries must frame the rules within the stipulated time, which to my memory was a few more days. And then, all the rules were framed in no time and the Scheme was promulgated. When I read this file, I was struck by the decisiveness of the then Minister, Shri Rafi Ahmed Kidwai. More surprising was that even his signature was not necessary and a noting from his Personal Secretary that the Minister had decided, was sufficient to bring the mighty Secretaries to heel and to make them implement the scheme which they had all earlier opposed. I fixed up an interview with Shri V.N.Gadgil, and armed with the Annual Reports and the file, I met him. I showed him all the facts. Being a scholarly person, he was pleasantly surprised that I had so many facts and so many documents to show. He asked me why the Member (Operations) could not tell me that there was such a scheme and that the General Manager was only operating it. I said that I could not answer such a question, but added that such was the calibre of people coming up by seniority these days. He said that this was a very good scheme and should be refined to suit the present day conditions, that the amount should be more, there should be more publicity and more use of the scheme. After that, I met the Member (Operations) and told him that the entire matter was over. He was surprised and asked me how I met the Minister without telling him. I replied that the Head of a Circle, being the Head of a Department, was free to meet the Minister directly and this was what I did. He did not take any offence, but only opined that he could have been informed earlier. There the matter ended. Nothing came out of the Minister's wish that the Own Your Exchange Scheme should be utilised more to raise funds for the development of telecommunications. When I took over after a few months as Deputy Director-General (MS) in the Directorate, although I was not concerned with this, I tried to interest my colleague under whose jurisdiction this was, and his subordinates, and also the new Member (Operations). But nothing came out of it. That is because, as I had for long experienced, the Directorate has become very flabby with far too many officers, each concerned with too little a fraction of the total and therefore, lacking a sense of achievement and involvement.

I was to have another brush with political masters. This was when I was the General Manager, Telecommunications, in Andhra Pradesh.

Vijayawada, the second largest city in Andhra Pradesh, was languishing for want of more telephones. One of the main reasons was that the existing telephone Exchange building had its capacity exhausted, and a new one was very necessary. For this we had to acquire a site. Land was being highly speculated in. Prices were going up and nobody would ever willingly sell land to the Government which would pay only the rates that the Land Acquisition Officer prescribed, and this would usually be 25% to 35% of the going rate. During my time, I had come across a piece of land of 10 acres on Vijayawada-Eluru Road, and it was ideal for a telephone Exchange and residential quarters. I put it under acquisition. I was warned by my local officers that several attempts had been made earlier and not one succeeded because of political intervention. Actually, I was aware of this, because I myself came from Krishna District, and I was married in Vijayawada. I knew how my powerful community could do and undo the officers and also interfere with the Government processes. But to me, public good was more important than private relations. So, despite the warning, I had the acquisition proceedings progressed vigorously. The Collector at that time was Shri A.V.S. Reddy, a very spirited person who had served in the army, and who was not subject to political influence. We two decided that no matter what pressure came, we would proceed with the acquisition.

First my relatives came to dissuade me from acquiring the land. The landlords had approached them. They had told me that the landlords were their friends, and that they would be losing heavily, because what we would pay, as I said earlier, would be only a fraction of what they would get if they could manage to sell in the open market. Then some acquaintances came. I told them that I was at a loss to understand why they were intervening. Whenever I came to Vijayawada, they were coming to me complaining that the waiting list for telephone was large, that the waiting period was too long, and that the Department was derelicting its duty of providing more and more telephones in Vijayawada. I asked them how I could provide more telephones if there was not another Exchange, and how I could have another Exchange if there was no building, and how the building could come up without land. If they would show me any alternative piece of land anywhere and get the consent of the landlord for the sale, I would give up this land. They said I was impractical and that I would learn how difficult it would be to acquire.

Then came an M.P., a Minister and some M.L.A.s, some of them related to me, and all of them very good friends of mine. I then explained to them why we had to acquire land. I appealed to the Minister to give an alternative site, but he replied that he was not speaking to me as a Minister but only as a friend of mine, as well as a friend of the people whose land was being acquired. I told him that if all of them advised me to give up the acquisition and wrote a letter to that effect, and would also promise not to ask me for more telephones or blame the Administration in public that it was neglecting Vijayawada with regard to giving more telephones, I would be most happy to give up the acquisition. Certain benefits were also suggested to me, but I explained that I had already chosen Central Government Service, I had served in several States and was used to moving from city to city every two to four years. I had come here and it was my duty to extend telephone service and improve it. I was seeking their co-operation, help and guidance. They could decide what I should do, and that decision should be supportable publicly. They said that they knew that this was what would happen, but since they had a Constituency and constituents who were looking up to them for help, they had come to me. I was free to pursue what appeared to me to be in the best public interest. I must say that they never tormented me, nor did they try to harm me by engineering a transfer or any such thing. This incident again proves that if self interest is not involved, and if one can be very open and honest and bold and be prepared for taking advice, and appeal to the politicians sense of fair judgement, one would not usually come to grief. I was also glad to know later that they were consulted by the successive Communications Ministers, and all of them had spoken highly about my commitment, my hard work, and the extra-ordinary expansion and improvement of telecom service that took place in Andhra Pradesh during my General Managership.

I had worked as Head of a Circle i.e., Head of a Government Department in Ahmedabad (1971-74), Pune (1974-76), and Andhra Pradesh (1978-83). As such, I had come into intimate contact with the Ministers of Communications. I could talk with them directly, and long were the hours I had spent in discussions with them during their several visits to places that I served. One thing that surprised me was the loose talk that many were indulging in corruption, about money that the Ministers were taking to give telephones out of turn etc. I can honestly and boldly

say that none of the Ministers - Shri Bahuguna, Shri Brahmananda Reddy, Shri Shankar Dayal Sharma, Shri Brij Lal Varma, Shri C.M. Stephen, and later on Shri Arjun Singh, under whom I worked directly as the Head of a Department, had ever asked me to do anything, not even giving a telephone out of turn or even a temporary telephone to any person they liked. Very few people would believe this amazing experience of mine. I believe in the supremacy of the political Minister. In a democracy, it is the prerogative of Ministers to make policies. It is the duty of Civil Servants to place before the Ministers all the facts and all the arguments for and against any proposition or scheme. The realisability of any scheme should also be appraised in the light of experience, and in the light of how a bureaucracy would respond and be able to act or change. We must remember that politicians are usually far cleverer and able than Civil Servants. While we are appointed and have permanency of tenure and require no periodical renewal to continue in service, every Minister has to get himself elected periodically if he is to stay in power. To be elected and to continue in power is not easy and obviously he must be having leadership qualities which win for him the trust and support and confidence of the people. We, as Civil Servants, may be convinced that the telephone tariffs must be increased. Could we ever convince the people or the customers? We could only use the rules and the laws to enforce the rate rises. However, the politician is able not only to raise the rates, but also to impose fresh and ever-increasing taxes and yet come to rule again. In a democracy that is very important. If the Civil Servants are afraid to be frank, to be bold and simply take the orders of the Ministers, then they are doing a great dis-service. The Ministers are temporary, the Civil Servants are permanent. The Ministers have one perception i.e., of promising service and help to everybody. But they know that when they are in power, only a fraction of their promises could be fulfilled. It is for the Civil Servants to properly advise what could be fulfilled and what will be the general interest and what would need to be done, what would give immediate and temporary benefit, and what would be long-lasting.

We are apt to think that politicians will always support the Unions and let down the Management. I have come across instances in which this simply was untrue. Shri C.M. Stephen was himself a labour leader. When he became the Communications Minister, I had ample opportunity to interact with him intimately and drew upon his strength in my firm management. My first inter-action with him was in the

company of Shri Shivashankar, who took me to him in connection with the shifting of the Headquarters of the Telecom Division from Hyderabad to Khammam. A few days after that, he came to Secunderabad on his way to Gulbarga, from where he got elected as a Member of Parliament. I made a courtesy call on him, and in the first few sentences I told him that the telecommunications services could be vastly improved by determined management. I had also immediately stated that Ministers, being temporary, had little time to realise their objectives in any Department, but the Civil Servants, being permanent, could frustrate the temporary Ministers' objectives. This simply electrified him. Perhaps, no telecommunications person had talked to him like this either in the Directorate or in the field. Then he asked me why telecom improvements were being delayed. Very briefly and precisely I told him the reasons and how I was effecting improvements in Andhra Pradesh. He was animated enough to call his Private Secretary and tell him to cancel all programmes, with a view to spend more time with me, discussing telecom matters. The discussions lasted for about three hours. I gave him a panoramic view of how a determined Manager like me was, by interaction with the public and the staff directly, overcoming the evils of the system. For example, I told him about the Phonograms. The standards of the Department were ridiculous. The Phonogram Clerk was required to receive so many Phonograms per day, which amounted to about 20 minutes of work in an hour. The officials were asking for more staff or for overtime. I told the Minister that I had informed them that standards were none of their business. They had to work for seven hours every day, and every minute during every hour. If anybody was idle and would not answer the Phonogram calls after the prescribed number as per standards, he would be proceeded against. If anybody asked them to do overtime, they should refuse. I had given strict orders to my officers not to engage anybody on overtime, but insisted that every person should work for seven hours a day, minus half an hour for lunch and two fifteen minute intervals for tea. Anybody not working would be advised, warned, proceeded against and disciplined. The Union used to tell me that I was violating rules, that I was asking them to do more than the standards. I said that standards were guidelines for estimating the requirement of staff. They also meant that I could never have staff more than what the standards permitted. But, as a good Manager, I could always have less. Shri C.M. Stephen immediately saw how management could improve. I had further told him that there was a tendency in the telegraph offices

to increase the number of retransmissions between the origin and the destination by mis-routing, increasing the operations and getting more and more staff. There were all sorts of arguments so that telegrams would be delayed and more and more overtime could be had by the staff. I simply proposed that in these days, when over 80 cities in India are connected by airlines, and when Rajadhanis and Super Fast express trains were running, whichever telegram was not transmitted within so many hours should be bundled and handed over to the Indian Airlines to be delivered in the next one or two hours to the destination city, and collected and distributed to the addressee. This further animated him. I explained to him how metered demand trunk service would increase trunk operator productivity by three times, making it as easy as local assistance - 199 service calls - and that I had introduced it, without covering rules, from Vizianagaram to Visakhapatnam experimentally, and that this equipment was fabricated locally, for the Indian Telephone Industries would not make it unless designed by the Telecom Research Centre (TRC) in Delhi, and that the TRC would not design it unless asked by the Directorate, and that the Directorate would not decide for the next five years - it is not capable of deciding because of over-staffing in the ranks of Directors (over 80) and Deputy Directors-General (over 25). I found in him, one Minister who went into great details, and if he was convinced that what we were saying was right, and if he wanted to implement it, he would support the Management to the hilt, even against the Unions, whose patron he was supposed to be.

In the P & T, the Federation of National P & T Organisations (FNPTO) is supposed to be the Congress Union with connections with the INTUC. I had told Shri Stephen very frankly that it was easy dealing with the Communist Unions, because they were able to see that if an accord was arrived at, their members would never break it. The leadership would take the responsibility for its implementation. But in the FNPTO, there were many leaders. There was not much discipline. Besides, most of them were trafficking, i.e., canvassing for promotions, transfers and advancements. He used to listen to all this patiently and would never cut short anything. If we wanted to discipline any of the FNPTO people, he would not intervene. At least, that was my experience. It was during his time that the determined manager could bring about discipline. For example, earlier, the practice of the Junior Engineers writing the Confidential Reports of Telephone Operators was withdrawn. I had submitted to Shri Stephen that this was a grievous mistake

in the States (as distinct from the big cities), where the Junior Engineers are in charge of the telephone Exchanges, and if they could not write the Confidential Reports of the Telephone Operators, there was no way of enforcing discipline. How could a Sub-Divisional Officer or a Divisional Engineer, who was tens of miles away from the Exchange, know how an Operator was working? It is the Junior Engineer at the Exchange who knows and he should be allowed to write the reports. Shri Stephen supported this immediately and restored the right to the Junior Engineers. But, I am sorry that later on, after he went away from the Ministry, the Unions had their way, and the Junior Engineers could no longer write the Confidential Reports of Operators working under them in the small Exchange in the Circles.

It was during Shri Stephen's time that I, in Andhra Pradesh, was removing the Public Telephones from the Post Offices and placing them in the grocer shops. He toured Andhra Pradesh several times at my instance, for opening new Exchanges, introducing direct dialling or some such facilities. Hours and hours were spent in his company and he used to go into the minutest details, and once he was convinced of a position, he would go back to Delhi and see that it was acted upon, no matter what the whimpering of the ignorant was. He was a very great orator. In the State, we used to travel by road. I used to stop the car and show him the Telegraph Office, Public Telephones etc. I used to suggest to him that he should put questions to the subscribers, get their answers, their views and so on. He liked all this and knew what a tremendous public information, instruction and relations work my staff in Andhra Pradesh was doing. While travelling, I several times pointed out to him the Sign-Boards at the entrance to a city or a village and outside with the inscription:

**"NAMASKAR/ TELECOMMUNICATIONS ANDHRA PRADESH"**

Below it was given all the relevant information about the town or village: its population, the number of schools, the number of Doctors, the local crafts and industries, the number of telephones and so on. At the bottom was the inscription:

**"TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN YOUR LIFE AND PART OF IT"**

The Minister felt very happy. But then I told him that I was already being questioned by the so-called Financial and Audit people as to whether these Sign-Boards were authorised to be put up. At this he smiled.

I then told him that government servants could not understand that in the country-side, telecommunications should be undertaken as an instrument of development and for this purpose, the involvement of the people is necessary and the people should perceive telecommunications as their friend and benefactor. He agreed with me. I also told him that sometimes we used to encourage the Panchayats or the rich farmers of the villages to foot the bill for these Namaskar Boards (as they came to be called), and sometimes we ourselves used to bear the cost. During my five-year period as General Manager, Telecommunications, in Andhra Pradesh, almost every town and village where we had a telephone, had such a Sign-Board. Our vehicles had Sign-Boards in the rear with the greeting, "Namaskar". We had come to be called a Namaskar Department. People used to say that whether they got service or not, they at least got a Namaskar. But, I had noticed with regret that later on, after I left Andhra Pradesh, when the Namaskar Boards were damaged or uprooted, there was no effort to put them up again. All this was due to lack of orders from above. What a pity that for such simple things, orders are required. But where administering rules, no matter whether service is rendered or not, is uppermost and the safest thing to do, how could one see the value of these symbols of involvement of telecommunications in the life of the people?

During Shri Stephen's time, the Unions lost much of their influence. The weapon of the Unions was to charge the officers with corruption. But Shri Stephen used to bluntly tell them that it was none of their business to stop corruption. He had a Vigilance Department. He had the CBI. And therefore, corruption he would take care of. The Unions should place only economic demands, and that too, only those which are within the powers of the officers under whom they were working. Every political demand and every other anti-work stand would be ruthlessly opposed by the Management. He was very severe with the Managers also. He held that it was because of the abdication of the responsibilities of supervision and management on the part of the officers that discipline suffered, service deteriorated, and politicking increased. He was very severe and stern with the Managers in his meetings with them. But he used to feel more than happy if he came across any Manager who was ruling (and not merely reigning) firmly in the interests of service and improvement. He had three or four of us according to his standards and he used to go by our propositions and advice and views in many of his decisions.

Shri Bahuguna was another Minister who was very able, perceptive, and took great interest in going into details. Those were the years (1971-75) immediately after the Congress Party split, and he and the Congress Party were really interested in improving service. Although he was a very active politician, he devoted as much time to the intricacies of administering a Department as to his political affairs. My first encounter with him was within four months of my taking over as District Manager, Ahmedabad Telephones, in November, 1971. He set apart only ten minutes to see me. But the ten minutes went on for two hours! That was in his house. I made a very provocative statement at the outset itself, saying that the people had given him such a massive mandate that if he really wanted to improve the telecom services, he should intervene. I do not think any Government Servant ever makes such a statement. He told me that we are a democratic Government. That was not correct, I said. These very people and this very democracy had given him such a massive mandate, and here was the Department, i.e., telecommunications, which was serving ever-increasing numbers of people, playing a vital role for their successes in business and wealth-creation. The workers should be enthused. They were performing far below their ability, and good and honest management could improve the efficiency, and the Government should also compensate the workers in productivity gains. He then enquired whether I was associated with politics at any time. I told him that I had been in the Students' Federation, that I believed in Marxist analysis and economic theory and views, but that I did not think that the Government of India was capitalist or an exploiter, and therefore, the workers indulging in continuous political struggles in the Departments was wrong. Their welfare was right. In fact, I used to lead the Unions' delegation to the Minister whenever he visited Ahmedabad. I used to tell him of all that we were doing. He could see the rapid improvements that were taking place in Ahmedabad. He also noticed how I was going to the people, reaching out to my own workers, and how I was involving the customers and the workers and the Management in joint efforts.

Long after he left the Department, he was remembering me. He was also apprehensive that my being far ahead of my colleagues might involve me in some troubles. Once when my colleagues who were apprehensive of my superseding them were pleading that seniority should be the criterion for promotion, he said that if that was so, Morarji Desai should have been the Prime Minister and not Indira Gandhi. He said

that he did not believe in seniority, but only in merit and performance. It was not only with officers that he could be so bold. He was very frank even with the Unions. Once, when the Assistant Engineers who had come from the ranks were representing against quick promotions given to the directly recruited Assistant Divisional Engineers to the rank of Divisional Engineers, he very smilingly and tellingly replied, "Look, this cannot be avoided. Direct recruits always get accelerated promotions. T.A. Pai joined the Congress very recently, but he has become a Cabinet Minister. I have been in Congress for over 20 years, but I am only a Minister of State. So, whether it is Government Service or politics, direct recruits are always at an advantage." That amused them, even though it did not help them to advance their cause. Shri Bahuguna was so informal that, on several matters, he used to call me direct, and I too, could call him and speak to him direct. Of course, this was my relationship with many other Communications Ministers, especially with Shri C.M.Stephen. Shri Bahuguna felt that there might be attempts to see that my merit would not be recognised, and that some would try to do positive harm to me. While departing, he arranged for a copy of the remarks that he had written in my Confidential Report to be given to me to be kept by me. This is what he had written:

*"Shri T.H.Chowdary, District Manager, Telephones, Ahmedabad, is a fine officer who combines in him the qualities of an Engineer of high calibre, an administrator of rare perception and public relations, organiser of exceptional merit. The other day, a rare compliment was paid in the open court by a Judge to the improvement brought about by Shri Chowdary in the telephone service in Ahmedabad. I have congratulated him separately through a formal letter.*

*Shri Chowdary is an officer of exceptional competence and most outstanding ability. His merit deserves recognition by out of turn promotion by special selection.*

*This may be added to his Confidential Record File by Secretary (C) who may please draw attention to this note when he writes report on Shri Chowdary for the year 1973-74."*

Shri Brij Lala Varma was the Minister for Communications for sometime during the Janatha Government. He came to Andhra Pradesh

several times at my request. He visited a number of villages and small towns where we were opening telephone Exchanges and Public Telephones, and giving Group Dialling. Thousands of farmers used to take part in functions for inaugurating such services when the Minister used to address them. He was ill at ease in English. In the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh, at my request he used to speak in Hindi, and most of the people used to understand him. Once, however, he had to speak in English and was reading from a text. I felt miserable, because he did not appear to understand what was written. He was mis-pronouncing certain words. He could not take his eyes off the lines and the audience were visibly perceptive of the discomfort he was undergoing in delivering the speech. Unfortunately, it was my mistake. At the end, I apologised to him and told him that it was the last time any prepared text would be given to him. Later on, his English speeches were short. We used to give the points, and he used to speak in his inimitable way. There was one most fundamental change that he made, and I was instrumental in convincing him that it was necessary. In the Telecoms, there were Divisional staff and Circle staff and all-India staff. These classifications refer to their service liability by way of transfer. The Divisional Engineers were the appointing authorities for the Divisional staff like Telephone Operators, Clerks etc. The Divisional staff were being recruited in the State Headquarters, not from the Divisional (usually District Towns) Headquarters. This involved delays. Not only that, the Headquarters was unnecessarily getting bloated and was throwing its weight around. In any centralised system, this is an inevitable consequence. The Centre will have more and more of authority and less and less of responsibility. I suggested to him that the Divisional Engineers must be authorised to do the recruitment themselves instead of the Headquarters. The Administrative Staff Union opposed this, because the staff concerned, which was now located in the Headquarters, would have to move, or would not grow, and if it did not grow, its promotions would be affected. The Clerks (who belonged to the Engineering Staff Union) in the Telecom Engineering Divisions and those in the Headquarters are not inter-changeable. It was possible that the number of Clerks in the Divisions would increase and may get promotions faster than those in the Headquarters. But the Unions at the Headquarters were more vocal. That was why they were more resisting. But I was able to convince the Minister, Shri Brij Lal Varma, and when once he was convinced, he was unchangeable. Another matter which I wanted to do

within my own powers, but could not do, was to move the Directors away from Headquarters into the Field Offices. As the telecoms were expanding, more and more posts of Directors were being sanctioned (these are now called Deputy General Managers). They were all sitting in the Headquarters. But each one was in charge of a region. For example, in Andhra Pradesh, during my time, one Director was looking after the northeastern Districts of Andhra Pradesh, a second was looking after the central coastal Districts, a third one was looking after Rayalaseema, and the fourth one was looking after the Telengana region. But all were sitting in Hyderabad. They would go on tour, write inspection notes and come back. I felt that this was very strange. It would be better if these Directors had their offices located in the territory over which their jurisdiction lay. These are all all-India cadre officers. They may be comfortable in the State Headquarters. But was it their comfort which was more important than the efficiency of administration and management and their reachability by the customers and their subordinates? I convinced Shri Brij Lal Varma that just as we were pushing down the recruitment where it was unnecessary, undesirable and unneeded, so, too, we should send away the Directors from the State Headquarters to the Regions. He was convinced of this, and both my suggestions were effected within a few months in the most determined fashion, despite opposition from some officers in the Directorate, as well as from some workers in the Unions. Here again it is my conviction that analytical, committed and confident Civil Servants can properly convince the Ministers, and the Ministers' strength and power and position could be utilised for bringing about reform in management, and changes in rules and policies.

Many a time, Managers are at a loss as to how to tackle the staff resistance, especially if it is articulated through the Unions. Here again, I always used to make a distinction between economic demands and politically motivated demands. If there are demands or requests or grievances which are purely related to their work and to their emoluments, we should be very just and solve them also, if they are within our powers immediately, or advocate them for acceptance in the competent quarters. But if a particular action is politically motivated, harmful to the interests of the customers, and subversive of discipline or lowering of work standards, I was convinced that it should be firmly dealt with. One such incident happened in Vijayawada.

The Telegraph Messengers collect the telegrams that are received and deliver them all over the city. For calculating how many messengers are required, there are certain standards : how many messages could be delivered in a trip and in a day, and these are different if one has to walk or if one can go on a bicycle. Besides, Mopeds were also introduced. Taking all this into account, the strength of the Messengers will be determined and their output measured. Where they were able to cycle, and even if they were using cycles, the Unions were saying that these routes or distances were covered by foot and therefore, each Messenger should deliver less number of messages. I did not agree. They resorted first to "work-to-rule" and then stoppage of work. They were led by a Marxist-inspired Union. The Telegraph Clerks were led by the INTUC - sympathising FNPTO Union. The FNPTO and the NEPTE (National Federation of P&T Employees) are rival Unions in the P&T. The NEPTE, especially the Marxist Wing, which was controlling the Telegraph Messengers and Telegraphists, was wanting to be militant to show to the workers that they were the real leaders. When the Messengers stopped delivering messages, the Management had the duty of seeing that the customers did not suffer. From Hyderabad, I called the Secretary of the Youth Congress in Vijayawada, explained to him the matters involved, and requested him to send a few score willing, unemployed youth whom we would engage and pay according to the number of messages delivered. There was immediately a swarm of them, a few hundred, all clamouring for work. The Union protested that this was not correct. How could these people be trusted to deliver the messages to the proper addressees, and how could such people be entrusted with Government work, argued the Unions. Our reply was that this was none of their business. They struck work. We told them that they were free to do so and they could go on. But the Management had certain responsibilities and if anybody questioned about the loss of telegrams or secrecy, we would answer. We would take the responsibility. I asked the officers to stand firm and give the telegrams meant for delivery to the Youth Congress Workers. Within a day, the strike collapsed and the striking staff came back to work unconditionally and what we felt right was enforced in regard to the number of messages to be delivered by a person.

Once the telegraphists resorted to tooldown strike. The telegraph clerks who belonged to a different union were working and booking the

telegrams and collecting the charges, only to have the telegrams posted in the evening. I felt this was simple cheating of the public. So I ordered a prominent notice to be displayed at the booking counter. It read:

*"Telegrams are not being transmitted by wire, but are being posted.*

*You need not offer one here and waste your money. The Post Office is just across. Post it yourself".*

I also directed the officers to stand at the public counter and draw the attention of whosoever came to book a telegram to the big notice. Within a few hours, there were no telegrams being offered for booking. The Union objected to this notice. But we told them that it was none of their business. The Management had a duty not to mislead the public by accepting a telegram which was going to be posted, but collecting telegraph charges instead of postal charges. By evening, the strike had to be called off, because it was ineffective.

Some of the workers were from families related to me or who were acquaintances. They knew that my brother and my other relatives were all political activists, some of them in the Communist Party itself. They started realising and saying that because I was from such a political family, and because my work methods were not merely of the usual Government Servant's pattern, but were informed and inspired, I was doing such things, that the guerilla tactics of the Unions would not come down, and that I too, could play the people and the parties against them. I must however, hasten to add that whatever I did was to protect the interests of the customers and not to harm any individual worker. If the workers were being misled by the Unions, they should not be allowed to suffer the consequences of their un-thought of and ill-directed or coerced actions.

## TELEPHONE ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Telephone Advisory Committees (TACs) in several places have come under adverse criticism because they have come to be viewed as Telephone "Allotment" Committees. Most of the members of such Committees used to concentrate upon dispensing favours by recommending applicants for telephones on out-of-turn basis. In some cities, there were quotas for each member. In some cases, they were also acting as pressure groups for the placement and transfer of telecom employees. Actually, used properly, the TACs are powerful instruments for interaction with the public. When I first became the Head of Department, i.e., District Manager of Telephones in Ahmedabad, we had a Telephone Advisory Committee, presided over by me. Earlier, I knew how it was working in Bombay, and was determined to transform the Ahmedabad TAC into a model. In the first meeting itself, we placed before the TAC the awesome responsibilities that we had, because of the huge waiting list, the bad performance, and the very adverse opinion the public had about the Telephones. The Committee would be the bridge between the customers and the Management. It would have to assist us in getting sites for telephone Exchanges, in getting quarters from the Housing Board for our staff, and in getting relaxation from the Municipal Corporation in respect of Floor Space Index (FSI) (how many square meters of a building can be constructed in a given site area). It should study our operations, suggest improvements, collect suggestions from the public and see how they could be implemented and check whether the instructions and rules in force came in the way of their implementation. These were the most important tasks. It would be associated with our planning. I used to present to the Committee our plans and incorporate its suggestions. The Committee members would attend our meetings with customers. Then, finally, I told them that we would also seek their advice as to how to allot telephones in the Special Category on an out-of-turn basis. Also, in cases where everybody was saying that he should be

placed in the Special Category, the TAC should advise us whether the claimant has a special justification. A member's recommendation, both for categorisation as well as for out-of-turn allotment of telephone, would be subject to scrutiny not only by the other members of the TAC, but by the citizens, and it would be the telephone administration which would have to answer. Therefore, we proposed that the Committee's recommendations would be exhibited in the notice board for the benefit of the public. We said that we were quite sure that the esteemed members would make only such recommendations as would meet with even public agreement, and finally, that it would be the unanimous recommendations in regard to categorisation and out-of-turn allotment that would be binding upon us. In this perspective, the members of the Committee realised that they were not to allot telephones alone, but really to participate in policy-formulation, its implementation, and in making the Telephone customer-oriented and in assisting the administration in the very difficult task of allotting a few telephones out-of-turn without public criticism of favouritism.

We invited the Committee members to write out each one's contribution at the end of the year to be printed as a booklet. In the event, all of them co-operated, and I did believe that this was the correct way to handle a Telephone Advisory Committee to make it advisory and not allotment oriented.

While in Andhra Pradesh, we did a little better. We held meetings of the TAC, not in the State Headquarters alone, but in the chief towns of the State, by rotation. Advance notice was given to journalists, the local elite, and trade associations about the impending TAC meeting. At the conclusion of the meeting, we used to have a sitting with the elite of the town and the subscribers. There used to be lots of questions put and we used to give patient answers. Very often, I prevailed upon the TAC members themselves to give these answers. Issues ranged from rudeness of and no answer from operators, to telephones going out of order frequently, exorbitant bills, no or delayed response from officers, heavy delays on trunk-calls, demand for automatic Exchanges and STD, etc., The presence of municipal councillors, MLAs, office-bearers of local trade and business associations and leading citizens used to lend colour and prestige to such meetings. We held meetings in Nizamabad, Warangal, Kurnool, Tirupati, Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam, besides Hyderabad.

It is my firm belief that a utility service which is also a monopoly must be compelled to be absolutely open and be trusted by its customers. Proper explanation, sincere effort and hard work would meet with understanding. I insisted upon the practice of every TAC member and every telephone employee answering the telephone with the greeting, "Namaskar! Hyderabad Telephones, Vijayawada Telephones, or so and so."

The Telephone Advisory Committee of Andhra Pradesh was used as a forum for India - wide discussions of various telecom issues by the Telephone and Telecom Advisory Committees of other States. We used to pass a number of resolutions bearing upon the separation of the Posts & Telecommunications, rate rises, various vexatious procedures and rules in regard to telephone billing, realisation of money, dis-connections, bonafide use, inspections, and even upon qualifications for recruitment and recruitment procedures. The resolutions passed used to be sent to the Directorate as well as to Committees elsewhere in the country. It had been my desire that there should be an all-India meeting of all the Committees wherein these issues could be discussed and a powerful public forum created to influence the Department in favour of the customers. But soon, I moved over to the Directorate in Delhi. The Department's rules and charges for certain customer-provided attachments as well as some departmentally provided attachments were high and unjustified. For example, a push-button telephone which is provided by the customer himself, was charged an annual rental or an attachment fee of a few hundred rupees. If it had a "repeat dialling" facility, some more money was charged. If it had a memory, much more was charged. I felt that this was pure extortion, because the customers had purchased them, and the customers were maintaining them, and so the Department had no right to charge these amounts. Similarly, the charge for a long-cord was so high and had to be paid every year, that many customers were surreptitiously buying it and fitting it to their telephones. Sockets in different rooms for the same telephone were also being charged for heavily. The customers therefore, got these things done by-passing the telephone persons. But they were all running the risk of having "unauthorised" attachments. Many a customer did not disclose the push-button telephone that he had put in. However, whenever there were some compulsions, telephone persons would visit such customers and threaten disconnection for having unauthorised attachments. Of course,

this never happened, because "hush money" would prevent that. I had therefore written a memorandum on several issues, got it printed, and gave it to the members of Telephone Advisory Committees in several cities and States to be sent out as a memorandum to the Honourable Minister for Communications. Shri Ram Niwas Mirdha was the Communications Minister at that time. I took one copy and showed it to him without disclosing the authorship. He was indeed shocked that such extortions were being indulged in by the Department. I am glad to record that he ordered the ending of all these extortions. The bureaucracy has extra-ordinary power and opportunity to mislead the politician-minister against the hapless customers who are captives of a monopoly. All the price rises and the inequities would be explained off as "Government policies", whereas Government, i.e., the Minister, was being misled. Many a time I used to ask the several score Deputy Directors General in the Directorate talking of Government, "please let me know the telephone number and the address of the Government, and I will have all these abolished". Thereby I meant that we are the Government and it is we who should correct the injustice.

While in the Videsh Sanchar Nigam, I petitioned the Minister for Communications to constitute an Advisory Committee for the VSNL. No reply came because the Secretary to the Department of Telecoms suspected that such a committee would strengthen me and the VSN against him and his anti-corporation and anti-customer policies.

*"The important thing for government is not to do things which individuals are doing already and do them a little better or a little worse, but to do those things which are not done at all."*

- Lord Keynes.

## PUBLIC MEETINGS WITH TELEPHONE CUSTOMERS

It was 1972. For the past two years there had been so much deterioration in the telephone service in Ahmedabad that customers used to cut their telephone wires and deposit the telephones in the District Manager's Office! There used to be cartoons reading : "Miss. Dial Tone Comes to Town", in the leading newspapers. There were complaints about the inordinate delay in the restoration of faulty telephone non-response to customers' enquiries, and absolutely un-informative and un-communicative attitude with regard to alleged excessive bills and faulty telephones. Rudeness of Operators, misinformation and wrong information about when a person would get a telephone shift or a telephone number, were other varieties of complaints. The success of telephone calls was going down. The morale of the employees was at the lowest ebb. The citizens' rating of the Telephones was that it was the laziest and the most inefficient of all the utilities in the city.

Many seniors declined to take over the management. The post carried a Special Pay. I was the 42nd in rank to be entitled to such Special Pay. Besides, the post was equal to Head of Department. Nevertheless, the then Director-General of the Posts & Telegraphs and the Secretary to the Ministry of Communications, Shri N.V. Shenoy called me and almost ordered me, without a choice, to take over the Telephones of Ahmedabad. My protestations that all my seniors would resent against me and great jealousy would be aroused, went in vain. I then took it up as a challenge. I assumed charge as District Manager of the run-down Ahmedabad Telephones in November, 1971. Within five months, we turned the tide. I enthused the staff from the lowest Linemen upto the Divisional Engineers. I told them that as far as the customers were concerned, whomsoever they came in contact with in the Telephones was the Government, and their attitude would determine the image of the telephone system and the Government. Group meetings, frank discussions and agreed programmes were embarked upon.

People were encouraged to implement their suggestions when once they were approved by the group, without waiting for endorsement from the higher and higher ranks of officers. Initiative was defined as "doing the right thing without being told" and innovation as "doing work in a new way to effect economy or efficiency or more satisfaction". The results were startling. There was competition between various exchange units for excellence. Weekly improvements were displayed and publicised in the monthly meetings. All officers were encouraged to meet customers in the premises and in the offices very freely and speak out the truth. They were taught the virtue of listening without interruption, and repeating the important points customers were making, to signal that they were attentive. Whatever was possible was prescribed to be done immediately without endorsement from the top. Appreciative letters started coming in.

I then conceived the idea of holding a public meeting. The plan was that we should speak frankly about our strengths and weaknesses. There is nothing to be hidden from the customers. Indeed, their understanding would be most useful to boost up the morale of our work-force.

We put in an advertisement : "Have you got a complaint against the Ahmedabad Telephones? You are invited to air it and have the answer at such and such place at such and such time. Chief Justice (Retd.) Mian Bhairu of the Gujrat High Court would preside, and Ahmedabad Telephones would answer. Please give your telephone number so that we can answer specific complaints also". Newspaper men told us that the Telephones would be torn to pieces and, may be, a number of people would be transferred as a consequence. The threat only increased our interest and determination to make the public meeting of complainants a useful one, and turn the event into yet one more achievement of the Ahmedabad Telephones. Over 150 complainants turned up. I had grouped the complaints into various categories, and the customers were told to speak out their mind, at the end of which I gave the replies as well as the position and views. My Assistants were giving me file after file. In fact, I had already gone through them before the meeting. This type of dealing astonished the customers. The position as regards rules, the ethical points involved, and the legal position were all explained. The customers were explained as to which officers would be dealing with their complaints, and how they would be dealt with. They were told that they were free to go to the exchanges, and themselves examine the

procedures and the records and the way efforts are being made to improve. The meeting lasted for about four hours.

Next day, there were headlines in newspapers, characterising the meeting as "trend-setting", "path-breaking, and as an express manifestation of the Management's will to be people-oriented and open-minded. They appreciated the sincerity of the effort and the improvements that would surely follow. In fact, this open meeting was followed by several other group meetings. The Ahmedabad Telephones used to be adjudged as one among the best of the Indian Telephone systems. A tribute was paid by a High Court Judge to the improvements effected in the Ahmedabad Telephones. The esteem for the telephone employees in the citizen's view went up.

Arising out of the direct inter-action between the customers in a group and the management, the following new practices were, for the first time, initiated in the telephones.

**Meter Readings to Subscribers :** The bills were prepared once in a quarter (nowdays once every two months). If a customer got a very heavy bill, it was very difficult for him to recall when and for how long he made the STD calls. The reasonableness of the metered units could not be easily related to the actual use made weeks and months ago. I said I could help. Although the bills were for three months at a time, the meters, however, were read in the Exchange every fortnight, and records were maintained. If any customer informed the telephones in advance that he would want to be given the fortnightly meter readings, we could help. However, since it would cost, we would charge an amount. I worked it out at Rs. 2, again without reference to anybody. I further issued instructions that the fortnightly differences should be worked and if any number showed a high difference, the exchange should keep the meter under observation in addition to taking tests to see that it functioned properly. He should also contact the customer in a very unsuspicious, knowledgeable, helpful way to ascertain the reasons for the heavy incidence of calls and to help the customer recall whether he has made a large number of STD calls, or whether these were done without his knowledge. From that step, there could be mutual collaboration to find out whether there was any mis-use or malfunctioning. The investigations immediately after the discovery of a large incidence of calls, would be more useful to arrive at a proper decision when the customer

complaints that the bill is very heavy. This practice was intimated to the Directorate, and I am happy that this has now become a standard practice viz., giving fortnightly meter readings at the option of the customer for a charge.

**STD Held-up Complaints:** Many a customer reported that they made STD calls, but often found that even if they hang up after the call was over, the connection was not released, as ascertained from obtaining no dial-tone if they put back the handset and re-lifted the handset. Their concern was that during this held-up period, the meter went on advancing and that was the reason for the very high bills. It is true that such cases, besides many other malfunctioning cases, were observed. Theoretically, the Exchange should force-release the customer and stop the meter. This force-release would be effective within about a minute and half at the latest. But that means only 45 more metered units for the longest distance slab in India.

In order to find out the incidence of improper metering, an STD Public Telephone was opened when I was the District Manager, Pune Telephones. This was in the charge of our Receptionist and anybody could make a call, of course, paying for it. The Receptionist-Attendant was recording her observations, especially with regard to metering. A meter was also provided just in front of the telephone instrument. On many an occasion, there used to be metering even when there was dial-tone on. Sometimes, the meter would race, registering as many as a hundred units every minute, unrelated to any standard tariff. Sometimes, the meter would stop even. At other times, even when the handset was replaced, the meter would be ticking away. Obviously, the customers' misgivings were not unfounded.

There was not much that we could do to help an individual subscriber. I had however, introduced the practice of opening a new service, "STD Held-up". If a customer suspected that he was held up after an STD call, he had to call this special number. He would not, obviously be able to do this from his own held-up telephone. He would have to go to some other telephone to make the call. There was no alternative. We could not do the impossible, but the customer had to take the trouble of going to the nearest telephone and calling the STD held-up number. This number was a telephone in the Switch Room, which has technical personnel all the 24 hours. On receipt of a call, the technical official in

the Exchange would enter the number reported to be held-up, the calling number, the name of the person making the complaint, and the time in a register and ask him to hold on. He would then go to the telephone meter and see if it was operating, and also note down the meter reading. He would come back to the telephone and tell the customer whatever was the fact and record it in the "STD Held-up Complaint Register". A report of it would be made to the telephone billing section and also to the excess call complaint section in the Telephone Manager's office. When the customer complained of an excessive bill, these facts and evidence would help the management to decide as to how many calls should be rebated. This was the best that the management could do. The continuance of this practice does not require any orders. But, it is my regret that it has been discontinued after I left, and was never introduced by any Manager anywhere.

**Split Bills :** When a telephone bill is complained of to be excessive, and if the customer does not pay, his telephone would be disconnected. He loses service. The telephones would get a bad name. In view of the real possibility of malfunctioning as well as malpractice, I thought it wrong to disconnect a customer when a complaint for excessive billing was under investigation. I decided that the bill may be split up into two one for an amount equal to about the average, which he had to pay immediately, the other for the rest of the amount, payment of which could be kept in suspense pending investigation and decision. I reasoned that in this fashion, the customer would be happy that his telephone was not disconnected, that the monopolist authority was not imposed, and that the complaint would be receiving attention. He would not become inimical to the telephones. The Telephone Administration would also benefit in that it would receive immediately part of the amount that was due to it, instead of keeping it under accounts receivable. This commonsense practice was decided upon by me and advocated for universal adoption to the Directorate. I am happy that this has been approved, and it is now a standard practice all over the Department.

**Registered Reminders :** The Telephone bills are sent by ordinary post, sometimes late. Sometimes they are not received by the addressee. For various reasons, the bill may not be paid in time. The Administration expects that it is the responsibility of the customer to await the receipt of the bill, and if it is not received he should go to the Accounts Officer Telephone Revenue and get a duplicate bill and pay it

in time. This is again an unethical imposition of a monopoly service by a Government that puts such obligations on the customer. As some relief, there is a practice that the Accounts Officer Telephone Revenue watches out for the payment, and if it is not received, his clerks would ring up the customer. If it is indeed done, the recipient of the ring may be a child or a servant, or an un-understanding person in the house or office. That is sufficient for a telephone reminder and in the next two days if the payment is not received, the telephone would be disconnected. Many a customer pointed out that this was insufficient and asked what the Department would lose if a written reminder was sent. Of course, this was extra work and, therefore, there would be extra costs in the telephone Department. I had, however, then and there agreed to issue registered reminders if the customers paid for such a scheme, and gave standing instructions. I also mentioned that the cost of registration would have to be borne by the customer, which no one would normally oppose. So, that was how the practice of registered reminders under the standing instructions, initiated in Ahmedabad, became the Rule.

**Assured (against dis-connection due to non-payment) Telephone Service :** Customers wonder why their telephones should be disconnected if their bills are not paid owing to oversight or mistake sometimes. At the time of giving the connection, the telephones take a deposit equal to one year's rental, and this lies without earning any interest. In other words, it is a life-long, interest-less deposit. The telephones may be enjoying the benefit of earning interest on this. When such a deposit is available and its amount is increasing with the passage of time by the interest earned, why should the telephone be disconnected, sometimes for petty amounts of a few hundred Rupees? So argued the customers. I sympathised and agreed with them. I felt that it was unjust to dis-connect a telephone. The fear in Government is that everybody will pay very late and may even default. Government practice is to bring in a rule everytime something goes wrong. This is applied to the telephone customers also. I was told by the Directorate that this (deposit paid at the time connection was given) was an unadjustable deposit and therefore, would not be set off against any bills that were not paid. I believed this to be a very unjust ruling. Therefore, without infringing the Government's directive, I told the customers that they could place a deposit which was more than their expected telephone bill amount for a quarter or two. This would be adjusted against any unpaid bill, and the customer would be intimated that so and so bill for such

and such amount, which remained unpaid, had been adjusted against his deposit lying with the telephones. If he chose, he could replenish the deposit. Quite a number of customers availed of this and I had never referred this to the Directorate for fear that this too would be ruled against.

**Information Bulletins :** I felt that the telephone rules and practices and operating methods were largely not easily understood by the vast numbers of customers. This is nothing unnatural, for even intelligent persons like us do not understand income-tax rules or even the railway rules. How can we expect thousands of telephone users to know the telephone rules which, by the way, are not usually publicised?

I embarked upon the writing of a series of Information Bulletins on subjects like how subscribers' complaints for telephone service are received and acted upon, how trunk calls, when once they are booked, are put through and billed, why thousands of telephones go dead during the monsoons, and what could be done to avoid or mitigate the large-scale interruptions, corruption in the telephones, why there are waiting lists, and how telephones could be shifted or transferred from one place to another or from one hirer to another and so on, how the Telephone Directory is compiled and corrected, how customers could ensure that their numbers and addresses are properly listed even if somebody is using somebody else's telephone etc. Whenever a new service was introduced, or there were modifications in the rules, again an Information Bulletin was produced. These were largely circulated among the staff and also among the customers. They were freely mailed to randomly selected customers and were also available for any customer. They were priced 10 paise, not because that was the cost of producing, but because I felt that anything given free may not be read or would be thrown away. But if it was priced, then people would read it. In order to uplift the level of knowledge about things happening, and why and how they are happening, I started House Journals ("*Phone-Avaz*" in Ahmedabad, "*Phone Sandesh*" in Pune, "*Doorvani Sandesh*" and "*Narada*" in Andhra Pradesh, "*Videsh Sanchar Patrika*" in the Videsh Sanchar Nigam, Bombay) for circulation among the staff.

With these publications, the management became meaningful and comprehensible to the workers, and the entire telephone system became open, transparent and inter-active with the customers.

**Community Telephones :** It is quite usual, until cable pressurisation and laying of cables and ducts come through that thousands of telephones would go dead during the rainy season, when into a punctured underground telephone cable sheath, water enters and destroys the conductor insulation. If a large cable of the size of a thousand pairs is what is affected, all the areas served by it may have no telephone service. The location of the fault and its repair may sometimes take days. Many customers will be very much inconvenienced. "*Can't the telephones do anything about this?*", the customers asked. I had an answer.

From the nearest service-having areas, wires were run on telephone posts crossing service area boundaries, and Community Telephones were opened. These telephones were kept in a tent and were attended by telephone Linemen or others. Information was disseminated by word of mouth in the area, and also through Press Notice and All India Radio, that pending restoration of the service, Community Telephones had been opened in such and such areas. Any user could go to the Community Telephone if his telephone was dead. He could write down his number and make the calls. A little incoming service could also be given by mutual understanding and arrangement with the Attendants.

The first such practice was initiated in Patrakar Colony in Ahmedabad, when the entire Colony's telephones went dead and it was taking time to restore the service. This practice was very well reported of, and it was emulated by all the Sub-Divisions and Sections in Ahmedabad Telephones. For such occasions, I am quite sure that there need be no rules, but only commonsense and the management's sensitivity to customer needs. My principle is that what all is possible should be done immediately and the impossible will take only a little longer.

**Enlisting Public Co-operation :** In Ahmedabad, "*Uttarayan*" or "*Makarasankranti*" is a great day. Tens of thousands of kites would be flown by persons of all ages, from the young to the old. Actually, the kite flying would start a few days before the festival day. The strings of the kites would be coated with glass powder and the sport is to cut one another's string.

We had drop wires for telephone service provision. They were copper conductors with plastic insulation. Glass powder-coated kite strings would cut the drop wires, and many thousands would go dead. Broken

strings would also bridge the bare iron wires which also are used to provide telephone connections. As this was during winter season, in the night dew used to get deposited on the strings, and this would lead to low insulation between the conductors. When a customer was called at that time, the ring would trip with just one click in the telephone. If this was not noticed, no incoming call would be received. Customers would complain that they were missing calls. But by the time they were being tested, the sun's heat would have improved the insulation, and the telephone Exchange would remark, "*no fault found*". And this would go on repeating.

After a lot of analysis, we decided that the customers should be advised. We put up a big hoarding :

*"Sport for the Cat, Death for the Rat".*

*"You may fly the kites for fun, but the tangled strings and the telephone wires cut by the glass-coated strings are causing havoc in the telephone system. Can you help by having your sport off the telephone lines?"*

Even if this did not pre-empt many faults, those involved in the faults did understand, and would, in fact, give a leading complaint saying that they were noticing strings or broken wires. "*Would the telephones repair them?*" So complaints became requests.

Yet another instance of public education is utilising every disaster as an opportunity to convey more information and draw better sympathy and understanding. Once at the Western edge of the Nehru Bridge across the river Sabarmati in Ahmedabad, we discovered a cable fault which affected about thousand telephone services. It was occasioned by the traffic signals people planting a signal post, and while doing so puncturing the telephone cable. It was a very important junction. So, I immediately had a big hoarding put up, writing thereon Mar. Antony's words to the mob after Caesar's assassination, but slightly altered:

A poet invoked to provoke citizens to Dial Before they Dig:

*"Dead are we nine hundred*

*Friends! 'Ahmedawaadis' and country-men*

*Lend me your ears . . .*

*This was the most unkindest cut of all,*

*Oh! What a 'hole' was there my country-men!*

*Then I and you and all of us fell 'dead'.*

We invited a few newsmen and showed them why and how the cable was punctured, what it led to, and drew their attention to the hoarding also. The next day, it was box news, with a write-up. That became comment in all the informed and intelligent circles, including among the customers who thereby started understanding why telephones were going dead during the rainy season. We also put up hoardings with the title, "*Dial Before you Dig*". This campaign was actually started by me when I was the Deputy General Manager of Bombay Telephones (1968-71), which used to suffer extensive cable damages, and therefore, tens of thousands of telephones going dead during the monsoons.

**Dial Before You Dig :** The telephones have extensive and detailed maps of where they have laid cables under the carriageways or pavements of different roads. Due to various reasons, almost every year or alternate year, the same places are dug up to lay further cables. The electricity and water-supply authorities also dig up the same places for giving electricity or water connections. Actual digging is done by Mazdoors who, either due to ignorance or carelessness may puncture the cables. All these operations mostly take place during the non-rainy season. If a cable sheath is punctured then slightly, nothing will happen. But when once the rains start, water enters through the puncture into the cable sheath, destroying the insulation, leading to dead telephones. The telephone people come to know through complaints after the service is lost, whereas the damage would have taken place much, much earlier. Due to inadequate and antiquated methods, finding out the spot where the cable damage has occurred takes days, and when there are too many faults as at the beginning of a monsoon, the workforce is not sufficient, and fault restoration takes days and days, and more and more of the cable will be damaged with greater seepage of water through the puncture in the sheath.

As a pre-emptive measure, I launched the "*Dial Before You Dig*" service. Any person digging could make a telephone call to this service. The telecom people would, from the address, ascertain from their drawings whether any telephone cables were there. If so, we would despatch

our engineering personnel to physically inspect whether there was any sheath damage. If there was a suspicion, we would flood that spot with water, and if the puncture was indeed there, telephones would go dead. We would repair it then and there without waiting for the monsoon rains to reveal the puncture through complaints of dead telephones.

In order to encourage the diggers to call us, I printed beautiful cards with pictures of cinema stars on one side and important numbers of the telephone people on the other side. The idea was that the diggers would keep the cards for love of the cinema stars, and it would be easy if they wished to inform the telephones.

The Dial Before You Dig service has, by an order of the Directorate, come to be extended to many important cities, of course, with different results depending upon the management's commitment for pre-emptive action.

**Inter-active Meetings :** Noticing the eagerness of the telephone people to be open-minded and communicative, in Ahmedabad and Pune we came to be invited to every type of meeting and given 15 minutes to half-an-hour to speak on whatever aspects of telephone we desired. This is an exhilarating recognition of our service nature and our good image and public acceptability. Public service organisations like the Rotary Club used to arrange face-to-face meetings between customers, operators and the telephone management, and between repairmen (Linemen), Telephone Inspectors, customers and the management. These happy get-togethers built up an excellent image for the telephone system.

I coined appropriate logos for the systems I held charge. In Ahmedabad, our every notice and advertisement carried the byline, "*In the Service of Citizens*". In Pune, the byline was, "*Commute Less, Communicate More*", and in Andhra Pradesh it was "*Telecommunications in Andhra Pradesh's Life and part of It*". How I wish such practices were continued! Management is a style. Even in the best organisation there would be faults, there would be frauds, there would be under-performance. However, customers tend to appreciate sincere endeavours and the sensitivity and immediate response of the managers to the customers' complaints, needs and suggestions. How excellence and acceptability are to be attained can never be ordained by rules. If the leader sets a value upon service and esteem, many things can be done. However, when the service is administered by a Government Department, if one is

only a Civil Servant, he could choose to be faceless, he could choose the protection and the defence that the Government can confer upon every aspect of his activity, including non-delivery of service, but under the umbrella of rules.

**Customers' Right to Know :** I believe that informed customers will be the most understanding. Unawareness and wrong information are deadly adversaries to the organisation. So, in addition to articles in newspapers, interviews to journalists and talks on radio (and on Doordarshan later) on important issues, we used to issue advertisements of an informative nature. In Ahmedabad where the telephone service was absolutely poor and which we improved within a few months, we wanted the customers to know about what our tests were revealing. We also felt that the figures we would publish would be compared with the customers' own experience and we would have thus a very good counter-check against any fudging of figures in our own organisation. One advertisement which received very favourable comment was titled, "Have You Noticed?", and under that we explained that our programme of test calls and observation of live traffic was showing that cross connections, wrong numbers, no tone, low speech, one-way speech, etc., were all showing declining failures. We also gave the figures, and underneath that we put the question, "Have you noticed whether these figures describe the true state of affairs, i.e., improvements being effected?" We invited customers to note their own observations and feed us with the information. The advertisement was followed by our telephone persons visiting customers at random and polling their opinions.

One series of advertisements that worked with deadly effect upon the mischief-mongers among the staff was in connection with a strike launched by a section of the telephone people. In May 1979, there was a cyclone which hit Ongole and some parts of Prakasam District of Andhra Pradesh. There is a very well-meant rule in the Posts & Telegraphs that those who are affected by natural calamities like cyclones and floods could be given some non-interest-bearing loans up to a certain value. Some telecom employees from Prakasam District applied for these loans. Very soon, telecom employees from all over the State also started applying for these loans, encouraged as usual by popularity-seeking, militant unionists. Even, people from Adilabad, the northern-most town of Andhra Pradesh, 600 Kms. away from Ongole, were applying. In their applications, they used to state that their kith and kin suffered loss in the

cyclone, their ancestral home was washed away, and so on. Indeed, some applications were backed by cyclostyled reasons! We decided not to act upon such applications. The Union said that this was high-handed, and resorted to industrial action, i.e., strike. We immediately advertised the true facts in newspapers, which led to correct understanding among the public and, therefore, their hostility to the strikers. It is my firm belief that there are three parties - the management, the workers and, most importantly, the customers. It is necessary to enroll the last. They would act as a powerful corrective to any mis-guided action of the other parties.

Public meetings were conducted by me in Pune and in Andhra Pradesh subsequently. My peers and superiors viewed them with disfavour - for obvious reasons. But, in the last two-and-a-half years, under increasing criticism and under "Mission Better Communications", holding public meetings by the Management for the customers has to be accepted as a desirable, and, in fact, a necessary practice. The Department has even issued written instructions to this effect. These are called Telephone Adalats for customers and pension Adalats for retired employees.

*"Public opinion is everything, with public sentiment nothing can fail. Without it, nothing can succeed. Consequently he who moulds public opinion goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions."*

- Abraham Lincoln

## CUSTOMER AND WORKER INVOLVEMENT

Immediately after graduation from the College of Engineering, Guindy, Madras, I joined the All India Radio. While I was working in the Central Projects Circle in Kasturba Marg, New Delhi, I had a Project Officer who was very stern and spoke very little, and of whom everybody was afraid. My designation was "*Technical Assistant*". and I was in the Purchase Section. It was a very routine job, not involving much engineering knowledge. The Central Project Circle was in charge of installing radio transmitters, studios and receiving stations. The installation, planning and progressing was being controlled in this office, which was also buying some small indigenous items. Once our Project Officer made out a case for some more Technical Assistants and Assistant Engineers in the Headquarters Office. I saw how little work we were having and I wondered how there could be a proposal for more staff. I cut short three layers of officers, "*Why are we sending a proposal for more staff?*" I asked. That was in 1954 (or 1955): He answered, "*Young man, what do you know of these things?*" I told him that I may not know much but, the country, we are told, was not having enough financial resources for development, and if we fritter away money by creating jobs when they are not needed, I felt that we were doing a dis-service. He asked me whether I was politically active. I said that there was no politics involved, but that everyday we were reading in the newspapers that we should observe economy, improve our productivity and serve the country, for which purpose Five Year Plans were being formulated. He smiled and said, "*How do you think you will get promotions if there are not more posts?*" I replied, "*For my promotion, are the people to pay?*" I then told him that if he did not withdraw the proposal, I would speak to some M.P.s. He asked me who I would speak to. I told him that I would speak to Prof. N.G.Ranga, whom I knew. May be, he would even put a question in Parliament. He took these words quite seriously and withdrew the proposal. I am mentioning this incident to say that from the

very beginning, I was considering Government job as an opportunity for taking services to the people rather than enriching oneself by promotion or some other thing.

Although I was having leftist views and was even with the Students' Federation, very soon I had come to the conclusion that ideology was not the important thing in India. We have to increase wealth, we have to increase our efficiency and our productivity, we have to be excellent in whatever we do. It is the duty of an honest Government to distribute the wealth or to make the wealth available in an equitable manner, to help the poor and reduce poverty. Perhaps, I was very foolish. But then, I was completely convinced that it was correct, that it was my duty to buy Small Savings Certificates to help finance the Plans. From my meagre salary of Rs. 340 in All India Radio, I used to buy, every month, Rs. 50 worth of National Savings Certificates, and I was thinking that I was responding to the call of the great leader, Jawaharlal Nehru. When I got an increment, with the entire amount I used to buy National Savings Certificates. Much later, I had enough difficulty in cashing them, because the Post Master was saying that my signature was not tallying. It was then that I realised that my ideology was misplaced.

My ideas of involving the people and the workers more and more in what we were doing increased from the time I moved to managerial positions, first as Deputy General Manager in Bombay Telephones (1968-71), and later on as the Head of a Circle (District Manager, Telephones, in Ahmedabad and Pune, and General Manager, Telecommunications, in Andhra Pradesh) i.e., the Number One, reporting directly to the Secretary, Ministry of Communications. It is important that our workers should know what they are doing, and why they are doing. They should be fully informed, so that they can intelligently inter-act with the customers. In Bombay, if a person's turn came for a telephone, he may not get it for long. He would be told that there was no cable pair. Similarly, if a business applied for a private wire from one premises to another, it would likely be told that there was no cable pair. If a person's telephone number was wrongly printed, or not at all, he would get angry, if there was no sufficient explanation given. We were just then (1970 or 1971) introducing STD from Bombay to Pune and Bombay to Ahmedabad. That was a great event. But our own men did not know what it was and how it worked. Suppose a customer, a neighbour or a friend, asked

some question, how would a telephone man answer if he is ignorant? Such questions led me to two actions. We should produce Information Bulletins to inform, instruct and generally make aware, all the ranks of workers, of what we were doing. When STD was introduced, my suggestion was to assemble all the engineering ranks and tell them what it was all about, and to write about it in our Newsletter, and also to produce Information Bulletins for circulation among the workers as to how STD worked. I also produced such Information Bulletins on cable pairs, Telephone Directory etc., and also on "How to Get A Telephone The Right Way", while I was in Bombay. In Ahmedabad, as No.1 (District Manager, Telephones), I had a much freer run and greater opportunity, and, of course, a first-hand responsibility to the workers, as well as to the customers and the citizens at large. I started a house journal called, "Phone Awaz", in which every aspect of what we were doing was discussed and informed. It served as an instrument for dissemination of information, as well as criticism and self-criticism, with a view to improve the awareness of the workers. In order to inform the public, I was writing almost one article a week for the Gujarati and English press in Ahmedabad. I invited to be questioned on All India Radio and in various public organisations like the Rotary Club, Chambers of Commerce, Lions Club and so on. I was sending my officers to schools and colleges, demonstrating the proper use of telephones, and answering their questions. I was inviting people to come to the Exchanges. I produced Information Bulletins on various aspects of service like how Trunk Calls are put through, why cable breakdowns take place, corruption in telephones, how to get a telephone the right way, excess telephone bills, Public Telephones and so on. The various Information Bulletins were being posted to important citizens and associations, as well as sold at price of 10 paise each.

When I went to Pune, I took one further step. In addition to starting a house journal, I started a quarterly journal for subscription by the telephone customers. It was called, first "Namaskar!", and later on "Phone Sandesh". It contained articles of interest to the public, fielded questions from the customers, and narrated the most unforgettable incidents in the life of telephone persons.

My public information and relations work reached the climax when I was in Andhra Pradesh. A house journal "Narada" was started for the workers, and for the information of the public I started the "Doorvani

*Sandesh*". There was a very novel way of getting it circulated. We wrote to the customers that if we did not hear to the contrary, we would include such and such amount in their next telephone bill as subscription for the Doorvani Sandesh. Some responded positively, some didn't. In the event, we were printing 20,000 copies of the Doorvani Sandesh and posting it to as many people. Later on, it was in two editions - in English and in Telugu. Many were the questions which customers were asking, and all of them were being answered. Both the workers, as well as the customers were looking forward to the next issue of "Narada" and "Doorvani Sandesh". I encouraged and patronised a cultural association by the name, "Kalavahini", at the Head quarters. I helped them to write stories and dramas, with telecommunications as the theme, and they went round the State enacting them. Some of them were hilarious at our own cost i.e., ridiculing our own faults and foibles. Under the banner of Kalavahini and Federation of P&T Engineers AP, we brought out a number of books:

- "Namaskar", containing answers to customers' questions.

- "We The Telecom Men In Your Service", containing first person narrations of telecom officials of unforgettable incidents in their service life.

- "I Am A Lineman" (Operator, Driver, Phone Inspector etc.), describing the official's activities, duties etc.

- "The Tales The Telephones Tell" (Telugu), a collection of stories with telecoms as theme.

- "America to Andhra and "I Want A Telephone" (both in Telugu), collections of ten plays with telecoms as the theme.

The year 1982 was the Centenary of the telephone service in India. We launched a big public awareness programme with the co-operation of the Government of Andhra Pradesh. In every District, we constituted a Committee with the District Collector and the Divisional Engineer, Telecommunications, as Co-Convenors for celebrating the event. Essay and elocution competitions were held in high-schools and colleges on telephone themes. Telephone and Telex Operators in Private Companies were brought to our Exchanges. There were question-and-answer sessions. We arranged exhibitions and demonstrations of our service.

We held tripartite meetings between the Management, the workers and the customers. We explained why telephone service was inadequate and unsatisfactory, what steps were being taken to improve it, and what reforms were necessary. Together with the highest penetration of telephone service in the country-side, these activities really built up an excellent image of the telecoms in Andhra Pradesh. Similes and examples used to be given in answering questions from the public and the customers. For example, in one meeting, I was asked why we were opening more Exchanges when the service was very poor, and whatever was there could not be maintained. I answered, "If you do not have any service, your complaint is only one - that you don't have". Suppose we give you a telephone, it may work badly, and you may complain of it, and there is only one consequence - it has got to be improved. Take the case of roads. First we have canal bunds, they become metal roads, finally they become tar roads. With every succeeding election, the people power grows. A Panchayat road is declared later on as a Zilla Parishad road, and with one or two more elections, it will become the State Highway. In the same fashion, we were constructing primitive telecom lines, and as we gain strength, they will be upgraded. This is the only way we can progress in a democracy. A beginning is good, a semblance of service is better than no service, and improvements would come in. This used to be easily understood and since at every stage, we were involving the Panchayat Chairmen, or the MLAs, or MPs, they were part of the decision-making process and management. I had even requested the Collectors and the State Administration to co-opt my Divisional Engineers into their Development Councils. I had encouraged my Divisional Engineers to attend the Zilla Parishad meetings. Later when I was in the Directorate, I proposed to the Directorate to see that our Divisional Engineers in the Headquarters get an official position in the Zilla Parishads and in the various Committees that the Governments constitute for local development. Unfortunately the Directorate is not an instrument for any worthwhile policy-making these days and, so, I did not succeed.

Even in the best of telephone systems, there would be some faults, there would be errors, there would be mistakes and, sometimes, there would be even criminal negligence. If the Management is sincerely and consistently trying to improve and if this is made perceptible, things will be alright. But, if either the Management is unequal to the task, or improvements are not coming in and if communication has broken down,

then things could be very bad. In Ahmedabad, the System before 1971 was very bad for a period of about 10 years. The city was growing, becoming important business-wise, but the telephones were under-performing and were not expanding enough. So, there was genuine dissatisfaction. The situation was very fertile for any person who could exploit it. Telephone subscribers formed an Association and one gentleman, who had no ostensible means of livelihood, became the Secretary of the Association. One well-meaning, but publicity-seeking person became its President. They were giving Memoranda and publicising the lapses of the Ahmedabad Telephones. The Secretary was a blackmailer. He had access to many newspapers and was able to easily get big publicity for complaints. He would make an issue of everything from bad service to corruption. He built himself into a terror to every telephone officer. Disgruntled officials were giving him information. When the service was improving and we became communicative with the public and the customers, he feared that he would go out of business. He was wanting to show that there were no improvements and that faults and corruption were still rampant. No amount of well-meaning dialogue with him was reforming him. I concluded that he was fault-finding, a perpetual gutter inspector. One day, he called for a meeting of customers. He had threatened through that meeting he would mount a big agitation. By that time my Information Bulletins and public meetings and open access system had informed a number of discerning people, who were convinced that we were coming up and up and we needed encouragement. I asked a friend of mine whether he was attending this meeting. He said that it was a nuisance gang and there was no use attending the meeting. "Let them do what they want", was his thinking. Then I told him that it was because good people were apathetic, that bad people thrived. Wouldn't he think it proper that if he felt that we were doing a good job and becoming better and better, he and some others should also attend this meeting and talk about it? In the event, about 50 to 75 people who thought well of the Ahmedabad Telephones attended the meeting to the utter surprise of the 5 to 10 people whom the professional detractor of the Telephones had gathered. This man wanted to pass resolutions condemning the Telephones, but he found everybody else talking well about it. Not only that, they passed a resolution appreciating the improvements and congratulating the Ahmedabad Telephones. This was too much for the professional detractor. He thought that I had planted all these people. He rang me up to say that he would expose me.

I told him that he could try it. This time, there were many correspondents at the meeting, and they were witness to the genuine expressions of all the unusual attendees. Nothing came out of his threat and he went out of business. I think that what I did was absolutely correct. I had seen in Pune and other cities also a few self-styled "leaders" of Telephone Users' Associations. Some of them are really concerned, but a few make a living out of it, taking undue favours from the lower officials under threat of exposure and adverse publicity. In my later charges, I saw to it that proper and healthy User Associations came up and that they were patronised by the Management itself.

I believe that the workers of an organisation have a "Right to Know" from their Chief Executive, as to how their organisation functions, what its problems are, how they are being tackled, what are its achievements in the past year, and what are its programmes for the next year. When I was District Manager of Telephones in Pune, I wrote a "Report to the Workers", both in English and in Marathi. I assembled all the workers and using a public address system, explained the salient points and invited all of them to put questions. The meeting lasted for about four hours and all of them felt happy and said that this unprecedented submission of the Chief of the organisation to questions by the workers had endeared me to them. In the Videsh Sanchar Nigam also, at the end of the year, we had published a "Report to the Workers", reviewing our performance, our programmes and our plans for the next year and had it distributed widely. Similarly, another report was brought out on the various ameliorative and welfare measures that the Company had planned and was implementing and what more was contemplated. I only wish that these are systematically done and persisted in and that they get institutionalised.

## INVOLVING PEOPLE AND COMMEMORATING THE GREAT

One of the greatest and most exhilarating challenges for Indian telecommunications is to provide telephones in the vast and farflung populous rural areas. Due to increasing agricultural prosperity brought about by irrigation schemes, well-to-do farmers and service organisations like Rural Development Banks, Panchayats and fertiliser, seed and agricultural implements dealers are wanting telephones in their homes, shops and offices. To serve them, Small Automatic Exchanges (SAXs) are being opened. In Andhra Pradesh, out of 1,900 and odd Exchanges, (in 1989) 85% are such small Exchanges, with 25-100 lines. Rented "buildings" are few in availability and most of them are unsuitable as they freely admit dust, humidity, sunlight and, sometimes, rodents. The correct thing is to have a very small structure of about 200 sq. ft., to house the SAX Switch and power supply equipments. The best thing is to have ready-built, trailer-mountable structures transported from a central fabrication plant and located in the villages. This would take some time, because the Government Department that the telecommunications are and the traditional civil engineering approach would not easily permit these things. Considering that hundreds of Exchanges were being opened in Andhra Pradesh, and as the villagers were very, very enthusiastic, I launched a Bhoodan scheme for sites for telephone buildings in the villages. Coming from a farmer's family in a village (Angaluru in Krishna District), I know the feudal pride that the villagers have in becoming partners in any development scheme. In my own village, Angaluru, since the 1940s, we farmers have been contributing to build a girls' high school, a number of primary schools, and a library, and these days, a milk chilling centre, veterinary health centre and so on. On the insistence of the villagers, I used to attend functions to mark the opening of village Exchanges. I put it to them that, if they donate a piece of land, we would construct a building. A piece of land of about 200 sq. meters costs very little in the villages. There is no question of a land centre as in the

cities, because the load itself is little and the distances involved are also very little. Most of the connections are given by overhead wires. The cost of a small structure to house a village Exchange would not be more than Rs. 20,000, and the land for it may at best cost about Rs. 2,000. If we could spend up to Rs. 100,000 to open an Exchange, Rs. 2,000 was nothing. But, what I reasoned was that the villagers would feel that they are responsible in getting the Exchange building, and that they are partners in the telephone plant installed in the Exchange. In every village, either the Panchayat or a rich landlord would easily donate the land. I offered to put a plaque on the Exchange building, commemorating the donation. The village elders and people's representatives (Panchayat Presidents, MLAs and politicians), welcomed this idea. I had one more reason. In times of commotion and agitations in the cities, public properties like buses, milk booths and telephone Exchanges are the first targets for vandalism. In the cities, the telephone Exchanges could be protected by the police. But in the villages, how soon could the police reach and is it possible that every village Exchange could be protected by policemen round-the-clock? On the other hand, if the villagers have a feeling that the telephone Exchange building is theirs, and is standing on a property that was donated by them, then, I was convinced, good sense would prevail, and the Exchange building and the equipment would be protected, untouched by any agitation. These days, so-called Naxalites are attacking and putting out the telephone Exchanges in the forest areas of Andhra Pradesh. This is a perversion and I am sure that if I were in Andhra Pradesh, I would have contacted them, as I did contact the agitating underground student leaders of the Nav-Nirman movement in Ahmedabad in 1973-74, and reasoned with them and prevailed upon them not to touch the telephone Exchanges.

I spoke to our Junior Engineers and Sub-Divisional Officers and with the Linemen, those who actually install and repair the telephones. They spread the message. We had hundreds of sites donated by farmers and in a few cases, by the Panchayats. The first donation started in my own village, Angaluru, wherein I wanted my Panchayat to donate land, both for a telephone Exchange, as well as for a Post Office. Today, two beautiful small structures stand side by side in the village. In tens of villages, during my time itself, telephone Exchange buildings were constructed. Each one has a plaque wherein is written the name of the donor and that is the shield against every vandalism. The family

members of the donor would deem any attack on the building or damage to that property as an attack on, or damage to their own family, and would be spurred into action to protect it. In one village (in West Godavari District), a very wealthy Chartered Accountant who lives in the city of Hyderabad, donated land and a building itself for an Exchange in memory of his parents. In another village (in Prakasam District), a Junior Engineer, who belonged to that part of the State, was able to inspire and enthuse the villagers to participate in the construction of the Exchange building itself. I was thrilled because that was how in our own village, during my grand-father's time, our school was built. The villagers engaged their bullock carts and were bringing soil to raise the level of the site donated. Some people transported bricks from a nearby village. The village carpenters gave their labour free for completing all the wood work. The village blacksmith contributed his mite. The masons and the floor-layers contributed their labour. A building which was estimated to cost, according to the Civil Wing (Civil Engineers) of the Department, about Rs. 50,000, was completed in about Rs. 30,000. This was an unorthodox way and many of my detractors elsewhere had their tongues wagging. There was an attempt to chastise the Junior Engineer (at the instance of jealous peers or professional unionists whose ire he drew by insisting on performance), for committing irregularities (Saving money in ways not envisaged in rules is an irregularity in a senseless Government milieu). In the forest areas of East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh, in a tribal village, another Junior Engineer also constructed a building without going through the Civil Wing. I encouraged all such initiatives. My argument was that if we are to construct our houses, we don't engage Executive Engineers and Assistant Engineers in our villages. The system of the Civil Engineering Wing is to make drawings, prepare preliminary estimates, invite tenders, sometimes again and again, and get the work completed in about two years' time work that could be completed in three or four months' time and at a cost which is far higher. When I was explaining as to why I was constructing these buildings departmentally through our own telecom engineers involving the villagers, one of my colleagues said that if we lose money, any amount of it, and all according to rules and procedures, the rules would protect us. But, if we do anything outside the rules, first, it will be suspected, second, if something went wrong, it will be held that because we deviated from the rules the thing went wrong. While appreciating the argument, I did not agree with the conclusion. His argument

was absolutely correct. I have seen scores of buildings constructed by the civil engineering Contractors, leaking year after year, floors cracking, doors and windows falling apart, and all of them requiring special maintenance estimates. Much money had been poured down the drain, but all according to rules and therefore, perfectly right.

I used to mention these things in my monthly personal letters to the Director-General. News of donation after donation was published in the house journal "Narada", and the public education journal, "Doorvani Sandesh". Every one of the donors was sent a personal "thank you" letter by me. I was asked to explain under what rules I was accepting donations of land. My reply was whether I should return all the sites. There were no further questions.

My fascination for involving people and enthusing them in telecom matters, goes prior to my days in Andhra Pradesh. When I was in Ahmedabad there was a site where a new telephoexchange building was to be constructed. The locality is known as "Jamalpur". I have always been interested in history, especially in the ancient history of India. When I went to Ahmedabad, I read K.M.Munshi's "Glory That Was Gurjara Desa", "Krishnavatara", and "Jai Somnath". I read some more books about Ahmedabad City itself. Navrang Khan was a famous Moghul General, after whom one of the areas of Ahmedabad was named, "Navrangpura". I named the telephoexchange building as, "Navrangpura Telephone Exchange". Ahmedabad was also known as "Karnavati", after the last Hindu King, Karna, who was defeated by the conquering muslim invaders. I thought it would be proper to name the new Exchange in Jamalpur as, "Karnavati Telephone Exchange". The elderly people and many Ahmedabadis felt very happy, but some rabid elements said that the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) calls Ahmedabad, Karnavati, and naming an Exchange as Karnavati was indicative of my RSS sympathies. There were Letters to the Editor, for and against, on this issue. I had a friend, Shri Rauf Valiullah, a Congressman, who was in the Telephone Advisory Committee. He used to be my greatest defender, saying that what I was doing was in line with what I had been doing earlier, for one Exchange was named after Sabarmati, commemorating Mahatma Gandhi's Ashram, another was named after Navrang Khan the great muslim General, and that this Exchange was named Karnavati, again to recapture the history of the great city of Ahmedabad. The then Minister for Communications (the late Shri Bahuguna), received several

complaints. He came to Ahmedabad, heard me fully, and knowing that I was not an RSS man, he did not go by what the fanatics were saying. He told me to be a little prudent and cautious and for the time being wanted me to call it the "38 Exchange". The furore subsided.

When I was in Pune, I read volumes and volumes of Maratha history, because Pune is the cradle of Indian renaissance, of the national resistance put up by the great Chattrapathi Shivaji. Shaniwar Wada, the fortress of the Peshwas, is an inspiring building. A most modern building, housing three telephone Exchange units, was in Bajji Rao road, and it was simply being called, "City". I named the three units as "Bajji Rao", "Sadashiv" and "Sarasbagh", three great names of which every Maharashtrian would be proud. A new building was to come up, for which we had already acquired a site. I called it "Mahadji Shinde Telecom Building", after Mahadji Shinde, the great Maratha General of Gwalior and the most illustrious of the Generals under the Peshwas. Pune loves its history and loves anybody who loves Pune. For a non-Maharashtrian to have been the first to name its telephone Exchanges after its illustrious figures was great, and the City showered its affection on me. The telephone Exchange was opened years after I left Pune (I left Pune in the year 1976, and the telephone Exchange was opened in the year 1984 or so). At that time, the Minister for Communications was Shri V.N.Gadgil. When he came to know that it was called Mahadji Shinde Telecom Building, he felt very happy. He invited Mahadji's scion, Shri Madhav Rao Scindia to be associated with the function. In Pune, he came to know that the person who gave this name to the Exchange building was me, and that I now was in the P and T Directorate as a Deputy Director-General. When I met him, he felt very happy that I took the initiative of naming the building after a historic person. I then told him that while I was the first in recent years, to do so, in Delhi a building is called "Kidwai Bhawan", and another, "Khurshid Lal Bhawan". It would be right if we issued instructions to all the General Managers to name the important buildings in every city after historic persons. The matter was not pursued because, as I have very often discovered, many people would approve but none would initiate. When I was the Additional General Manager in Calcutta Telephones where I went from Pune, I wanted to name one of the telephone buildings as "Bidhan Chandra Sanchar Sadan". But my senior colleague Gen. Manager dared not agree to this. I felt very sorry. It was during Shri Bidhan Chandra Roy's time that we got the most prestigious site in Dalhousie Square (now called Benoy Radal

Dinesh Bag), to house the eight storied Telephone Bhavan, the tallest in the 1950s in Calcutta. It was due to his personal interest that we got another site, where the "24" Central Exchange is now situated. He was such an achiever that he suggested to an enterprising Divisional Engineer who was in the Army earlier, to engage "goondas" to drive out the goondas who were occupying the "24" site. So, I felt that it was only proper that the Telecom commemorated the memory of Shri Bidnan Chandra Roy.

While in Andhra Pradesh, I made it a point to name many of the buildings that were coming up, or had just been completed, after great persons. The "Kavitraya", or the three Telugu poets who had translated Vyasa's Mahabharata into Telugu are revered in every home in Andhra Pradesh. The first of them, Nannaiah hailed from Rajahmundry. The second, Tikkanna, hailed from Nellore. The third, Yerra Pragada, hailed from near-about Narasaraopet in Guntur District. The telephone buildings in these three towns were named as, "Nannaiah Doorvani Kendra", "Tikkanna Doorsanchar Bhavan", and "Yerra Pragada Doorvani Bhavan". Another great Telugu poet was Srinatha. The telecom building which came up in Guntur was named as, "Srinatha Sanchar Sadan". The great Pothana translated Vyasa's Bhagawatha into Telugu. He was from Warangal District. The telephone building there was named after him. In Hanamakonda (Warangal), the Exchange was named after Rani Rudrama Devi, the mighty and proud Kakatiya ruler. In Anantapur, two new buildings came up. These were called, "Krishnadevaraya Sanchar Sadan" and, "Vemana Doorsanchar Bhavan". Vemana is reported to have attained samadhi in Kadiri in Anantapur District, although it is not conclusively known where he was born, where he lived, and where he died. In Visakhapatnam, I had two buildings named as "Gurazada Sanchar Kshetra" and "Sir C.R.Reddy Telecom Bhavan". In Secunderabad, the new CTO building was named as "Suravaram Pratap Reddy Sanchar Bhavan". In Duggirala, in Guntur District, the telephone building was named after Kshetraya, the great Carnatic composer of Padams. In Kothagudem, the telephone building was named as, "Dammakka Sanchar Bhavan". Dammakka was an illiterate village woman who found the idol of Lord Shri Rama and worshipped it. This idol was later on installed in Bhadrachalam by the great Saint and Rama Bhakta, Ramdas. Naming telephone buildings in this fashion after illustrious persons of the areas, was very much liked by historians, poets and people's leaders.

This was unprecedented, and a very good impressions of telecommunications in Andhra Pradesh spread. This also strengthened our ideal as contained in the logo, "Telecommunications in Andhra Pradesh's Life and Part of It". I am only sorry that this spirit has disappeared in the subsequent managements. The workers and the officers down the line, however, have sweet and abiding memories of those days, wherein people treated them as their friends, benefactors and family members.

When I took over as Chairman & Managing Director of the Videsh Sanchar Nigam in Bombay, I had the last occasion to name a new building to come up as, "Lokmanya Videsh Sanchar Bhavan", after Lokmanya Balgangadhara Tilak. This building, at a cost of Rs. 100 million, is coming up in Prabhadevi area of Bombay. The foundation-stone for this building was laid by Shri Vasant Sathe, and he was very happy that I was naming the building after Lokmanya Tilak. It is my fervent wish that the Gateway Building that is to come up in Calcutta would be called, "Bidnan Chandra Videsh Sanchar Sadan".

"Not gold but only men can make A great nation and strong, Men who for truth and honours sake stand fast and suffer long, Brave men who work while others sleep, Who dare while others fly, They build a nation's pillars deep and lift them to the sky".

## BEFORE THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

In the telephone systems of the big cities there are rapid expansions. They have more than one Exchange. The added subscribers are given numbers. A telephone becomes more and more useful, the greater the numbers of telephones it can reach. Therefore, the numbers of the new telephone subscribers must be made known easily to all. In a city, customers shift their residence or office from one area to another and then their telephone numbers are changed. When a new Exchange is commissioned, the services from the surrounding Exchanges are transferred to the new Exchange and, therefore, the telephone numbers, shifts of customers from one place to another, and the transfer of service of customers from one Exchange to another, may amount to as much as about 20% to 25% of the system capacity itself. A Telephone Directory is meant to give the correct numbers of as many customers as possible, and as up-to-date as possible. If we can produce a Directory very frequently, customers would be most benefitted. But the cost of producing a Directory every month may be nearly prohibitive and even if it can be afforded, there is a minimum time taken to produce the correct, up-dated manuscripts and to complete the printing process. So, the periodicity with which a Telephone Directory could be brought out is a compromise between customer convenience on the one hand, and the cost and feasibility of production on the other.

When the system size was small and the growth was not large, as long ago as in the 1950s, it was prescribed that a Directory should be produced once in six months. But, when the system size has become large, and the growth is also rapid, to maintain that periodicity is difficult. The cost of giving an obsolete Directory to the customer is very high. For non-existent numbers, if the customer calls the Directory Enquiry service, he has to pay, while theoretically he is supposed to be given a free Directory containing all the telephone numbers, correctly

and up-to-date. Whenever the numbers are changed due to area transfer, there are advertisements in the newspapers, giving the new numbers for the old. But very few people can keep such advertisements in their Directories. Sometimes, supplements are produced, listing the new telephones given and changed numbers due to shifts and area transfers. But, some 90 of the customers would find it inconvenient to keep the supplements or the clipped advertisements at hand. They may look in the Main Directory; dial the number, and may get it correct. But they will get the wrong person, because that number would have been allotted to somebody else. The recipient of the call will say it is a wrong number, and the caller also will say it is a wrong number, but would have lost money. Every call answered right or wrong would be metered. From the customer's point of view, and to be fair to him, it is morally binding that a Telephone Directory is produced at least at the prescribed periodicity, and more importantly, as up-to-date as possible on the date of publication and distribution.

Even if one is able to keep up the periodicity, to have all the new subscribers, changed numbers etc., incorporated in the main body, is a difficult job. The Telephone Directory is the only publication which becomes obsolete even during its printing. If the process of printing and binding and delivering the copies extends over a period of months from the date the manuscript is given, then the new telephones that are being given, and the numbers that are being changed due to shifts, cannot be incorporated in the main body. One may give an Addendum or a Supplement even, along with the new publication. But again, this detracts from the easy and correct finding of the number. To be sure, one must first look in the Supplement to see if the number is there. If it is not there, one should see the Addendum. If it is not in the Addendum, he should go to the main body, and if it is not there, he should ring up the Directory Enquiry service. How many would do this? Those who would not do may have to call Directory Enquiry service and pay for it, or go on paying for right numbers, but wrong persons.

The time taken to print a Directory depends upon how good is the printer. If a job is given to the lowest tenderer, no matter whether he has got adequate composing, printing and binding facilities, then you may get the job done cheaply from the money point of view. But it will be useless. What is the good of a Telephone Directory which is current up to, say, 1986 December (usually including the Addendum, or

sometimes even a Supplement), but which is distributed towards the end of 1987 or 1988? The time taken to print the Directory is affected by one more factors. In order to reduce the cost, advertisements are accepted for printing in the Directory. There used to be what are called "Strip Advertisements", three of them on any page, running across the full width of the page, one at the top, and upto two at the bottom. Suppose there is a page in the Directory containing "Guptas", and a number of Companies like "Gupta Carpets", "Gupta Associates", "Gupta Builders", "Gupta Jewellers" etc. and all are wanting that their advertisements should appear where the Guptas are alphabetically listed, then the advertising agent would go on bargaining with the Guptas for the highest price, accepting that Gupta Company gives the maximum advertisement price. In the process, that page will be held up. Similarly, the greater the time taken to print, the greater the time available for the advertiser to collect more and more advertisements. A small press, inadequate for the job, and a bad advertising agent, could together include and go on putting the blame on one another, to conveniently delay the publication. The sufferer is the customer ultimately, and the party to be discomfited and complained against is the telephone management.

All these factors are at work and that is why, even today, we see many Telephone Directories which are corrected up to date "X", but are distributed and available to the public only from the date "Y", the period between "X" and "Y" running to several months. I got to know the Telephone Directory work intimately when I was the Deputy General Manager, Bombay Telephones. The then General Manager, Shri D.F.D.Joshi, a meticulous person who was very punctilious and very sensitive to customer opinion, took out this work from another Deputy General Manager and entrusted it to me, in the belief that whatever was given to me would be done with utmost competence, understanding and involvement. After having produced three successful issues of India's biggest Telephone Directory i.e., that of Bombay, I knew all the intricacies and issues involved in its production. The release of a Telephone Directory is a big event, very much looked forward to by the customers. Besides, the Telephone Directory is the only publication which is referred to, perhaps, more often than even the Bhagawad Gita or the Bible, in a day. Therefore, its correctness, its up-to-dateness, and its appearance, should be matters of prestige for any telephone Administration and that is how, everywhere in the world, the Directory is viewed. But, unfortunately, in many of the cities systems in India, the Telephone

Directory suffers from all the undesirables - appearance beyond the prescribed periodicity, a great lapse of time before its availability to the customer and the date up to which the corrections were incorporated in the main body and in the Addendum, and bad print.

When I was the District Manager, Ahmedabad Telephones (1971-74), I vowed to produce Directories at the prescribed periodicity with the least time gap between the last date of incorporating the corrections and its availability to the public. When I invited tenders for four successive issues at six-monthly intervals of the Ahmedabad Telephone Directory, many tenders came. Some were from Ahmedabad and some from distant places like Jaipur. If the work is awarded to a person who is outside the place (in this case Ahmedabad), there is another disadvantage. The advertising agent could be in Bombay (and in fact, it happened to be so), the Directory would be for Ahmedabad, and the printer could be in Jaipur. Now, to bring about speedy printing is very difficult, and blame can never be apportioned unerringly, so that the damages clause in the contract, either for the advertising agent or for the printer, could be enforced successfully. I had all the three capacities separately evaluated viz., composing, printing and binding. This evaluation used to enable us to judge whether the tenderer could, indeed, bring out the Directory in the time that was prescribed for its printing and delivery. Out of five or six tenderers, I had to rule out all but one and award it to the costliest bidder who happened to be in Ahmedabad. I had to rule out a party in Calcutta on the basis of both his past failure to produce Directories in time and also the distance factor. I had to rule out a number of them within Ahmedabad, because their printing presses and/or binding capacity was inadequate to the task. I had to rule out a party in Jaipur, because of distance, the impossibility of doing the job at the rates he quoted in the time prescribed and because he already has a number of contracts, which would mean he had to print several Directories at about the same time, with the inevitable consequence of some being delayed. This party was very ambitious and wanted to get more and more, and felt very aggrieved when his tender was rejected. I sent my Financial Adviser to see for himself the printing capacity, as well as his ability to produce several Directories in the same time, with the men and machinery that he had.

The stipulation in those days was that all the tenders should be evaluated, and our opinions, along with the original tenders, should be

sent to the Chief Controller of printing & Stationary (CCPS), Government of India, New Delhi. We were to get his advice, and in the light of his advice, we had to take a decision. His observations were mostly in agreement with my own conclusions, but yet his advice was that since so and so's offer was lowest, he may be given the contract. I considered this advice, and reasoned that since price was not the sole determinant, but that the timely publication of the Directory for the benefit of the subscriber and non-defrauding of the customer was more important, the ability of the tenderer to deliver the job in the time stipulated in the contract specifications should be the most important criterion. I had rejected this advice and took a decision, which I was competent to as per the delegated authority, and awarded the work to the party in Ahmedabad whose rates were higher. The Directories were produced on the dates that we wanted, and within the period that we stipulated, vindicating the correctness of my decision. While deciding, I had reproduced in the file, the following observation of the noted philosopher, John Ruskin :

*"It is unwise to pay too much, but it is worse to pay too little. When you pay too much, all you lose is a little money, that is all. When you pay little, sometimes you lose everything, because the thing you bought was incapable of doing the thing it was bought to do. In common law, business talent prohibits paying a little and getting a lot which cannot be done. If you deal with the lowest bidder, it is well to add something for the risk you run. If you do that, you will have enough to pay for something better."*

I had then directed my office to go ahead with the award of the contract, which was done. It transpired that I did not put my signature to this noting (this came out during the inquiry before the Public Accounts Committee, and would be referred to later).

The Jaipur party who lost the contract nursed a grievance. He had also felt that apart from losing the contract, the fact that it was rejected, might militate against his getting further contracts. During my time in Ahmedabad, the telephone services improved on an unprecedented scale and in the quickest of time. Due to my unconventional, people-oriented, customer-serving, service-delivering management, the Ahmedabad Telephones became very popular with the customers and

the citizens, and its name and fame spread far and wide. The Director-General and the Minister were holding up the Ahmedabad Telephones as a model for the rest of the country and when they were addressing the other General managers and officers, they used to say, "*If Hanuman Chowdary could do it in Ahmedabad, why can't you do it here?*" The telephone system was expanded so rapidly that within two-and-a-half years, it more than doubled from 16,000 to 34,000 lines. Its charge could be upgraded from that of an officer in the Junior Administrative Grade, in which I was, to that of a Senior Administrative Grade. The service personnel wanting promotions were waiting for every opportunity to create one more post, and when the Ahmedabad system capacity increased to justify one, they got it upgraded, which meant that if I did not get the promotion, I would have to leave the place. Promotions were to be effected and, at that time, in view of my excellent confidential records based upon my work not only in Ahmedabad, but in Bombay and earlier, it was anticipated that I would be graded "*outstanding*", and would supersede over 40 persons. So my seniors were very worried and went on representing that promotion should be only on the basis of seniority and not on any selection basis. When the question of upgrading this post came up, the Minister (Shri H.N. Bahuguna) said that it could be upgraded only if I would get the promotion and occupy the post. When all these bitter worries and stirrings were going on, the Minister got transferred, the Director-General was out-maneuvred, with the result that the promotions went by seniority and I had to leave the place on transfer to my equivalent rank post elsewhere. I was succeeded by a person who was one of those apprehending to be superseded. He was also tutored by some others to find out every possible infraction of rules, so that I could be "*fixed up*" to avoid possible supersessions in future. It was during this period that the Jaipur party who lost the tender for the printing of the Directory was incited to give several representations. These were conveyed to the Auditor General who wrote a para saying that the tender for the printing of the four issues of the Telephone Directory was not awarded to the lowest bidder, but to the highest, and, therefore, the Government lost so much money. It went up to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), and it was to be heard. It was for the Director-General to defend it or proceed to investigate it.

Four years had passed by this time since my moving away from Ahmedabad, from where I had gone to Pune and Calcutta and then to

Andhra Pradesh, where I was the General Manager of Telecommunications. When the time for the Director-General to appear before the PAC of the Parliament was coming, he went into the case thoroughly. Luckily, he happened to be an IAS officer. The case was allowed to go up to the PAC by an engineer belonging to my own service and who became Director-General. He had been inimical to me for the past 12 years. He was arrested during the Janatha Government and suspended for certain misdemeanours. It was during his Director-Generalship that my successor was encouraged to find out holes and to support charges against me. When he was suspended, he was succeeded by the IAS Director-General. The IAS Director-General, the late Shri Dave, made thorough inquiries, first about my integrity, and he was satisfied beyond any doubt about my rectitude. When he learnt the entire story of my popularity and the movement against an imaginary supersession and the thousands of representations that came from the citizens of Ahmedabad against my transfer, he guessed that it was jealous seniors and others who had engineered this paragraph about the award of the Directory contract, so that if I were thoroughly "fixed" once and for all, for the next several years there would be no threat of my superseding others. He read every line and every page in the entire file. When he discussed the case with the then Member (Operations), who was a very shallow person and with the Deputy Director-General concerned, (who was one of the persons who faced supersession by me), both of them were telling that disagreeing the advice of the Chief Controller of Printing and Stationery was incorrect, and that I was at fault in awarding the contract to the highest bidder. The Member (Finance) happened to be from the IA & AS and not from the Postal cadre. This officer, Shri Katoch, who is now no more, had also examined the files and made his own inquiries among the financial officers (who were not from the Postal cadre), and he was also convinced that my integrity was impeccable and that it was only due to my boldness that I took such decision. My later conduct in Pune, which also involved unconventional decisions, was also known to the IAS Director-General and the IA & AS member (Finance) of the P&T Board.

I was then called to be heard by the Deputy Director General, the Member (Operations), the Member (Finance) and the Director-General. The Director-General asked questions. He first asked me why I did not sign the note giving my decision. I was taken aback and said that I would like to see the note. I found that I did, infact, not sign. I asked

him whether I could put my signature now, i.e., in their presence. He said, "Don't do it". He then asked me whether I still stood by whatever I had written. I said yes, and added that I would sign any statement that he would want. He then asked me why I recorded all the orders and the decisions myself, and why nobody else wrote anything i.e., neither Head Clerk nor a Directory Officer, nor a Divisional Engineer nor the Internal Financial Adviser. I said that as I dictated the note, all of them were in my presence, and I had discussed the matter with them and recorded all the contents of my discussion, everybody else's views, and my decision thereon. Where, then, was the need for somebody else to write, when I myself applied my mind so thoroughly and was so convinced then, as also now. This had internally pleased him, because this made him to believe that I could not be a crook, because if I was a crook and if I had other intentions, I would have all my subordinates write the notes and arguments and the conclusions, and instead of giving my decision would have simply approved their recommendation, which would be as I wanted. But, in this case, the entire responsibility could be fixed upon me, because nobody else's note was there. No crook would ever implicate himself so inextricably in such a momentous decision which would reject all quotations and award the job to the highest bidder. He then asked where I had come across the quotation of the noted philosopher, John Ruskin, which I had put in my note. I said I read extensively and keep whatever appealed to me in a note-book. This quote appeared to be most appropriate in the case under consideration and so I had recorded it. Sensing that the Director-General was not finding me guilty and in fact, was appreciating me, the Member (Operations), who so far had been saying that I was wrong, started saying that I was noted for my love of literature, that I was a very good writer, and that I was a regular contributor to several periodicals like the Bhavan's Journal etc. The Director-General asked me to look at what I had recorded, and asked: "You have stated that one of the Contractors would come to grief, another would not be able to do the job, and another person would no more get any contracts. How could you come to such infallible conclusions?" I replied that, that was my intellectual exercise, and then I showed him the Director-General's Circulars to all the General Managers, in which they were informed about the failures of all the Contractors whom I had ruled out. One failed in one circumstance, another in another, and yet another somewhere else, and all their performances had to be brought to the adverse notice of all the General Managers, so that they would take

this into account while evaluating any tender offers from them. The Director-General then asked me, "Are you a prophet?" I said that when I recorded my note, I was not. But, as later events had shown, I had become one. He smiled at this. Seeing this, the Deputy Director-General (who was one of the persons who could have been superseded by me) and the Member (Operations) now started saying good words about me. However, the Deputy Director-General started mumbling, "But, sir, the advice of the Chief Controller of printing & Stationery was to award the contract to the lowest tenderer". At this, the Director-General (DDG) became visibly furious and asked the Deputy Director-General (DDG), "Has the District Manager, Mr. Chowdary, contravened any of the Director-ate's instructions?"

The DDG : "But, Sir, he has to take the advice of the Chief Controller of Printing & Stationery".

The DG : "Will you read out the Department's instructions?"

The DDG : "The Head of the Circle will take the advice of the Chief Controller of Printing & Stationery and decide..."

The Director-General interrupted him and asked him to read it again.

The DDG : "The Head of the Circle will take the advice of the Chief Controller of Printing & Stationery and decide..."

Interrupting, the Director-General asked, "Did the District manager, Mr. Chowdary, take the advice of the Chief Controller of Printing & Stationery?"

The DDG : "Yes, Sir. But the advice was to award the contract to the lowest tenderer".

The DG : "Read on. What is the Head of the Circle supposed to do after taking the advice of the Chief Controller of Printing & Stationery?"

The DDG : "He would decide..."

The Director-General, interrupting, "He has to take the advice and he would decide., That is, the Head of the Circle would decide. In this case he

has taken the advice, and he has decided. Then how did he contravene the Department's Instructions?"

The DDG : "Sir, the advice is to give the tender to..."

The Director-General, interrupting, "Mr. (the Deputy Director-General), do you understand the difference between 'advice' and 'decision'? This is plain English. The Head of the Circle has to take the advice. The Order does not say that he will decide as per the advice of the Chief Controller of Printing & Stationery, which means that it will be the Chief Controller of Printing & Stationery who decides. The Order says that he will consider the advice of the Chief Controller of Printing & Stationery. But the decision will be his. Can't you understand this? You are a DDG, and you don't know the difference between 'advice' and 'decision'. Read what the District manager has written in his note".

The DDG reading my note, "..... I have taken the advice of the Chief Controller of Printing & Stationery into account, and I disagree from it, and decide....."

The DG : "Gentlemen, there is no question of any instructions of the Department having been violated. It is only a question of whether there was any consideration other than what he recorded. That his decision is right is proven by the fact that whomsoever he has ruled out has been later found to be unequal to the task of printing Directories, as circularised by you gentlemen. Leave the matter of integrity to me".

And the matter was over. The Director-General then told me smilingly, "You and I will together go to jail, and before that I will suspend you. Choose your place". I told him that I would like to appear before the Public Accounts Committee myself. But he said, "No, you need not. You simply wait". That evening he called me back and said, "You can go home. Nothing will happen". He told them (the Public Accounts Committee), "Whenever you want, you can have a CBI Inquiry or any other inquiry, but this man has done the correct thing and the best thing, and I am convinced that his integrity is impeccable". That was the end of the story, and the public Accounts Committee dropped the issue. My detractors were thoroughly discomfited, but didn't end their efforts to

damage me.

I was District Manager of Pune Telephones (1974-76) after Ahmedabad. For me, work was more important than merely following rules, giving excuses and not rendering any service. In Pimpri, there was a MAX III type of Exchange which was under-utilised, because the calling rate from the subscribers was very high. During the "busy" hour, its traffic carrying capacity sufficed only for a fraction of the nominal capacity. The Exchange was being expanded and connections could be given, provided the junctions from Pimpri to the Pune Telephone system could be increased, for, about 70% of the calls in Pimpri were meant for Pune City. There was no point in giving more connections if calls could not go to Pune. A junction cable was needed, and was provided for in the project. The Directorate did not allot this cable. The reason was that the P&T did not have enough money to buy the cables, all of which were from a Central Government Enterprise, the Hindustan Cables Limited, which was making the required junction cables in its Hyderabad factory. I contacted the Chairman & Managing Director of the Hindustan Cables and asked him whether he could give me this cable. He said that he could, provided I placed an order directly. I asked him why he was not supplying to the P&T. He replied that there were no orders because the P&T had no money. I said I had provision in my sanctioned estimate for the money. He was a former officer of the P&T, and told me that I had no powers to place orders directly, and if I did, I might come to grief. I told him that it would be my worry and not his, and asked him whether he would supply the cables if I placed the order. He said that he would. I then told him that he had to deliver the cables to us according to my schedule, and the time available was so short that as and when the cable drums came, I had to lay and joint, so that by the time the Exchange expansion was completed, the cable was also ready for service. He agreed. I placed the order and I so planned the work that over 20 kilometers of trenching, cable-laying, jointing, testing and commissioning could be completed by the time the last drums came, and by which time the existing capacity was also expanded, so that in the next seven days, all the expanded capacity could be productively utilised by giving connections which would generate revenue. This was accomplished. While departing from, or disregarding the Departmental rules, I had again and again put to myself three questions viz.,

Was I putting the Government to loss?

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Was I making money for myself?

Was the customer's cause helped or harmed?

Since the answer to the first two questions was "No", and "Yes" to the last, I was not afraid.

In a few months' time, the Directorate came to know that I had made a direct purchase of the cable. This was violation of rules. In the Directorate were a few senior officers who were of the same rank as myself, and who still had dread of my superseding them. One of them, who was in Material Management, made out a case that I seriously violated the rules and that I must be taken to task. When my explanation was asked for, I wrote thundering letter saying that I deserved appreciation for what I did and not asked to offer explanations. The Member (Development) rang me up and said that he had to go through the "motion" of calling for the explanation. I would not come to any grief. So, I should co-operate in giving answers. I told him that he could ask me any question and I would give the only answer that was right and by which I would stand. In their notes they wrote that if I went unpunished, people would go on violating rules. I had replied: "Pray let me know how many people in the Department violated rules for the good of the customers without personally benefiting? And, how many people violated rules for their own benefit, putting the Department to loss, and faced what consequences?" My letters and the "fixing up" notes were all seen by the Member (Finance), who luckily did not happen to be from the Postal cadre. He was an IA & AS officer (Shri Jain). He was taken aback on seeing the vehemence of my letters. He wondered what type of person I could be to write such daring and challenging letters to the Director-General. He wanted to find out for himself. One day he descended in Pune. I guess he made enquiries with a number of people. He had a daughter living there (which I came to know later). As in Ahmedabad, I had already become too well-known in Pune also, and the Pune Telephones were very popular with the customers. I was also known here for my interest in Sanskrit, Maratha history and cultural events. I guess that he had got very favourable reports about me. He had a discussion with me and I satisfied him on every question that he had to ask. When he went to the Directorate, he is understood to have recorded that what was done by me was absolutely right and proper, and if only a few more people could do like me, the Department would get a better name

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and better returns on its investments. The case was not pursued. I wanted to get a copy of the note that he had recorded, but my "friends" saw to it that the file was not available.

I had yet one more brush with the Public Accounts Committee. This was for my deeds in Andhra Pradesh. During my tenure in Andhra Pradesh (1978-83), there was unprecedented expansion of the telephone network to the rural areas and there were a number of innovations, which led to the introduction of direct dialling i.e., STD (Subscriber Trunk Dialling) even from Manual Exchange, Metered Demand Service, Group Dialling even from MAX III Exchanges, and a number of other service-enhancing, customer-satisfying, revenue-earning, loss-minimising schemes. This meant that we had to have a lot of equipment. There were not enough allotments. Therefore, I made direct purchases from the Indian Telephone Industries, the sole manufacturer and supplier of these equipments to the P&T Department. By this time, the Postal cadre officer had become the Member (Finance), and due to my several actions, chief among which was the removal of the Public Telephones from the Post Offices to be placed in the grocers premises (see the Chapter, "Where Should Public Telephones Be Placed"), he was particularly inimical to me. The audit parties were tutored to raise objections against this direct purchase of equipments from the Indian Telephone Industries in violation of rules. This was pushed up to the Comptroller & Auditor General, who called for a hearing by the Public Accounts Committee. This was in 1983, five years after the first brush with the Public Accounts Committee.

The Director-General, again this time, was an IAS officer who was admiring my daring, my extraordinary work, and who had even recommended my name for a Presidential Award. He used to lament with me about the "jokers" that he was having in the P&T Board. I used to tell him that I would do what all I was doing only as long as he had confidence in me. He had only to tell me that he was having doubts, and I would stop. I had been waging a two-front war, one against non-professional men masquerading as Financial Advisers, and the other against the Civil Wing (pleading that civil wing engineers should be placed under the General Managers) which was not responsible to anybody, either the Posts or the Telecoms, and which was spending money by becoming a law unto itself, able to impress every authority that mattered, in the usual manner of any PWD or CPWD. The Civil Wing was wanting to

needle me and had the Director-General on its side. But the Director-General's admiration for my work was more than sufficient to be unsettled by the Civil Wing people telling stories about me. In the event, the violation of rules involving my directly purchasing equipments from the Indian Telephone Industries without allotment from the Directorate, came up before the Public Accounts Committee. I wanted to argue myself. I was not allowed, I did not go to the Director-General privately and explain anything. Nor did he wait. Perhaps, he expected that in view of the seriousness of the matter, I would approach him. I was convinced about the righteousness of what I did and I imagined that this Director-General too, like the previous IAS Director-General, would stand by me. Before the Public Accounts Committee, he was badly ragged. He did not defend me. He expected that they would give an adverse comment. The Public Accounts Committee noted the extraordinary work that was done in the Telecom Circle, Andhra Pradesh, but it held that there was violation of rules. The Director-General was to retire in the next two months and he smelt some trouble for me, because there was a set of officers who felt very jealous and who could do damage to me. He called me and said he would give me an adverse entry, which I should immediately appeal against, and he would get it expunged. His reasoning was that if this happened and if this incident of direct purchases in violation of rules was to be the cause for action to be taken as per the findings of the Public Accounts Committee, the explanation that I would have given for getting the adverse entries expunged could again be quoted and, therefore, that would save me. The giving of the adverse entry, its conveyance, appeal against it, and its expunction were all done within about a month's time. The Minister (Shri V.N. Gadgil) was explained everything by the Director-General, and there was no difficulty in expunging it.

The matter rested just like that. But after two years, when the Member (Operations) who esteemed me very much had retired and an ill-disposed, mediocre person took over as Member (Operations), the matter got revived on the plea that the findings of the public Accounts Committee had to be acted upon and the consequence reported to them. I was asked for an explanation. I gave it. I reproduced all the commendations that I had received from Minister after Minister and the Member (Development) for the extraordinary work done in Andhra Pradesh. The Member (Operations) also recorded that this extraordinary work could be done only because so much initiative was shown, and although it may be technically in violation of rules, nobody was put to any loss. In my

reply, I had quoted Cardinal Wolsey, who was stripped of all his powers by King Henry the Eighth of England: "Had I served my God (family) with half the zeal with which I served my king (the Department), I, in my old age, would not have come to such a pass". The reply was put up, and the decision had to be taken by the Minister, who then happened to be Shri Ram Niwas Mirdha. During his travels to Andhra Pradesh and his interaction with several members of Parliament, he came to know of the extraordinary work done in Andhra Pradesh. The fact that one-fifth of the number of Exchanges in the whole of the country were in Andhra Pradesh, and that over 30% of its villages were telephoned, in contrast to less than 7% in the whole of India, were terribly telling facts, and that all this happened during my five years in Andhra Pradesh, had made the Minister to conclude that this was an engineered complaint by jealous colleagues to damage me. When this was under discussion, the Director-General called me and said that if I gave an apology, the entire thing would be dropped. I refused to do so and told him that I would stand by every deed I had done, and if it meant any damage, I was prepared to face it. It was suggested that I could say that these purchases were made without my knowledge. I refused to say that even although one of my subordinates was prepared to take the blame.

These three incidents, among several others, are illustrative of how jealousy and concern for one's own seniority can blind people to any good deed. While the juniors and most of the Department's officials, including the Unions, were appreciative of my work, that very fact went on arousing jealousy in proportion to the intensity of the approbation and approval that I was getting from my juniors, the rank and file, the customers, and the public. I cannot but quote the following (which appeared as an advertisement of Cadillac Motor Car Company):

In every field of human endeavour, he that is first must perpetually live in the white light of publicity. Whether the leadership be vested in a man or in a manufactured product, emulation and envy are at work. In art, in literature, in music, in industry, the reward and the punishment are always the same. Thereward is widespread recognition; the punishment, fierce denial and detraction. When a man's work becomes a standard for the whole world, it also becomes a target for the shafts of the envious few. If his work be merely mediocre, he will be left severely alone - if he

achieves a masterpiece, it will set a million tongues a-wagging. Jealousy does not protrude its forked tongue at the artist who produces a commonplace painting. Whatsoever you write, or paint, or play, or sing, or build, no one will strive to surpass, or to slander you, unless your work be stamped with the seal of genius. Long, long after a great work or a good work has been done, those who are disappointed or envious continue to cry out that it cannot be done. Spiteful little voices in the domain of art were raised against our own Whistler as a mountebank, long after the big world had acclaimed him its greatest artistic genius. Multitudes flocked to Bayreuth to workshop at the musical shrine of Wagner, while the little group of those whom he had dethroned and displaced argued angrily that he was no musician at all. The little world continued to protest that Fulton could never build a steamboat, while the big world flocked to the river banks to see his boat steam by. The leader is assailed because he is a leader, and the effort to equal him is merely added proof of that leadership. Failing to equal or to excel, the follower seeks to depreciate and to destroy - but only confirms once more the superiority of that which he strives to supplant. There is nothing new in this. It is as old as the world and as old as the human passions - envy, fear, greed, ambition, and the desire to surpass. And it all avails nothing. If the leader truly leads, he remains - the leader. Master-poet, master-painter, master-workman, each in his turn is assailed, one each hold his laurels through the ages. That which is good or great makes itself known, no matter how loud the clamour of denial. That which deserves to live - lives.

I also took strength and solace in the philosopher-writer Edmund Burke's advice to those who venture: "*Those who carry on great public schemes must be proof against the most fatiguing delays, the most mortifying disappointments, the most shocking insults and, what is worse of all, the presumptuous judgement of the ignorant*".

## OF PERSONS, PLACES AND EVENTS

Just as good teachers have a profound influence upon our character, interests and attainments, so do have some seniors in the service. Some colleagues also influence us, and their inimitable styles and attitudes to work leave lasting impressions. Those which have some lessons and which can provide guidance to those who are still rising up the ladder in service are recounted here.

When I had just joined the Indian Telecom engineering service as a probationer, I was posted to Calcutta Telephones. Mine was the first batch of probationers who, during probation even, had been entrusted with executive and operational duties. I joined the Calcutta Telephones and was assigned to the installation Branch. The "34" Avenue Director type of Stronger Exchange had to be expanded by 400 lines, and just six weeks' time was given. The General manager asked me whether I could take up the challenge and whether I would, without any mistake, commission the 400 lines expansion to a working Exchange. He had made a promise to the public, and this had to be fulfilled. In all confidence, I said, "Yes" and took up the job. I had sent away my wife and son to my native place and was working from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Working along with the Wiremen, the Mechanics and the Junior Engineers, was an exhilarating experience. I had learnt a lot, especially the intricate details of circuitry and the entire anatomy of an Exchange. The job was completed a few days ahead of the target, and the General Manager was very happy. With this accomplishment, I approached a Deputy General Manager who was in charge of administration, which included allotment of quarters. I was having a very small rented flat, the high rent for which was hurting me. I requested the officer to allot me a quarter. He said that my turn had not come and that I was too junior and, therefore, I had to wait. I told him of the arduous nature of my duties, what I had done, and the further installations that I had to take up. He reiterated his inability to help me and said that I should await my turn. I knew he had power to

allot quarters out-of-turn. I told him that so and so person, who was just doing a routine job like the printing of Telephone Directory, had been given a quarter out-of-turn. The nature of my job was more arduous, involving many hours work beyond the normal call of duty, and so I should be considered for out-of-turn quarter. He became furious. He said that I was seeking a favour and trying to fault him by giving some examples wherein he had given quarters out-of-turn. He said that those who seek favours have no right to argue. I learnt my lesson. A favour is a favour, and when once it is given, one can always find supporting and convincing reasons. We cannot coax a favour, because that has no basis in rules. I had remembered this incident for the rest of my career, and never did I allow any person to give arguments when he was seeking a favour. If I wanted to oblige, I would favour him. This particular officer was actually a very easy-going man, and had come to be known as Deputy General Manager (Signatures), because he was simply signing papers put up to him. He neither had any ideas, nor would he go into the merit of any case. Many, many years later, I had caught up with him and both of us were Heads of Circles, I in charge of a telephone system, and he in charge of the telecom system in a State. It was a pitiable sight to see him being snubbed by the Director-General and the Minister in their discussions with me and this gentleman. V.P. Kametkar

While in Calcutta Telephones, I had once finished one installation and was very eager to take up another installation. Almost a'1 the equipment for the expansion of the Alipore 45 Exchange by 2,000 lines had come, and it was lying in packing cases for quite some time. The Wiremen, Technicians, Mazdoors and Junior Engineers were sitting idle. My Divisional Engineer, would not allow me to open the packing cases and take up the installation. The reason was that the estimate for this work had not been sanctioned but, as per a special procedure, the equipment was ordered and had been received. The sanctions were encountering administrative delays in the Directorate. I was chafing at the idleness among many of my workers, the loss of revenue to the Department and the delay of service to a large number of waiting applicants. I could do nothing, because the Divisional Engineer would not allow the work to be taken up without sanction. Then, one day, he went on leave for a few weeks. That was the opportunity for me. I simply got all the packing cases opened and started the work. When he came back and saw that almost all the equipment had been erected and installation was in full

RC Sankharia  
swing, he got furious and asked for my explanation as to how an unsanctioned work was being executed. I simply told him that, in my opinion, it was criminal to keep idle labour and also unproductive equipment. I told him that, in his absence, I was in charge, and I took the responsibility upon myself. That was all the explanation that was given. He mentioned this to the General Manager who was not at all outraged, but felt quite happy that this initiative was shown by a probationary engineer. Later, when I was a Divisional Engineer in a project (Electrification Circle) concerned with the laying of trunk telephone cables from Kharapur to Rourkela in connection with the railway electrification, this particular officer happened to be an Assistant Chief Engineer in the P&T Directorate. I had infringed a procedure, attention to which was drawn by some audit party. The Assistant Chief Engineer conveyed to me the displeasure of the Director-General for infringing some procedures. (How this happened would be narrated in a later paragraph, as it was another educative incident). After about 15 years, he succeeded me to be in charge of a telephone system. In that city, where I was the Head of the telephone system, I had introduced a number of new procedures and new facilities, all in the interest of customers, not to the detriment of Government revenue, but simply there were no covering rules or procedures. Within a few months, he was discontinuing many of the procedures and the new facilities that I had introduced. He was asking under what rules these were done, and when the officers pointed out that all these were covered by orders issued by the previous Head of the telephone system, he looked for Code Book rules which did not exist, and, so, he discontinued them. Throughout his life, he would do nothing beyond what the rules provided and, even there, if there was any ambiguity, he would write for clarification to the Directorate. He would never receive it and no action would be taken. But he had a great shield when confronted by a customer or any official, in the words that he had "referred the matter to the Directorate". We later on became colleagues in the P&T Directorate. He retired very uneventfully.

While I was in the Electrification Circle (1960-62) in Calcutta, the job was exciting. It was executive work, involving co-ordination with the Railways, and having to get work done from Casual Mazdoors to Assistant Engineers. It was a three-bound one and almost a race between the Railways and the Telecommunications. One officer who was known for his dynamism and great energies was posted as a Director. But as the

JR Sen Gupta  
work expanded, many more posts got created and, therefore, the service people, who are ever-hungry for promotions, got the post upgraded from a Director's to a General Manager's rank (a similar thing was to happen to me in Ahmedabad). This is a price one has to pay for rapid achievements. Over him was placed a General Manager, Shri J.R. Sen Gupta. He was also a tough and dynamic person who never cared for rules, but only results. He had several brushes with his seniors earlier, even during the British times. He was the ideal for many a young probationer for result-oriented actions and initiatives. He used to visit my camp which was a cluster of tents along the railway tracks. We were shifting from one place to another as the work progressed. We had a jeep. Shri J.R. Sen Gupta saw the jeep unutilised and parked on a few occasions. He asked why it was idle. I said that it was out of order, and that the cost of its repair was beyond my powers and I was getting quotations and would send them to the Headquarters for sanction. He asked me whether I needed the jeep or not. I said that I needed it, but the cost of repair was beyond my powers. He again asked me whether my need was important or power was important. I said that I was being advised by every one of my officers that I might come to grief if I got the jeep repaired without sanctions. He asked me to disregard everything and get it repaired whatever the cost, and if he saw it standing idle next time, he would withdraw the jeep and proceed against me. The jeep was repaired in the next few days. It was this infraction of the procedure that was reported to the Directorate by the audit party, and for which, the Assistant Chief Engineer conveyed the Director-General's displeasure to me. I took this letter to Shri J.R. Sen Gupta and told him, "Sir, this is the reward for my work with your encouragement". Shri J.R. Sen Gupta simply took the letter, called his Stenographer, and in my presence dictated to the Director-General a letter to the effect that he has the habit of giving oral orders to his subordinates to carry out many actions. In this case, too, it was he who asked the Divisional Engineer to get the jeep repaired, no matter what the cost, as without it the work was getting hampered. All the covering sanctions would be taken care of later. He wrote that he was returning the letter to the Director-General unserved on the Divisional Engineer, and if the Director-General felt it necessary, he could convey the displeasure to him. I was profoundly impressed by his boldness. Very few are the officers who would protect their subordinates. Here was one who was taking the blame upon himself and daring his senior to take action against him and not against his subordinate.

I got transferred from the Electrification Circle to Delhi. I went to take leave of Shri J.R.S. He asked me, among other things, whether I had committed any irregularities. I was surprised. He said that the question was not with a view to punish me, but to protect me. If I could tell him what all irregularities I had committed, he would dictate a covering sanction, saying that all were carried out at his instance. I said that if I knew that they were irregularities, I would not have committed them and I would have reported to him. May be, there could be some. Then, on my making over-charge memo, he wrote to the effect that he, J.R.S., was in the habit of giving several oral instructions which the officer had carried out without fail. Any infractions found during his (my) time could all be held to be due to the oral instructions issued by himself. Could anyone expect this type of a superior?

One day, the same officer, Shri J.R. Sen Gupta, called me and said that, in Jamshedpur, there would be a very high-level co-ordination meeting between the P&T and the Railway officers. A large number of senior officers were expected. He told me that I should arrange for their comfortable stay and for their food. He detailed what should be served during breakfast, lunch, dinner and so on. I was feeling very uneasy, because the cost of all this would be quite heavy and I was wondering how I would be able to cover up these expenses. If I asked him, I did not know what he would think of my ability. He was so clever and intelligent that he found out from my face what precisely was agitating me. He said, "Don't worry about all the expenses and the arrangements. You have no experience. You have such and such an officer. You call him and tell him that these are to be arranged. He would do everything and you would not have to bother yourself about anything". I did call that particular officer, who came up from the ranks and who knows how things are to be arranged. In the event, the co-ordination meeting and the stay of the senior officers went off very well, and the main reason for the amicability and the agreeableness and the pleasant and mutually acceptable conclusions were all due to the facilities and arrangements that were so very thoughtfully provided by the experienced Sub-Divisional Officer of mine. Shri J.R.S. Sen Gupta used to tell us that rates alone could not achieve results. There are so many other fine things in life, some of which are felt, some of which are talked of, but never written. I went on learning that it was very true.

This General Manager, used to tour his areas extensively and very frequently. One thing intrigued me. He would never inspect the works. He would stop for a lunch or dinner, but most of the time we had to meet him at the Railway Station. He would talk to us, and, in the course of the talk, he would know how things were. Once I took the liberty of asking him as to why he was not visiting the work spots, seeing the workers, and talking to the people. If he did that, it would inspire us. He said that he had spent several years in the Department. His job was not to do, but to get things done. He had to see that his men were happy, inspired and motivated. He knew that accomplishments would easily follow. When he was looking at the faces of the men waiting upon him, or sitting in a meeting, he could easily find out as to how well or ill the affairs of the Division were. It was verily true. He had a very uncanny way of knowing what things were going wrong, and what things were being done exceedingly well. This faculty, I tried to cultivate.

When we were in the camps, we were running a Mess, and all the expenses were being shared by us. One of the officers, a South Indian, used to keep meticulous accounts and prepare bills for everybody, including myself. Once, Shri J.R. Sen Gupta happened to see us settle the accounts. He did not comment anything at that time. We then adjourned for a lunch. Over it, he was telling us: "You fellows! Don't think that because you are giving me a free lunch, I would never fire you for your inefficiency and lapses. I eat freely and fire as freely. Beware!".

We had one old and easy-going officer among our pack of Divisional Engineers, each in charge of a particular section of work. One gentleman, Shri R., was quite old, had served the British, and knew how to enjoy life. Once, three of us were at Howrah Railway Station, all to catch different trains to go to different places. I asked him what was the fun in going to that place where he was destined to, and told him that he should come to my Division and see my work. All of us used to have Railway Card Passes and could travel free in our work areas. Shri R. immediately changed his plan and accompanied me. At my work place, he saw another Divisional Engineer who was going to Ranchi. This Divisional Engineer invited Shri R. to accompany him to Ranchi, to which Shri R. agreed and did go to Ranchi. There he met another Divisional Engineer and followed him to some other place and finally came back to

Calcutta without going to the place he originally planned to go. The General Manager, Shri J.R. Sen Gupta, came to know of this. He called Shri R. and dictated a Casual leave application for all the days he was off, asked him to sign the application, and sanctioned it then and there itself. Both the actions are extremely illustrative of how some people can easily derelict duty, and how an apparently democratic General Manager could decisively discipline an officer.

I recall another educative incident. While working in the same Electrification Circle, I had one colleague, a brilliant logician who could prove anything. Nothing could bother him. He had no anxieties, no worries and no concerns. He could always prove that he was right and every other man was at fault. We had a Deputy General Manager, who was quite difficult to deal with. Once there was a cable fault between Asansol and Dhanbad and the Railways were complaining that the train movements were badly affected, because the telecom circuits were interrupted. Days were passing. The fault was not repaired. My colleague coolly stayed put in Calcutta in the Headquarters. The boss called him and asked him why he was sitting in Headquarters when the cable fault was continuing, becoming more and more serious, and the Railways were complaining to the Director-General. He asked him whether he did not know the rules that if there was a fault which was persisting for more than so many hours, such and such officer should move, and if the fault persisted for so many more hours, his superior should move. Here is the reply of my colleague: "Our objective is to repair the faulty cable and restore the service. Suppose I go there. I am not a Cable Jainter, I am not a Junior Engineer. I am not an Assistant Engineer. I cannot do any one of the jobs. So my personal contribution will be zero and useless. If I go there, the attention of my subordinates will be diverted to look after me, my tent, my food etc. So I will be detracting from their exertions to rectify the fault. Therefore, my going there is again useless. On the other hand, it is positively harmful. Now see the advantage of my staying here in Calcutta. I can talk to them and find out from them whether they want any help by way of materials or test instruments. They are not available in the camp. If I went there, I cannot invent them. On the other hand, if I stay here and if materials or instruments are needed there, I can talk to some other organisations and officers, get them and send them to the Division. So, there again you would see that my going is useless and my staying here is more useful". And as he was concluding, after every argument the boss was becoming more and more furious. He

went on saying, "Impossible, you are wrong~" But at the end of his arguments, my colleague asked his boss, to tell him which argument of his was wrong. He told the boss that if he insisted that he should go, he would write down what all he had said, give it to the boss and then go. And if for any of the reasons he had advanced, the fault prolonged, the responsibility would be that of the boss and not his. The boss got frightened and walked out of the room. I was witness to this conversation. My colleague never raised his voice, never showed any anger, but was only giving forth his cold logic. Later the boss realised his mistake and in a sober mood admitted that my colleague was right, although the rules would hold him to be wrong.

When I was in Delhi Telephones as Divisional Engineer (Planning), my boss was Shri MMK. He had a very high reputation for industry, depth of knowledge and for achievement. Further, he had the benefit of a long stay in Delhi and knowing several senior officers in and outside the Department, as he happened to be the son-in-law of a very senior and respected ICS officer. Almost everyday, he used to go to the Directorate, make enquiries as to how the various proposals that had been submitted by him to the Directorate were faring, discuss with the concerned officers, and then come to his office. He would dictate rejoinders, modify proposals and so on. Most of the time he would keep us in front of him, think through and dictate. Our job was mostly to fill up the blanks and prepare the annexures after collecting lots of figures. Association with the thinking process was our learning opportunity. We had, however, no occasion to use our own thinking or initiative. Even if we had prepared any drafts or memoranda, we used to find out that he had already given a dictation on the subject and ours was redundant. Once we were to have a discussion with a number of officers in the directorate on some aspects of planning for the Delhi Telephones. Shri MMK called me and asked me to prepare the Minutes of the meeting. I was surprised and said, "Sir, the meeting is to be held tomorrow. How can we write the minutes today?" He smiled and said that in meetings in Delhi, with many people participating, all sorts of things would be talked about. We who are bent upon achieving a certain conclusion should see that what we intend saying and what we intend the conclusion to be are ensured to be recorded. That is why we should prepare the draft Minutes in advance and modify them slightly in the light of what others might say. With advance Minutes with us, we should always be able to bring the other people to say what we want. This was a great lesson and I found

that what he said was absolutely right. He saw to it that everybody who was participating in the meeting would at least, among others, say what we had recorded in advance. At best, the words and phrases may change. I had built upon this practice in the sense that not only would I prepare advanced Minutes of the various meetings that I participated in later on in my various capacities, but I would also take the initiative of proposing them for adoption. If somebody else was the Convenor, I would send the draft Minutes as notes to the Convenor with a note that it was just to help him and gain speed. Very often, the objectives that we had in participating in the meeting had been largely achieved due to this practice. Shri MMK had a flair for writing memoranda and they are masterpieces. I learnt a lot as to how to write effective memoranda, how to title them, paragraph them, prepare a short executive summary in the beginning, and end up a note with a summary by way of points.

Another great learning experience was when I was Assistant Chief Engineer (1964-68) in the P&T Directorate. My superior was Shri RK. He was a gentleman who would go endlessly into all possible details. He would direct certain information to be collected. Not all would be available, and with whatever was available, when a discussion was held, he would ask for some more details. He would look for mistakes in English, composition, page numbering, referencing, and most of the time would be spent first in these trivialities. Then when all the information that he would like to have before deciding could not be collected or would not be available, and lot of time would have gone, he would finally say, "Gentleman, with this meagre and incomplete information, I would never take a decision. You proceed as best as you can...". Months would have been lost and finally a decision would have been taken with the information, surmises and knowledge that we had had at the start of the issue. He was an example of better being the enemy of good". He was a Deputy Director-General, but would go into details that a Junior Engineer may have to. Once, while discussing with another Deputy Director-General as to why there was such a very high failure on Subscriber-Frank Dalling (STD) calls, he called for a number of circuit diagrams of the final selection, STD relay sets etc. Not satisfied with the discussion of the design details, he prevailed upon another Deputy Director-General, Shri GVM who was in charge of transmission planning, to go to the Delhi Telephones STD Exchange. Myself and another Divisional Engineer (Installation), had accompanied the two Deputy Directors-General. Shri RK asked us to make a test call and it was a failure. The selection chain was

held, and together with us he started tracing the circuit. He was directing the operation of various contacts of relays, discussing and making more relay contacts operate, measuring the tension of the relay springs and so on and so forth. It went on for over two hours without any conclusion. Everybody was fed up, but not he. As it was about 8 p.m., he said that we might go for the day and investigate further later. During all that time, the other Deputy Director-General, a transmission specialist, who did not believe in this type of investigation by so senior officers, simply sat in a chair. When Shri RK proposed that we should go, he said he would not, and further added, "Two Deputy Directors-General and an Assistant Chief Engineer from the Directorate, and a Divisional Engineer have come here to investigate the phenomenon. They have struggled for two hours, and if such senior officers of such a high calibre with the highest reputation in the Department could not find out what the fault is, it would be disastrous for the reputation of the Directorate. The Assistant Engineers, the Junior Engineers, the technicians and Wiremen who are maintaining this equipment and who have seen us tracing the circuit and struggling to find the faults, would laugh at us. From tomorrow, they would never remove any fault, saying that when the Deputy Directors-General themselves could not even find the fault, how can they be expected to? So gentlemen, I am sorry, I won't go out until the fault is detected and rectified." We enjoyed all this very much. But Shri RK felt annoyed and led the walkout. Poor Shri RK was a very well-meaning person and a gentleman. But, his greatest flaw was that he would like to be certain beyond any possible doubt in regard to every matter. Without all imaginable information and without testing that information or data for its correctness and integrity, he would not proceed to take a decision. But in actual life, this is impossible. Decisions have to be taken well in time. Otherwise, the costs of delay will be terrible. If one has to get every fact, it will be eternity, and by that time no decision will be necessary, because matters would have taken their relentless course for good or bad, and others would not wait for your own opinion or decision. What is the use of one's experience? What is the use of one's professional intuition if full and unalterable and unquestionable facts only can lead one to arrive at a decision? When he was in a good mood, I recited to Shri RK, the Bhagawad Gita Sloka:

"The ignorant, undevoted and doubting perish. For the doubting, there is no comfort either in this world or in the other".

Gita - IV - 40.

Kamlesh  
Better being the enemy of good  
better being the enemy of good  
better being the enemy of good

manan

165  
164

As people rise higher in the managerial ranks, it is necessary for them to be decisive, and, very often, not all facts would be available. But, it is in the light of a person's professional experience and judgement that he will have to decide issues.

It is very necessary that officers, especially Managers of telephone systems, and, for that matter, those in charge of any utility service, train their family members in the use of telephones to answer properly, to greet rightly, and to be helpful and courteous and not officious. The job of a telephone manager is especially exacting if one is sincere. If a train or an aeroplane is late, or if water-supply is not there, or if electricity fails, the sufferer cannot get in contact with the General manager of the concerned service instantaneously. Not so in regard to telephones. Any customer or user can, from the nearest working telephone, ring up the General manager, irrespective of the time of day or night. The complainants expect the call to be answered, their grievance to be heard, and possibly rectified. "If the General Managers telephone has himself answered in such a rude and irresponsible manner, there is no wonder that his telephone Operators and Linemen would be behaving in a much worse fashion", say the customers. That a little mistake or carelessness on the part of even a member of the family of a General manager could lead to very sad results, had been learnt by me while working in Bombay Telephones. My General Manager was one Shri K. Shri B of "Mother India" used to write very disparagingly about Bombay-Telephones, and sometimes he attacked the General Manager by name also. We in charge of management, especially the Number One, have to be sensitive to public criticism, because the Communications Ministers have almost without exception been asking reports if there was public criticism of a General Manager. One gentleman tried to patch up between the General Manager and Shri B, and, in the process, Shri B was to give a ring to the General Manager, so that, over a telephone conversation, the General Manager could be invited to dinner, and that would be the occasion when every misunderstanding would be got over and amicable relations would be established. The telephone call came, and the wife of the general manager picked up the telephone. The caller said, "I am . . . . . Possibly the lady did not hear distinctly or she could not immediately place which B was calling. So, without masking the mouthpiece, she told her husband loudly, some B is calling. Shri B heard this and immediately took great offence as to how so great a celebrity as himself could be

referred to as "some B". That showed that not only was the General manager rude, but his entire family was rude and had a lot of vanity, he concluded. The conversation turned very sour. The bid to patch up failed. On the other hand, the differences were aggravated. It is said that in the Indian Foreign Service, the spouse is also assessed before an officer is given a particular foreign assignment. While this may not happen before a person is posted as General manager of a telephone system, it is necessary that the telephone managers and their families are made aware of their correct behaviour and response on telephone to the customer.

An irritating practice which needs to be avoided, would have been noticed by many a caller, not the called. Most officers, especially in Delhi, would have their own telephones answered by servants, and it would appear that many of them are tutored to say that the Saab is in the bathroom. After getting the same reply for one or two hours (because the servant could not recognise that it was the same caller who was making all the calls), the caller ventured to suggest through a letter that, it is hoped that the bath-room has been designed as a bed-room for rest, recreation and every other activity, because the Saab has to spend so many hours a day in the bath-room. After finding that many of our officers were wanting in proper etiquette over telephone, I had issued an instructional pamphlet to all the telephone men. Here are the salient points regarding answering on the telephone:

Answer promptly.

Announce your identity. Begin by saying *Namaskar*.

If a person other than for whom the telephone is listed is answering, he should say, *Namaskar! So and sos telephone*. When asked by the called as to who is speaking, he should give his identity as so and so's servant, wife, daughter, friend, Secretary etc.

If the person answering is different from the owner of the telephone, he should volunteer to take a message. He should ascertain the calling party's number and name and take down a brief message. He should also volunteer to know whether the calling party would himself call later, or whether he would desire his master to return the call.

It is wrong to pass on the telephone from one person to another person, keeping the caller waiting, like a servant answering the telephone and passing it to the son, and the son then giving it to the mother, and the mother saying that the Saab is in the bath-room, or has gone out, or is not available. It is best that only the person who is in a position to give complete information, answers.

It is proper to keep a note-book and a pencil or pen always by the side of the instrument. It would be annoying if the caller is told, Hold on. I am searching for a pen or note-book to take down your number or message.

It is good habit for the officer/manager to enquire from his household members/assistants whether there were any calls in his absence, and from whom they came. He should then hasten to return the calls from important persons.

Once when I was the Deputy General Manager of Bombay Telephones, a memorable incident took place. We have a large number of departmental quarters. People get them after 20-25 years of service, because they are so few and there is a huge waiting list. Quite a number of them are sub-let, sometimes to other departmental employees, and often to rank outsiders. There are also instances when the allottee does not live in his quarter, but lets out the quarter completely. It happened to be the Estate Officer, and once I had to inquire into the letting out of a Bombay Telephone quarter by one of its employees to a taxi driver. The employee himself was not living there. While conducting the inquiry, I made observations to the effect that if the allottee was sharing it with another Bombay Telephones employee, it would be nice and, in fact, would be considered as a very socially useful practice. If he had sub-let it to an outsider, it was an offence. If he did not live there and let it out to a rank outsider, it was a grave offence, meriting the highest punishment. Why did you have to give it to a taxi driver?, I asked him. May be you have taken some 'pugree and you are charging some high rent, as our inquiries reveal. Is this not highly immoral?, I asked him. The employee

found out that I was trapped because of the use of the word Immoral. He went on to explain, You are saying that I am indulging in an immoral act in that I have given away the departmental quarter allotted to me to a rank outsider to make money. But is my offence unusual? I am now 55 years old. For 35 years I have lived in a 'Juggi' i.e., a 'Jhopdapatti. I raised my children in a slum. They have grown up by now and have gone away. They have their own families. Only myself and my old woman are continuing in the jhopdapatti. We have suffered for 35 years. We are used to it. What do we need the Government flat for now, when our children don't live with us, when we have become old, and when I am due to retire soon? If I vacate my jhopdapatti, I won't get it back for the same price that I have paid. I would rather continue in that. Yes, I have taken 'Pugree and I am charging very high rent from the taxi driver who keeps his taxi also in the premises, as your inquiries correctly revealed. I am converting my 35 years of suffering into money and this is not immoral. Look at the freedom fighters. They had gone to jail, some of them only for a few days, during the time India was fighting against the British Empire. 20-30 years after we have got independence, all these freedom fighters are being given pensions, concessional railway tickets, priority telephones etc. Now, what is that? They have converted the suffering that they underwent during the freedom-struggle into money. This is the official policy of the government of India. I am doing exactly the same. I have converted over 35 years of my suffering due to living in jhopdapattis into money. You may call the others 'suffering for freedom. I would call myself, 'sufferer for want of quarters. Just as they are being rewarded, I was not, but I took the example. I had no argument to this excepting to flout the rules. I only said, What you are doing may not be immoral, but it is illegal. Just for my sake if you now cause the taxi driver to vacate and occupy the quarter yourself, at least for some time, I will exonerate you. And that was what I did under the weight of the impracticality or immorality that was involved in comparison with another practice of the freedom-fighter that he quoted.

The position of a General Manager of Telephones is a very interesting one. It involves a lot of inter-action with the public and with the Ministers and MLAs and MPs. And these days, when there is perpetual dissidence and periodical downfall of Ministries and leaderships, there is conspiratorial activity among the dissidents the telephone persons are unknowingly drawn into the actions by omission or commission, or at

R. K. Nagde  
least they would be used as ignorant accomplices. It is telephone tapping which has led to the resignation of the Chief Minister of Karnataka. Such legal and illegal, known and unknown tapping of telephones, and in fact, provision of telephones is very much related to political fights. There is another type of illegal telephone involvement and that is for criminal activities of smugglers, gamblers and dope peddlers.

Political pressures, especially from the ruling party, are unavoidable. Telephones are scarce, the waiting lists and the waiting periods are long. Many are the people who ask for a telephone immediately. They cannot be given one according to rules. They have to wait for their turn in the particular category of registration. But political persons will come saying that they are social workers and that they hold so and so position in such and such organisation, and that they are very important. How can such important persons be not given telephones immediately when even Panwallahs and timber merchants are getting telephones, they would ask, if you don't give a telephone, they will agitate, they will write letters, give statements to the Press, complain to Ministers that there is a lot of corruption in the telephones, the service is bad, the General Manager is indifferent and that all the officers have vested interests and so on. One way is to ignore this. But, unfortunately, the rulers will not ignore this. Transfers and other inconveniences will be heaped upon the so-called tactless and inefficient managers and officers. But I found that there was a very simple way of dealing with all these people. At any time in any telephone system 2% to 5% of the telephones are disconnected for non-payment. That means that much capacity is there, not generating traffic nor earning revenues. If temporary telephones are given, the rental is double, and so the Department gains money, whereas, against the disconnected telephones, money is lost in two ways. Firstly, they do not make calls, and so pay no revenue. Secondly, they cannot receive calls and, therefore, calls which would have otherwise been originating from others to them would also not produce revenues. So, when political heavyweights came for temporary telephones, after making enquiries about their heaviness and the influence they wield, temporary telephones used to be given. It is known that many of these people would not pay the bills later, and so heavy deposits used to be taken, sometimes in instalments. The temporary telephone would be given for periods ranging from 3-6 months. It would come up for renewal periodically and, if, in the meanwhile, the bigwigs who recommended had themselves fallen

from power, or if the party having the temporary telephone had become persona non grata due to changes in the political situation, the telephone would be not renewed, and this non-renewal would not result in any nuisance, because the un-personned social worker would not get any publicity. Is this the correct way of dealing with political pressure? There could be several answers. But, in my opinion, this was the least costly, in fact, no costs in terms of money to the Department, and least damaging to the prestige, integrity and image of the telephone organisation. We are living in a political democracy, and it is impossible to ignore either the power of the politicians or the venality of some of them, who, when they don't get what they want, can immediately talk loudly of the inefficiency, corruption, non-service and wrong bills and every type of failure in the Telephones, all of which would evaporate if the social worker is given an out-of-turn telephone. When the choice is between bad and worse, it is always better to choose the bad and strive to improve it, rather than never decide and let events overtake you.

Richard 14/5/21  
18.05.21

"Lives of great men all remind us we may make our lives sublime and departing leave behind us foot prints on the sands of time".

## IN THE VIDESH SANCHAR NIGAM

In May 1983, the then Communications Minister, Shri V.N. Gadgil, told me that he would like me to go as the General Manager of Uttar Pradesh Telecommunications. A lot needed to be done in the Prime Minister's State. He had in mind the extraordinary work that had been done in Andhra Pradesh for the expansion and improvement of telecommunications during my five-and-a-half years stewardship of that State. I told him that if these were his orders, I would go, but if I were given a choice, I would like to come to the Directorate. The reason was that I felt that things were not moving in the Directorate, that many of the initiatives, innovations and new practices that I had introduced should all be formalised and ruled to be applicable all over the country, and that this could be done only from the Directorate. I knew the formidable difficulties of having to operate in a purely paper-work office like the Directorate. The Honourable Minister told me that he was not compelling me to go to Uttar Pradesh, and that my choice (of coming to the Directorate) would be conceded. That is how, towards the middle of July 1983, I landed in the Directorate for a second tenure. Earlier, for four years, during 1964-68, I had been in the Directorate as Assistant Chief Engineer.

Soon after joining the Directorate, I realised that the affairs in the Directorate were worse than what I had imagined them to be. From about 5 Deputy Directors-General (DDGs), the number had gone up to about 30 in the Directorate, including the Telecom Research Centre (TRC). Work had got splintered among these one score and a half DDGs, and every decision was involving four to six DDGs. All were senior officers, and the decisions had to be mostly value judgements, which would, therefore, depend upon one's experience, philosophy and vision, and intuitive ability. Some of these DDGs had spent more than two-thirds of their career in the Directorate or in the Telecom Research Centre. A type of bureaucratic arthritis had struck them. There were

people in the Finance, impeding the implementation of even a generally agreed project or proposal. The senior-most among them were all Postal officers who had come to the Telecommunications Wing just for career prospects, and not because of any special training or achievement in finance or Accounts. Under their rule-administering, precedent-seeking, so-and-so-information-in-such-and-such-case-may also-be-linked-up attitude, it was frustrating to see the very slow pace of work, all subject to "finance" veto, unlike the decision-making by the General Manager in the field, with the financial advice placed at his disposal. I had also seen that the voluminous reports that were submitted by the Committee on Telecommunications (COT) headed by that redoubtable civil servant, Padmashree H.C. Sarin, were being ritually reviewed every month as to how many of the about three hundred recommendations the COT had made were being implemented. There was even a special post of Deputy Director General (Committee on Telecommunications). DDG (COT) for short! Most of the recommendations have been declared to have been implemented. But in reality, there has been hardly any difference in the working of the Telecommunications. Of course, one extra post of DDG was created in accordance with these recommendations to be in charge of telegraph traffic, but that was filled up by about-to-retire engineering personnel in quick succession, some of whom had never even seen any telegraph service!

I had come to the conclusion that it was impossible to make any difference as long as this leviathan of a huge "DDGfied" Directorate existed on top of the several parallelly-working field organisations, each with its own General Manager and Additional General Managers. Earlier, while in the field, I was memorialising through the common citizens, MLAs and MPs, for the separation of the Posts & Telecommunications. Luckily, within a few days of Shri Rajiv Gandhi taking over as the Prime Minister of India, he decided for the separation, and created two separate Departments, one for Posts and another for Telecommunications. It is understood that the Prime Minister also desired that this separation would only be the first step in a series of telecom reforms, under which one of the options would be the constitution of the Telecommunications into a Corporation. Many of my colleagues, especially those in the Directorate, were satisfied with the separation, as it gave a few more posts in the rank of Additional Secretary, as Members of the separate Telecom Board, but were not at all enthusiastic about corporatising the entire Telecommunications. As there was internal

opposition or tarrying on this issue, a Committee, consisting of officers of the rank of Additional Secretary in the Ministries of Communications, Planning, Finance, Economic Affairs and Industry was constituted. I had prepared a thirty-five page paper titled "*Restructuring of Telecommunications*", pleading for the corporatisation of the Telecommunications at one stroke and for changes in the 19th century-vintage Telegraph Act, and proposing State-wide corporations as subsidiaries of an all-India holding company. I canvassed this idea with the members of the Committee, and all the members from outside the P&T were convinced of the appropriateness of a corporate structure. But the Department's officers were against it. However, as the instructions from above were for changes, in deference to the wishes of the Departmental officers, a series of reforming steps was proposed and got accepted. This envisaged the conversion of the Overseas Communications Service (OCS), India's international telecommunications provider, into a State-owned corporation (which finally came to be known as the Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited or VSNL for short) and the constitution of the telephone systems of Delhi and Bombay into another corporation, the Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL). While the outsiders in the Committee envisaged this as the beginning of corporatisation, the Department wanted this to be "*experimental*". Their line was that if the MTNL succeeded, then further corporations could be thought of for the other telecom units in the country. They were trying to emphasise that the MTNL was mainly to raise money by way of bonds from the public to finance the capital construction programme of the budget restricted Department. The Cabinet view was, however, different. There were discussions among the Class I engineering officers of the Department, wherein excepting myself, Shri M.P. Shukla (who later became the first Managing Director of the MTNL), and one or two others, all the rest were opposed to corporatisation, mainly because they did not understand what this implied and also because the then Secretary, Telecommunications, and the members of his Board, were opposed to corporatisation. I had prepared an extensive paper on the pros and cons of corporatisation and circulated it among all the Branches of the Indian Telecom Service Association (ITSA). Finally, as it was the Prime Minister's and the Cabinet's view that corporatisation should be proceeded with, the Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited and the Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited were formed and registered under the Indian Companies Act, 1956, to function effective from 1 April, 1986.

While this partial corporatisation was going on, uncertain of the result, I had also extensive interaction with the then Honourable Minister of State for Communications, Shri Santosh Mohan Dev, and convinced him of the necessity of reforms within the Directorate, irrespective of the outcome of the corporatisation effort. I prepared a note entitled "*De-DDGfication of the Directorate*", establishing the desirability of having not more than 9 DDGs for quicker and effective decision-making and policy-formulation. The rest of the DDGs were to be dispersed as General Managers and Additional General Managers to the field units, and an allocation was also worked out. The Minister wanted this to be implemented by the Secretary. There were two meetings of the DDGs, one in which the Secretary was not present, and the other with him in attendance. In the first meeting, excepting three or four, all the DDGs agreed that there were far too many DDGs in the Directorate, and many of the functions could be devolved to the State units and the number at the Headquarters could be reduced. This was contrary to the Secretary's wish and view. A second meeting was called with the Secretary in attendance. Every DDG was asked to speak. I was astounded at almost everyone turning turtle and opining that the present strength of the Directorate should continue. Then one Member of the Telecom Board said: "*Everyone present here knows who the author of this idea is. Would he speak out?*" I owned up and said that the fact that my esteemed colleagues had one mind in the absence of the Secretary and another in the presence of the Secretary pointed to the degeneration that had set amongst us. I then expounded my reasons and my prescription. In the event, a Committee was formed at the pleading of the Secretary to look into this question. Actually, their idea was that if the Committee went on prevaricating, the Minister would be changed. I told the Minister as much, saying that while bureaucrats were permanent, Ministers were temporary, and that if he really wished to carry out changes, he should order and not appoint a Committee. Unfortunately, his portfolio was soon changed, and the upshot of this was that the Committee came up with a report for some more DDGs! I felt I was wasting my time and even considered quitting the Department.

About this time, the first Managing Director of the VSNL left the Company to take up an assignment in Mauritius, and the vacancy left by him was advertised. I applied for the post and was one of several to appear before the Public Enterprises Selection Board (PESB) for an interview. In the interview I had a fearless and no-holds-barred exchange

with the Secretary, DOT, to whose questioning I answered that as Managing Director of the VSNL, I would work for liberalisation and the largest extent of demonopolisation of telecom services. The PESB bracketed me along with another ex-OCS officer. It was the privilege of the Appointments Committee of Cabinet (ACC) to select a person from amongst the Panel submitted by the PESB. It is understood that the then two Communications Ministers had made out a very strong case for appointing me as the Managing Director, and that is how I came to take up the appointment as Managing Director of the VSNL. I was to resign from the Department and plunge into Public Sector service. It was a heart-rending decision. For thirty-four-and-a-half years I had worked in Government. I was fully and passionately devoted to and involved in telecommunications. There was much yet left to be achieved in our domestic communications. Should I quit the Department? But then realising how frustrating it was to be one among 30 DDGs and how I would simply be wasting away the remaining two-and-a-half years of my service, I decided to make a new beginning and use the new position for further assaults on the Departmental type of working and for the corporatisation of every segment of Indian telecommunications. I took up my new charge in April 1987.

It is always more difficult to record the present than the past. The present has too many issues, some of which, in the afterglow of history, may not be as significant as others. I am mentioning here only such of those events which involved a principle and called for an exposition and a prevailing over. The first and foremost is the extension of the International Subscriber Dialling (ISD) facility. ISD was first introduced in India in 1976 from a few cities like Bombay and Delhi to just one country, the United Kingdom. In the next decade, this was extended to 18 more countries, taking the total to 19. But, in the period April 1987 to middle of 1988 (i.e., in just over a year), I added 158 more countries for ISD from India, taking the total to 177. Formerly, the Ministry was clearing proposals to extend ISD, country by country, i.e., case by case. I felt that there was absolutely no principle involved. It is the policy of the country to have ISD as it is cheaper for the customer and also more economical to the organisation. Like Subscriber Trunk Dialling (STD) for destinations within India, ISD for destinations outside India, alone, can satisfy the customers. When the proposition was made that the principle of extension of ISD to every country in the world, subject to the other country's willingness, must be agreed to, the Finance in the Ministry

was saying that the question involved foreign exchange. This actually meant that they would like to send proposals case by case to the Department of Economic Affairs, the Finance Ministry and, perhaps, the Planning Ministry and so on. That is how bureaucracy would be built, time would be lost and the customer inconvenienced. International telecommunications, I argued, are earning foreign exchange. It is the phenomenon in all developing countries that the minutes of incoming telephone traffic are more than the outgoing and, therefore, the country would always earn foreign exchange. If the incoming calls succeed more and more, in that measure more foreign exchange would come. Luckily, the Engineer-Secretary of the Department was also convinced, and used all his vehemence to smother the Finance's advice of case by case examination, and allowed me to go ahead. Then it was only a question of vigorously taking up with every country, providing for more circuits, expanding the switch capacity and rapidly making ISD universal, and this was done. As a result, the outgoing minutes of telephone conversation went up from 26.7 million minutes in 1985-86 to 90.7 million minutes in 1988-89.

There were crossbar international gateway exchanges in Bombay and Delhi, alongside the Store Programme Controlled (SPC) analogue electronic gateway exchanges! Some circuits were terminated on the crossbar switches and other on the SPC switches. In the international network, circuits between any two countries are both-way. If at one end we have got a very efficient switch, but at the other end an inefficient one, the overall efficiency goes down. For example, one international circuit terminated on the crossbar switch was able to handle 50 calls a day on an average. But the same international circuit, when put on an electronic switch at either end, was handling 100 calls a day! There is no sense in retaining the crossbar exchange under the rule of its prescribed life. What is the use of a life which earns less than what somebody else can? Taking this line, I got my Board of Directors to accept the premature retirement of the ineffective crossbar gateway exchanges. As Deputy Director General in charge of all of India's Trunk Automatic Exchanges (TAXs), which were all till recently crossbar, I had been how abominable their performance was. So there was a clear case for retiring and replacing them by electronic exchanges, even in the inland network. However, the "Finance" in the DOT would not allow that. On the other hand, they would ask as to why the efficiency of the crossbar exchanges

could not be improved, why it was under-performing, what were the reasons and who were all responsible for the under-performance? Such questions can never be answered truthfully and, therefore, the inefficient switches would continue in the network, leading to inefficiencies and cost penalties, forgone revenues and mounting dis-satisfaction. In a company, the Board of Directors is what would decide, and it being sensible, I decided on the principle of economic life and not prescribed life. The expansions of the analogue switches were carried out to provide for the retirement of the under-performing crossbar switches and also the extra number of international circuits warranted by the traffic growth.

In 1971, a beautiful 16-storied building, Videsh Sanchar Bhavan, with a marble facade was constructed in the heart of Bombay on Mahatma Gandhi Road. On the first floor was a provision for a public telecom facility, what nowadays is called the Telecom Bureau. The OCS was, however, not allowed to offer any services directly to the users. The DOT's view was that all service must be provided by the DOT alone, and the OCS (now the VSN) should be a mere carrier. I have believed that the DOT is wrong in not only not allowing the OCS/VSN, but even private parties, to open Telecom Bureaus. When I visited Srilanka for a SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) telecom meeting, I had noticed in Colombo that there were many shops in the bazaars and in the airport providing telecom services to the public. The public could make telephone calls, send telegrams, telex messages and, later on, facsimile messages also, from these Bureaus. In 1986, in Colombo alone, there were more than 40 such offices. I had written about this in the DOT's journal "*Telecommunications*", and initiated a case for permitting private individuals in India to offer telecom services from their shops. It made no headway, tangled as it was between several Deputy Directors-General in the Directorate. In the VSN, I had decided to open an International Telecom Bureau in our own building, the Videsh Sanchar Bhavan, although there was a case to open such Telecom Bureaus in other cities like Trivandrum, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Amritsar, Jullundur, Chandigarh and Pune where we had no offices. When the matter was discussed with the DOT's Directors on the VSN's Board, they were wanting official reference to and written permission from the DOT. That would never be forthcoming. I made an oral representation, first to the Secretary, Telecommunications. I told him that we had decided to open the International Telecom Bureau from our own

building, and that we were going ahead. I then said that I should be permitted to accept facsimile messages for transmission between the four metro cities from where we were operating International Telecom Bureaus from our own buildings. I explained: "*A person comes with two fax messages to our Bombay office. One is meant for New York. We accept it and transmit it right away. The other message is meant for Madras. We tell him that it cannot be sent, and that he should go to the nearby Central Telegraph Office of the DOT to have it transmitted to Madras. Is this not a ridiculous position for a DOT's company to say that it would send a fax message to New York, but not to Madras!! What is worse, the customer can go to one of several score private persons who are advertising fax service. The Government's (DOT's) company will send a fax message to New York, but refuses to send it to Madras, and the customer goes to a private person to send it!! Is this what you want?*" I asked the Secretary. He told me that this was wrong. He said that I should write to him and he would permit us to send fax messages within India between the four metro cities also. Accordingly I wrote to him, but there was no permission forthcoming. The DDGs and others concerned were determined to confine the Videsh Sanchar to be a mere carrier and not to permit it to offer any service to the customers directly. I suspect that the Secretary, sympathising with the opposition, did not overrule the concerned officers who were to respond to the Videsh Sanchar's requests. He would, however, go on verbally telling me that he had instructed the concerned section to issue the permission. I had sent a large number of newspaper clippings containing advertisements of private persons offering fax service. "*How is it that when this is available from so many premises not belonging to the DOT, the VSN, the DOT's company, is being restrained from offering such a service?*" I wrote. The answer came within a few days in the form of raids on all the private parties offering fax service! Their fax machines were confiscated. I felt very guilty and immediately wrote a paper excoriating the monopolistic, irrational and anti-customer practice of the DOT. This was given to some of the companies whose machines were confiscated. I had represented to the Minister about this most irrational, anti-customer, high handed, terrorist action of the DOT. Finally, the matter was resolved in a very simple way. One of the employees of a company which was providing facsimile service in contravention of the telegraph rules was related to a very influential politician in power. This company took up the matter with the Ministry of Communications through its

power-wielding politician-related employee. Within a few days, orders were issued from the Directorate that any person can offer facsimile service on a bureau basis, provided he paid a certain licence fee. Of course, this fee of Rs. 15,000 per year was extortionist. More extortionist was the imposition of a fee of Rs. 3,000 per year for attaching a fax machine to a telephone, even for one's own use. The machine is not provided or maintained or operated by the DOT, and yet a person, even for his own use, has to pay Rs. 3,000 per year for nothing. Such are the customer-inimical (not customer-friendly) attitudes prevailing in the monopoly which gets advice of maximising revenue on the basis of who can pay and who could be sucked. We, in the VSNL, went ahead with the opening of International Telecom Bureaus offering fax, telex and ISL services. In Bombay we have added to it data-base search facility also. The irony is that if anybody wants to make a local telephone call from these Bureaus, he cannot! But, with the friendly attitude of the Chief General Manager of the MTNL in Bombay, we have been able to have the latter install a few coin-collecting local pay-phones in our International Telecom Bureau in Bombay. Today, for fax, the VSNL as well as some DOT's Telegraph Offices\* and private people are in competition with one another. Of all the three, the most rule-ridden and least-satisfying service is from the DOT's offices. Why, in spite of my best efforts, we, in the VSNL, are not able to successfully and effectively compete with the private parties, is narrated elsewhere.

\* There is one interesting affair. The DOT has over 500 Telegraph Offices called DTOs and CTOs (Departmental and Central Telegraph Offices, respectively) as distinct from 34,000 combined Telegraph Offices working from the Post Office premises. 75% of the telegrams in India originate and terminate in these 500 DTOs and CTOs. I had suggested that the DOT put 500 fax machines in as many cities and towns, so that it would be able to accept and deliver a telegram in any language (provided the address is written in English or Hindi), and that, too, in half an hour. Would that not be a revolution? But, no! The DOT could not simply do this as the decision-making is clogged and material procurement is a matter of three to five years, while a private person can get it in as many days. Once I proposed to the Minister for Communications that the VSN, the DOT's company, can buy and give all the 500 machines. The procurement by DOT was difficult and time-involving. He immediately called for the Secretary. The latter would have none of it. He said that this was included in their 8th Five Year Plan and they were taking steps to implement it. The Minister, however, accepted a minimum proposal of mine that the VSN procure and place fax machines in 8 cities in the Departmental Telegraph Offices. These were procured. But when the Secretary was asked to issue instructions for the DTOs to receive the machines, the request was negated. When told, the Minister did not pursue the matter.

How little sense and understanding is available in the so-called "Finance" in the Directorate, is illustrated from one more instance. On 1 April, 1986, the VSN came into being. For the year 1985-86 and for some time before, a number of foreign administrations owed together a sum of Rs. 150 Crores. Included in that was about Rs. 40 Crores from the DOT itself to the VSN (earlier OCS). The "Financial Advisers" in the Ministry (one a Postal Officer in the rank of Additional Secretary, and the other an ex-Stenographer who, by dint of years of service, became a Deputy Secretary), ruled the outstanding amounts (due, but not realised by the OCS, and, so, not passed on to the VSNL) to be a working capital loan and that the VSN should pay 17% interest on that loan, payable from 1 April, 1986, onwards until the last amount was paid to the DOT. A few months after I had joined the VSNL, I came across this very curious arrangement. I asked DOT: "Where is this money? Was it credited to our accounts in any of our banks? When the money is not with us, on what basis should we pay interest? You yourself owe us Rs. 40 Crores. You have not given us a single Rupee. But on that you are asking us to pay you interest! What financial decision is this? The Deputy Financial Adviser noted in the file that the Company was not charged any goodwill and, therefore, the Government was right in asking the VSN to pay interest on the working capital loan! Some such references was also made to the Ministry of Finance, who "agreed", and the decision was communicated to us that "it has been decided that it will be treated as working capital loan, and the VSN should pay interest on it". I raised this with the Secretary and the Minister and started making noise in the Ministry of Finance. In April, 1986, we were not informed that this was a working capital loan, and that interest was due on it. It was only 17 months after the Company was formed that we were informed that the amounts to be realised would be treated as working capital loan and that interest was to be paid on it from 1 April, 1986. I argued that it is the Government which should pay service charges to the VSN for collecting the Government (OCS) dues. It was the erstwhile Government Department, the OCS, to which the revenue accrued, but realisation was being done by the VSN. The cost of realisation, accounting and remitting, should be paid by the DOT to the VSN. If the VSN had retained the money without repatriating it to the DOT, then, for the period of retention of the erstwhile OCS's money now being realised, the VSN would pay interest, but not on the total amount of Rs. 156 Crores, which included dues from the DOT itself. I went on pointing out the poverty of

philosophy and the hollowness of the "financial expertise" that was available in the DOT by holding up this example. Finally, after about two years of argumentation, the "financial pundits" realised the absurdity of their position and accepted the VSN's position.

Yet another instance of anti-Company attitude and poverty of financial expertise is borne out in the issue that arose in regard to the sharing of revenues from international telecom services between the VSN and the DOT. Before the OCS was converted into a Company, all the surpluses of income over expenditure accrued to the general revenues of the Government of India. There was a proforma account according to which, as of 1 April, 1986, about Rs. 500 Crores of the OCS surpluses had thus accrued to the Government of India, Ministry of Finance. These were not treated as the revenue of the Department of Telecommunications or Ministry of Communications. In the first year of operation of the Company i.e., in 1986-87, the operating profit of the Company amounted to Rs. 124.93 Crores. Since it is a Company under the Indian Companies Act, 1956, it had to pay income-tax of Rs. 62.50 Crores. The rest remained with the Company and did not go to the general revenues. That means it became company resource and indirectly that of the DOT. In the case of the MTNL also, there was considerable profit. It had to pay tax, and the post-tax profit became the internal resource. Before MTNL, however, the operating surplus before paying tax was part of the DOT's surplus revenue, and although in theory it belonged to the general revenues, it was by convention treated as the internal resource of the Ministry of Communications/for DOT's capital works programme.

The DOT felt that the two companies were paying tax when that money was sorely needed for telecom expansion. They were paying tax because their income was high, more than the expenditure. The DOT felt that the income should be limited, so that there are no surpluses and, hence, no income-tax liability would be there. This could be done by increasing the amounts payable by the VSNL and the MTNL to the DOT for utilising the DOT's network. In the case of the VSNL, all the international calls are hauled over the domestic network to and from the Gateways. The DOT felt that haulage charges (technically known as "terminal charges"), payable by the VSN to the DOT, should be so increased that the VSNL would be left with hardly any surpluses, and so no tax would be payable. But in reality, this

discovery of a new principle of tax avoidance would act absolutely against the financial performance of the Companies. The DOT's thinking was that if no tax was to be paid, there should be no surpluses. If there are no surpluses, there would be no dividend and no internally generated resources. So these Companies would join the ranks of the Public Sector Companies which paid no dividend, and all of which depended upon Government Budget for expansion and even for renewal. But what autonomy can such Companies have? Who would know the mechanisms by which they had been made financial zeros? In the case of the VSNL, what was the necessity at all to form a Company, when for every Rupee it would have to go to the Government for budgetary support of its capital construction programme or for replacing its uneconomical or useless equipments?

The Cabinet Note creating the Company clearly stated that the DOT should not unilaterally increase the charges payable by the VSN so as to absorb its surpluses. The practice was that the Secretary in the Ministry of Communications would hear the claims of the DOT and the OCS/VSN and then give an Award as to how much the OCS/VSN should pay to the DOT for various types of traffic. From 1 April, 1985, the Secretary, Ministry of Communications was none other than the Director General, P&T. What it amounted to, therefore, was that he was raising the issue on the one hand, and he himself was deciding it on the other! I represented to the Minister for Communications that this was very unfair. The Company should not be impoverished, concluded to be sick and then a case made out for the abolition of the Company and reversion as a Government Department. There are other ways of making the tax burden least, Said I. For example, we were earning foreign exchange, and under Section 80 HHC of the Income Tax Act, we could claim exemption from some tax on the basis of foreign exchange earned, if the foreign exchange could be treated as out of export of services. The Ministry could support this stand of the Company. At the time of creation of the Companies, the Cabinet was also prepared to grant exemption from tax for the first five years in order to enable the DOT to retain the surplus from these two units as internal resources for capital construction. Not enough effort was put by the DOT to get an operative order from the Ministry of Finance. Instead, the Secretary was using his heavy weight and power to squeeze and smash the Companies financially. It started with one Secretary and then continued under his successor also.

For nearly one year, from April, 1988, till March, 1989, my energies as the Chairman & Managing Director of the VSNL, and that of the Managing Director, MTNL, were very largely and sadly expended in getting this unjust order held in abeyance till a scientific formula was decided. Risking my job and facing the hostility of my erstwhile colleagues in the DOT, I had lobbied, memorialised, and finally convinced the two Honourable Ministers that there was a very simple way of showing the financial health of the Company, reflecting its increased productivity and expanded operations and, therefore, higher operating profits, while at the same time making over a large part of these operating profits to the DOT to be used as its internal resources within its own decision-making power. The principle was a tax-exempt levy (approved by the Ministry of Finance) by the DOT on the VSNL and MTNL. This was accepted and the VSN's financial performance saved. For instance, for the year 1987-88, the VSN had an operating profit of Rs. 193.49 Crores according to the sharing formula in vogue since 1984, i.e., before it became a Company. Without tax-exempt levy, the tax liability would have been Rs. 77.89 Crores. But, by resorting to a 18% tax-exempt levy on the gross revenues of the VSN, the tax liability came to Rs. 58.75 Crores. The tax liability could further be reduced by allowing the VSNL to invest in the development of the domestic telecom facilities relevant to international traffic. For example, the four international Gateways in Delhi, Bombay, Madras and Calcutta could be inter-connected by digital optical fiber media, the capital cost of which can be allotted to the VSNL, and the latter can, therefore, claim a lot of investment allowance, saving that much from tax. However, none of these were countenanced by the DDG's and the "financial experts", because the true intention of all of them was not merely tax-saving, but on that plea to impoverish the "experimental" Companies and to finally lead to the declaration that the "experimental" Companies were failures, and so there should be no more companification of the departmental operations.

In Government, it too often happens that people are promoted by seniority. In theory promotions are to be by selection, and selection depends upon what is written in the Annual Confidential Reports. Most of the time, the Reporting and Reviewing Officers do not write about any deficiencies because they are construed as adverse and have to be communicated to the official reported upon. They are appealed against and the appellate officers very often expunge the adverse remarks for want of written supporting evidence. A few supersessions that sometimes take

place are very often seen to be sheer favouritism. It is seldom that the mediocre are superseded, while there are a few indefensible out-of-turn advancements. I have always felt that selections based purely on Confidential Reports do no justice to the individual's true merits or otherwise, but are harmful to the interests of the organisation, because neither the meritorious are advanced, nor are the mediocre kept in place. I was wanting to correct this, at least where I was supreme. In the VSNL, as Chairman & Managing Director, I was determined that in promotions for Company's senior management positions, selection should be based not merely upon Annual Confidential Reports, but also on an interview. I held that in the managerial positions, ability to communicate, to put forward a point of view and argue its correctness to convince others is an essential qualification. When we had to select Chief General Managers, I took the position that those who are eligible must appear before a Selection Committee and this Committee would go through the Annual Confidential Reports as well as interview the candidates and make an overall rating. The Officers Association protested. I stood firm and said that it was not at all compulsory that any person should appear before the Selection Committee. Only those who were willing to go through the selection process and are prepared to be posted anywhere need apply for selection. I had told my two Executive Directors, that Government had given us an opportunity to fashion a new Company, a new organisation, where all the principles we had been cherishing could be tried to be implemented. They went along with me. We associated a Deputy Director General of the Department of Telecommunications who was in charge of personnel, in the selection process. The Officers' Association called upon the concerned people to boycott the interviews, but eventually no one boycotted. There were supersessions. Surprisingly and agreeably, all the members of the Selection Committee rated the concerned persons similarly without any prior consultation! If one went merely by the Confidential Reports, there would not have been any supersession. This strengthened my view that interviews should be part of the selection process for managerial posts. The Officers' Association as well as the superseded person appealed to the Central Administrative Tribunal. The Department's nominee Directors on the Board of the VSNL, balked in supporting my decision (This again strengthened my view that the Departmental Directors, at least on my Board, were wanting the Company to be no different from a Government Department and had no convictions that Companies should be different from Government Departments).

The officers were representing that they were Government Servants on deputation and, therefore, their promotions should be according to Government rules. I pointed out that even according to Government rules, interviews were not precluded. The concerned rules only said that each Departmental Promotion Committee should decide its own method and procedure for objective assessment of the suitability of the candidates. Ordinarily, a personal interview should not be regarded as necessary, and the Panel for promotion/confirmation may be drawn up on the basis of assessment of the record of work and conduct of the officers concerned. The rule only said that ordinarily an interview should not be regarded as necessary. In other words, the DPC can extraordinarily hold interviews with the persons being considered. I took the position that first of all we were not a Government Department. Ours was a Company, and the post to which selection was being made was a Company post, and so the Company was free to adopt any fair means of promoting them. If the Government, as the cadre controlling authority while the people are on deputation from the OCS to the VSN, gave me a list of persons, who in its view should be promoted, then I might consider it. But until such a time UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) and ACC (Appointments Committee of Cabinet) involving panel was supplied to me, the Company would follow its own selection procedures for filling up Company posts. I believe, I have set up a very healthy precedent and this is being gradually adopted for other managerial posts. The message has been sent loud and clear that mediocrity may not always lead to assured promotions. The CAT (Central Administrative Tribunal) has not annulled the Company promotions; it only wanted the cadre controlling Government authority to prepare a panel for promotion quickly.

One instance of charging the customers very unreasonably had to be set right at least partially. An American Company wanted a satellite link from its Indian premises in Bangalore, to a place in U.K. (and from there to an U.S. city, where its Headquarters is). The satellite link was for the development and export of software. The Company brought a satellite earth station at its own cost to the specifications, and with approved test results. The VSNL installed it and is maintaining it. It costed about Rs. 11 million. The Ministry decided to charge Rs. 5.5 million per year for providing this facility. The capital cost was supposed to be treated as advance to the OCS/VSNL, to be paid back in five instalments at 10% interest to the Company on the amount that continues to be unpaid. There was no guarantee that after five years the

service would be provided by the VSN either by this or some other equipment. The customer had provided free space, free power and free air-conditioning and spares. It appeared to me fantastic that without investing a single Rupee and spending no more than about Rs. 0.2 million on the salaries of the maintaining and operating personnel, we would charge them Rs. 5.5 million (The space segment charges payable to the INTELSAT are Rs. 99,750 and are included in this Rs. 5.5 million). Why should we not treat it as customer-owned equipment just like electronic PABXs, or, according to DOT rules, as customer-provided? If the VSN was obligated to maintain and operate it for, among others, security reasons, then we should recover the costs plus a reasonable amount of profit out of this maintenance and operation. If the equipment is treated as customer-provided-and-owned, then a reasonable charge would be our maintenance and operating costs plus space segment charges plus some profit element. I reckoned that it should be no more than Rs. 0.4 million per annum. I went on pressing the Ministry for the downward revision of the rental. The "Financial Experts" indulged in convoluted arguments, questioning me as to why I should be eager to reduce the rental. I then reduced all my margins and finally compromised at Rs. 4.5 million per annum - about 20% reduction. I am not satisfied. But some reduction and relief to the customer has been achieved. Actually, in a period of five years, we would have collected Rs. 9.4 million and would have been left with equipment whose value after depreciation would be Rs. 5.8 million, and which would be good enough to serve for another five years. This instance goes to prove how monopolies are extortionist and how there is no check against this extortion when it is indulged in by Government or Government's Corporations in a monopoly business.

How unreasonable and extortionist can Government Departments or Companies be, is illustrated by a rate for another facility. The VSNL has three international Gateways in Bombay, Delhi and Madras. Some international circuits are available only at one of the Gateways. For example, circuits coming through the under-sea cables - Malaysia - Madras, and UAE - Bombay are available in Madras and Bombay only. Similarly, some countries work through satellite only to Delhi Gateway Exchange. But the calls may be in regions other than where the circuits, in the first instance, were available. These international circuits are, therefore, extended from the city of landing to Gateways over bulk circuits leased from the Department of Telecommunications, and these are leased on Supergroup basis, i.e., lots of 60 circuits, which should be cheaper than if

an individual circuit is leased. For 300 circuits between Bombay and Madras, 180 between Delhi and Bombay, and 120 between Madras and Delhi (in all, for 600 within-the-country circuits), the VSNL is asked to pay Rs. 38 Crores per year. According to the CCITT recommendations, this should be about Rs. 4.05 Crores (the recommendation is for Super-groups within a continent, not even within a country!). For over 2,000 international circuits (excluding to adjacent countries), the VSNL pays no more than about Rs. 12 crores to the INTELSAT. Compare the payment of Rs. 38 Crores for 600 circuits within the country, as against Rs. 12 Crores for 2,000 inter-continental circuits. In any country, if one leases circuits in bulk, there are discounts on tariffs. But here, there is no discount even. The rates charged for leased circuits within the country had been increased by 60% in October, 1988, and by 108% in April, 1989. This is in stark contrast to the world-wide phenomenon of falling charges for long-distance circuits. Today, in the INTELSAT, we are talking of an international circuit at a tariff of \$1 a day, and one circuit can carry 100 international calls (fetching Rs. 22,500 per day).

I had always felt that the rates our Telecoms are charging the customers are unconscionably high, several times the cost, and that the costs themselves are high because of over-manning, under-maintenance and obsolete equipment. In the VSNL, all these adverse factors are working to an extent lesser than in the DOT. The VSN has, therefore, proposed a reduction in the ISD collection rates from the customers. I was very, very happy to have been able to achieve this. While for the America we did not effect any reduction, for all other countries in the world, excepting the SAARC countries, the amount of time for unit of pulse has been increased by 20%, and for the SAARC countries, by 100%. These would mean a 20% and 50% reduction respectively in the charges. In respect of telex, the Indian practice has been to charge in multiples of one minute, whereas the international practice is to charge in multiples of 6 seconds. After about two years of pleading, we have been able to get this civilised practice, which is fair to the customer, accepted. This would result in about 16% saving compared to the previous method of charging for international telex calls. I know that the charges for international leased circuits could be cut by about 60%, still leaving 25%-30% profit for the VSNL. I wish that there is a fine costing exercise within the VSNL and the DOT and the charges are aligned with costs.

It is commonly known that Government Departments are over-staffed. It is also realised that Government Companies are over-staffed compared to private companies in similar business. In other words, the productivity and efficiency, whether in a Government Department or in a Public Sector Enterprise, is lower than in the Private Sector. One reason for this is security and the procedures for doing away with the inefficient and surplus staff. Another reason is the rapidly changing technology. For a primitive technology, persons with certain types of skills are required to maintain and operate. For a superior technology which replaces the primitive one, persons of higher calibre are required. What usually happens is that the higher calibre ones are recruited and the lower calibre ones are rendered spare with the retirement of the old technology, but are retained in service with hardly any work. I was determined to mitigate this over-staffing. When the VSNL was depending upon the H.F. (High Frequency) Radio for its international telecommunications, there were transmitting and receiving installations near Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras. The erection, maintenance and operation of scores of H.F. Radio antennas required low-skilled people like Chowkidars, to guard the extensive aerial fields, Fitters, Blacksmiths, Masons, Oilmen, Riggers, and water-pump and diesel engine operators. These amounted to several hundred and constituted about 30% of the total staff. From 1971 onwards, with satellite media replacing H.F. Radio, all these people have become irrelevant to the new technology and, therefore, surplus. Similarly, there are several hundred electro-mechanical teleprinters and such devices for international telegraphy and for leased circuits terminating in teleprinters in customer premises. The maintenance of these electro-mechanical teleprinters has required one type of manually-skilled personnel. All these are being replaced by Personal Computer-based solid-state terminals which require hardly any maintenance (In any case, maintenance skills for PC-based terminals are different from those required for mechanical teleprinters). Yet another reason for staff becoming surplus is the 10%-15% decline every year of telegrams. Till the early 1970s, the predominant form of international telecommunications was the telegram, but now this has been declining at about 10% to 15% per year. as a result, revenues from international telegraph traffic are less than two-and-a-half percent of the VSNL's total revenues. The telegraph traffic personnel, however, constitute 31% of the total staff. I reckon that out of about 3,000 staff now in the VSNL, at least 1,200 are not required. But becoming surplus is not the crime or

commission of the staff. The management should have foreseen the technological changes that were on the horizon and prepared to re-train and re-deploy the existing ranks. Of course, in this regard, the VSNL, formerly the OCS, has done better than the DOT in that it stopped recruiting people into the telegraph traffic branch several years ago. But more positive action could have been taken. It is a matter of great pleasure to me that I have initiated this process. Selected persons from the electro-mechanical teleprinter maintenance branch were given training in the maintenance and operation of PC-based teleprinters. Commerce graduates in the telegraph traffic branch are encouraged to refresh their learning and migrate to the newly-started Accounts and Finance branch. Those who are graduates other than in Commerce, were encouraged to take courses in Personnel Management, Public Relations and Welfare, and on obtaining the prescribed qualifications, were given new assignments. The cost of their tuition was fully reimbursed by the Company. The unskilled and semi-skilled Mazdoors are being encouraged at the cost of the Company to acquire higher qualifications from Industrial Training Institutes and then re-fitted into more useful and desirable positions. The Company is reimbursing money only on successful completion of an approved course. We needed stenographers. There was a prescribed test. All candidates failed but as Stenographers were very much needed, a proposal was made that persons with lesser performance may be taken. I ruled it out. I also ruled that since a large number of telegraph traffic personnel were surplus, and since they were somewhat familiar with typing operations on teleprinters, they should be utilised for taking dictations from whosoever can really give dictations. They would, in any case, be good for typing. I further ruled that every one of them would be given not a typewriter, but a PC to work as a Word Processor. They had to be explained and persuaded to change over to word-processing and Office Assistant jobs, rather than be declared as surplus staff without work, but with salaries and perks. How ennobling it is for a person to be retrained to work on a computer! He could now tell his family and friends that instead of being merely a salary-drawer after having become surplus, he has now found a new avocation, and that, too, involving the use of a Personal Computer!! There was the question of how their inter-seniority with Stenographers or others would be fixed and how promotions would be effected. As regards promotions, it is obvious that even if they had continued in the telegraph traffic branch, there would be hardly any, because of the rapid decline in telegraph

traffic and the consequent diminishing justifications for the continued existence of several higher posts. All these people doing a different type of work, involving the acquisition of new skills, could be given Special Pay. The cost to the Company, even if this Special pay is Rs.300 - Rs.400 per month, is but a fraction of Rs. 2,000 per month that has to be paid to a Stenographer, many of whom, even after years of engagement, are found to be unable to take dictations at a good speed, not to talk of transcribing without mistakes.

One curious phenomenon is the Mazdoors and Chowkidars, for whom there is no minimum educational qualification, also asking for promotions. Their submission is that they have seen people who joined as Junior Technical Assistants, and who have now risen to become General managers and Chief General Managers, while they themselves were still rotting as Mazdoors. Little would they understand that neither there is a change in the type of job that they are doing, nor do they have any educational qualifications, not even the minimum, which would enable them to imbibe some other training. But, to come to expect promotion has become natural. Many a time have many of them submitted that when people with little education could become Ministers and Chief Ministers, why could they not, be promoted. Of course, my submission that there was no bar on their quitting the Company or Government and becoming MLAs and MPs and Ministers, would not satisfy them. When once, for 45 minutes, I had been lectured to by these Mazdoors and Chowkidars that they were being discriminated against, and that no promotions were being given to them, I asked the officer in charge as to how many posts of Assistant Engineers were vacant. He said that there were four posts vacant. I then proposed to the Mazdoors and Chowkidars that four of them would be straightaway promoted as Assistant Engineers. They asked me whether it was a joke. I said it was very serious. If they were prepared to work as Assistant Engineers, they would be promoted. Still they were not satisfied. I really do not have an answer to such demands and aspirations. But the only answer, perhaps, to this is that Companies at least, if not Government Departments, should not take people without education or with the least education into their employment. Such low-skilled jobs should all be contracted out. I am happy that I have been able to start this process in the VSNL with Chowkidari (guarding or watch and ward) and Safai (cleaning) of the residential colonies and offices, which have all been entrusted to private contractors. Motor Drivers are another cadre who have such complaints.

They too, cannot be promoted. So I ruled that instead of owning cars and therefore, employing drivers, we should hire cars. Such cars are available every day and for any length of time without any overtime and clamour for promotions, and without any need for officers to waste their time in trying to count the innumerable leaves that these people take or having to answer to the Unions why their leave is not settled or why they have not been given uniforms and so on. It is worthwhile pointing out that while a Government or Company driver costs a minimum of Rs. 1,500 per month, the Company which gives cars on hire pays no more than Rs. 800 to Rs. 900 as total emoluments per month per driver. So is it with Chowkidars, too. A Company or Government Chowkidar costs Rs. 1,500 per month and very often he is absent. Administering him is very difficult. On the other hand, the Contractor-provided Chowkidar costs per head less than about Rs. 800 to Rs. 900 per month. More than this direct money saving, the most indirect saving is on the need to employ survivors of those who die while in service, in relaxation of educational qualifications and age. It is a cruel fact that most of the deaths while in service are among the Group-D (watch and ward, cleaners, labourers, drivers) people for various reasons connected with their illiteracy and imperfect upbringing. It is very sad to see that many of these officials are given to drinking, gambling, etc., have four to ten children and when they die in their 30s or 40s, they leave behind a pitiable family, which is used as an agitational issue by the Unions that compassionate appointments are not being made. The only cure, at least partial, is to have many of the low-skilled and absolutely unskilled services obtained through Contractors. In the VSNL, we have encouraged them to acquire educational qualifications by attending evening/night schools and gain proficiency in skills like tailoring, electrical appliance upkeep and repair. We fully reimburse their expenses on successful completion of training.

We have a large Public Sector in India - over 220 Companies with more than Rs. 60,000 crores worth of capital. Almost all these Companies are registered under the Indian Companies act, 1956. According to this Act there should be an Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the share-holders. The purpose of this AGM is that the share-holders attend the meeting, hear the Directors' Report, put questions, seek clarifications, elect the Directors, approve the accounts and declare a dividend. In theory, the owners of the Company shape the policy as well as oversee the financial and other operations through this mechanism of Annual

General Meeting. The Public Sector Companies are also to follow this practice. But this is a travesty. Who is the share-holder of the Public Sector Companies? It is none other than the President of India who names one or two nominees as share holders. As many nominees are there as would constitute a quorum. The Board of Directors is selected/nominated by the President of India. The nominees or their proxies who attend the AGM are about half-a-dozen and they range from Under Secretaries to Deputy Secretaries. They are not at all familiar with the Company's work nor with its accounts. Where is the public involved in these "Public" Sector Companies? No customer, no tax-payer (from whom the share capital has been collected by way of taxation or loans) is involved. As far as accountability to the public or to those who gave the capital to the Company is concerned, the Public Sector Companies are singularly immune. The AGM is a mere formality and in fact, is a farce compared to the AGMs of so-called Private Sector Public Limited Companies. We know such private companies holding meetings in a Bombay maidan because thousands would be present. The British Telecommunications and the American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T), with millions of share-holders, have thousands of people present at their AGMs. They hire either stadia or large halls to accommodate these people. The Chairman and Board of Directors are known to be meeting hundreds of share-holders in several cities, explaining the annual performance, although not required to do so by law. I believe that the Indian polity, after 40 years of Independence and seven Five Year Plans, has matured enough to be able to take over many of the tasks that the Government has taken upon itself to perform, especially the entrepreneurial ones. Why should the equity of the Public Sector Companies come only from the tax and loan monies of the Government of India? Why should not the State-owned enterprises draw their equity also from the savings of the people directly and in the process make them understand the enterprise, participate in the business policies, and act as a powerful corrective against the widely-known ills of bureaucracy and officialdom, throttling the State-owned Companies from working as really commercial and business enterprises? I had proposed that the equity of my Company, the VSNL, should be offered first to the employees and then to the public. But there was absolutely no reaction from the powers that be. When the proposition was leaked, the Times of India wrote an editorial. Within a few days, I wrote a demi-official letter to the Secretary, Telecommunications, saying that the rejection of my proposal

without it having ever been shown to the Minister and others, was wrong, and I would want it to be shown to the Minister. I had earlier talked about this proposition to luminaries like Shri Abid Hussain of the Planning Commission, Shri Sam Pitroda (currently the Chairman of the Telecom Commission) and even to my Ministers. Since the bureaucracy in general, and that in the DOT especially, is disposed inimically towards really autonomous companies (unlike carpet companies), and since they do not want any divestiture of their own power, my proposition is lost in the long, dark labyrinths of the arthritic bureaucracy. I have, however, thought that what is within my own decisive power, I should implement, and so I submitted my Company to a Public Scrutiny, because my Company's AGM did not scrutinise the Company at all. It was incapable of doing so, because a Deputy Secretary who knows nothing about the company was the nominee attending the AGM. In 1989, I wrote to about two hundred persons and institutions in Bombay, inviting them to a presentation of my Company's performance and to a discussion thereof. These invitees were large-scale users of telecom facilities, known consumer activists, journalists, economists and businessmen. In the event, about 50 of them turned up. Each one of them was given our Annual Report and in my presentation I explained a large number of issues, including over-pricing of our services. They had many questions, the answers to some of which are not in my power, but in the power of the public's representatives and the voice of the people through the Press. I wish that the Chief Executives of all the so-called Public Sector Enterprises adopt this procedure of having public meetings in addition to the law-required, factually name-sake AGMs. This practice of mine is in keeping with the public meetings I used to hold as the Chief of the Telephone and Telecommunication systems in Ahmedabad, Pune and Andhra Pradesh.

I have always held that telecommunications and other services which are monopolies and that, too, in the government Sector (and, therefore, not easily contestable), should subject themselves to disciplines which will make them responsive to customers and also fulfil the citizens' right to know\* - and know how entities like Companies, supposedly

\* There is an Act in Australia called, "Freedom of Information Act, 1982", enshrining the citizen's right to know. Under that Act, every enterprise of the Government must obligatorily furnish and publicise information about certain aspects of their organisation and performance. How much I wish that we have one like that in India where the Public Sector has come to occupy commanding heights (notwithstanding Shri Vasant Sathe's assertion of its descent to demeaning depths) of industry, trade, business and service.

owned by them, perform. As General Manager of Telephones and Telecommunications, we used to publish figures that would indicate our performance. These figures were open to contest by the customers. In the VSNL too, we had felt that as a Corporation, we must publish our performance periodically. We initiated this practice, publishing critical figures as to how many international calls were being completed, what was the percentage of the calls that were effective, the reliability of the national and international circuits, the total amount of paid telecommunication time and international circuits, and very crucially, our financial performance. Figures for any period were compared with the figures for the corresponding period of the previous year, as well as the immediately preceding period. It was apparent from the published figures that our financial surpluses were soaring and that was because of our extension of International Subscriber Dialling (ISD) to practically the whole of the globe and also because of our close surveillance on the performance of our switches and other network. While discerning public letters from transparency of our operations (we have received several letters from the public, appreciating the publication), it had curiously led to a very harmful reaction in certain quarters in the DOT. The surpluses which were never noticed in spite of being published in our annual and periodical reports and the increasing productivity which was far higher than that in the parent Department drew their ire. I guess that it is the periodical publication of those results that triggered some in the DOT for increasing the haulage charges of international traffic over the domestic network. In reaction, we withheld the financial information, but continued to publish the traffic information. From these figures too, it was apparent that our productivity as measured by the number of paid minutes of international traffic per employee, was steeply increasing (it, in fact, grew by more than 100% in three years!). Favourable notice of the Company's performance and the not so favourable or adverse notice of the quality of telephone service obtaining in the domestic network were irritating the powers that be. In the event, very sadly and reluctantly, we discontinued the publication of the information altogether in the newspapers. It was only as a substitute, albeit a poor one, that we resorted to the social or public audit of our annual performance by our users, journalists, economists and consumer activists. It is a pity that so desirable a practice which would enable an independent citizen to intelligently interpret and interact with his "own" Company's performance, had to be given up.

I had always felt that it was wrong that the Board of Directors of the VSNL was being filled entirely by Government Servants, because it would not be able to bring about any new talent or new culture or new direction to the management. Taking the cue from Air India and Indian Airlines, which have outside talent on their Boards, I proposed the induction of outside talent into the Board of the VSN and suggested names of persons from the non-Government sector. The Honourable Ministers at the time (1987) very much welcomed this idea and approved some names. But before they were sent to the prescribed authorities there was a change of Ministers. The next Minister also endorsed the name but before the bureaucracy could send it to the ACC (Appointments Committee of Cabinet), that Minister also went away. The third Minister also expressed his agreement but till today the induction has not taken place. So much for our lip service to the induction of outside talent into the Boards of Public Sector Undertakings. The bureaucracy is permanent. Ministers are temporary. And Public Sector Companies are carpets, it seems, to be trodden upon.

On and off, there has been talk about giving more autonomy to the Public Sector Companies and to have expert outsiders apart from the Departmental officers on the Board of Directors. I wanted to test the sincerity of these professions. I had proposed to my Ministry that there should be a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between my Company and Ministry. I had sent a draft MOU to the Ministry and went on reminding. The Secretary who was opposed to Companies simply seems to have remarked in the margin that MOUs are meant for production-oriented Companies only and not for service Companies. What actually he was afraid of was what when an MOU is signed, additional powers would come to the Company and that was what he was not wanting to part with. I took up the matter with the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) as it is supposed to be our angel of guidance and counselling. Its reply was that it had already taken up the matter of MOUs for a few Companies, and our request could be considered next year. How strange it is! Here is a Company which is very eager to execute an MOU, and which has already sent a draft but neither the Secretary of the administrative Ministry nor the guiding angel has come to the help of the Company.

It has been my view that not enough is being done by the telecommunication engineers and the Telecommunications department to arouse public

interest in matters concerning telecommunications. Whether it is a matter of under-investment or finding financial resources or arriving at an appropriate organisational structure, I am convinced that it is not the petitions of technicians and engineers which will matter, but only the persistent interest of economists, the intelligentsia and above all, the people's representatives, i.e., MLAs, MPs and Ministers, that would be required to bring about changes. It is unfortunate that there never was a Parliamentary Committee inquiring into the adequacy and other issues pertaining to telecommunications in India. There have been at least three dozen Committees in the last 30 years. Strangely, all the recommendations of these Committees have been declared to have been implemented but with hardly any change, excepting the creation of some more posts in the Directorate. While celebrating the centenary of telephones in India in 1982, I was the General Manager of Telecommunications, Andhra Pradesh. I proposed to the Ministry that the Department should institute Telecommunications Chairs in some Universities, that it should bring out a book on the history of telephone service in India and so on. All of them went absolutely unheeded. Of course in Andhra Pradesh, the local Government officers and the Telecommunications, launched programmes designed to heighten the awareness of telecommunications among the public. That is another story told elsewhere. As soon as I joined the VSNL, I stumbled across an engineering officer, Shri C.N.N. Nair, who had a flair for writing. I assigned to him the task of collecting material and writing the history of India's overseas communications. This has now come out as a book, "*The Story of India's Overseas Communications*". This was published and released by the then Minister for Communications Shri Vasant Sathé on 13 April, 1988. This publication really stung some in the DOT and I am happy that as an agreeable consequence, an attempt was made in the DOT, which resulted in the publication of a book, "*Forty Years of Telecommunications in Independent India*" in late 1988. However, the book is absolutely amateurish when compared with the "*Story of the Indian Telegraphs - A Century of Progress*" by Dr. Krishnalal Shridharani, which was written at the time of the centenary of the Indian Telegraphs in 1956.

I had my Board of Directors approve the institution of a Jawaharlal Nehru Lecture to be delivered by a well-known telecom personality, as an annual feature. For the first lecture, we chose Prof. Sir Bryan V. Carseberg, Director-General, Office of Telecommunications (OFTEL), United Kingdom. Sir Bryan is very well known for his contribution in

corporatising and privatising the British Telecoms and as the presiding deity of the regulatory institution, OFTEL. I was anxious that these lectures must be delivered soonest, and Sir Bryan readily agreed. He in fact, delivered the lecture in two parts, the first in New Delhi titled, "Providing Better Telecommunications for the Nation: Benefits of Competition", on 13 February, 1989, and the second in Bombay, titled, "Providing Better Telecommunications for the Nation: Effective Regulation", on 16 February, 1989. I hope and trust that these lectures will continue. We have created an endowment for this purpose in the Bombay University. I had my Board also agree to the institution of a Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship in Telecommunications. The idea was that an intellectual with an analytical mind would be chosen to visit any country in the world after consultations with the VSNL, study and report on the organisation, evolution and state of telecommunications and information industry and service in the chosen country. We should profit by a study of the changes and evolution that are taking place in other countries, and such reports should be written not by technicians and engineers on technical and engineering matters, however valuable they are, but by people with an integrated outlook, i.e., from a management or economist's or a sociologist's point of view. I am happy that the first two Fellows, for the years 1989 and 1990, have been chosen, and one would be visiting and reporting upon telecommunications in Korea and the other on telecommunications in Brazil and Taiwan. I hope that the MTNL would also embark upon such telecommunications awareness - promoting and public-educating activities.

I have felt that while volumes and volumes have been written on telecommunication economics and service, their pricing, financing and the efficiency of operations abroad, hardly any analytical or historical or appraisal work is done in India. In the DOT an Economic Research Unit was started about a decade ago but bereft of intellectual sustenance from the leadership, it has not produced works comparable to those that had come out of the AT&T or British Telecommunications, or even the French PTT. In the VSNL I have, therefore, got my Board to agree to the creation of a post of economist, whose main concern, among other things, would be the pricing of the international telecommunication services, sharing of the revenues between the domestic and international carriers, study of the linkage between India's external trade and different varieties and volumes of telecommunication services, comparative economics of different facilities (submarine cables, satellites, optical fibre links and so

on), demand estimates and economic choices between technically-feasible alternatives. I would have been happy if an economist had been available to me two years before, so that I could have imparted my philosophy and my outlook to him and he could have been embarked upon a number of investigations.

The Department of Telecommunications has planned for a Packet Switched Data Network (PSDN) for country-wide computer communications. Called VIKRAM this is being talked of from about 1984 onwards. As soon as I came to the VSNL, I had a project for an international Gateway prepared and we sanctioned it in the Board. By November, 1988, the equipment was put in place and service commenced. But unfortunately, the domestic data network has still not come and is not expected to come till the end of 1990. This itself should be a lesson. How is it that the VSNL has been able to place a system in service, while a much larger and a much earlier starter like the DOT has still not been able to implement its scheme? The reason is that the VSNL is a Company and the DOT is a Department of the Government with no focus. Tenders were invited by the DOT for the equipment years ago but order could not be placed. Evaluation, re-evaluation, clarification, re-clarification, negotiations and discussions among half-a-dozen DDGs, including in the TRC, have all delayed the matter so much that when the Telecom Commission came into being in May 1989, it directed that the equipment need not be imported but that it could be indigenously developed. Now that the international Gateway was in position, the question was how could it be utilised. Was there any need for Indian customers to have international data communications? The answer is YES. But how would they come to the international Gateway? We had convened meetings in Bombay, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune, Delhi, and Calcutta, and invited potential customers to attend. All of them expressed an immediate need. They had been needing this since years before. But the question was how would they access the international Gateway. Taking circuits on lease upto their premises from Bombay would be prohibitively costly as it would involve lakhs of rupees per year. Many of them are start-up Companies for development of software for export. Some of them were wanting access international data-bases to retrieve information. Our solution was that we would put PADS (Packet Assemblers/Disassemblers) in different cities and treat them as extensions of the international Gateways. The circuits connecting the PADS to the Gateway in

Bombay would be part of the international network and our proposed tariffs would take care of it. But where were the PADs to come from? The DOT could not effectualise the VIKRAM and hence the need for PADs. If VIKRAM were in place, everybody would have gained access to the PSDN and through that they would have come to the VSNL's international Gateway. Another question was regarding the tariff to be applied. The VSNL proposed the tariff as early as in 1987. But no approval had come from the DOT. The real reason appears to be that when the DOT could not implement the VIKRAM, why should it acknowledge the implementation and the presence of the international Gateway Packet Switching System (GPSS) of the VSNL? When the domestic tariff was not there what was the need for an international tariff? These were the unexpressed reasons for neither accepting nor rejecting our proposal. The VSNL was not put out. We obtained some PADS and placed them in service and were ready to give them to the General Managers of the DOT who were willing to take them. We had also given access to our GPSS through the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN). Some General managers sought instructions from the Directorate but these were not forthcoming. Some others who were more customer-oriented, did not seek any instructions from the Directorate, but straightaway gave access to the PADs and also provided leased lines from the PADs to the customer premises. Without much marketing and even with customer-indifference at the field level (in the DOT), the traffic has been increasing amazingly (See Table below).

| Year : 1989                                  | January | February | March | April | May  | June  | July  | August | September |
|--|---------|----------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|--------|-----------|
| Kilosegments                                 | 19      | 60       | 440   | 1217  | 1681 | 2197  | 2306  | 3181   | 3362      |
| Connect Time<br>in Minutes<br>(in thousands) | 1.08    | 1.69     | 5.26  | 8.9   | 16.6 | 24.03 | 31.45 | 61.0   | 72.1      |
| Revenue<br>Rs. in Thousands                  | 8       | 18.9     | 100   | 278   | 380  | 530   | 570   | 783    | 871       |

While amused and happy that there was no much need for international data exchange, I was alarmed at one consequence viz., that all this was one-way traffic i.e., Indian customers making outgoing data calls but nothing coming into India. VSN was getting a lot of revenue in Rupees, but the information that these people were extracting and the international facility that we were using involved payment of dollars, i.e., foreign exchange. For example, if a customer accessed one of the 5000 data-bases in the world, say, the Library of Congress (of the USA), and

obtained some information from there, he paid not only the transmission costs, but also the price of the information extracted, to the Library of Congress. There were no incoming calls from abroad into India for our country to gain both from the delivery of the international call into India and from the sale of India information in electronic form. It is true that on a Rs. 4 million investment, we are now making nearly Rs. 1 million per month. But a lot of money must be going out from India by way of foreign exchange as payment for the information being extracted. So we immediately set to organise the outward flow of information. We invited about 200 parties who have got information that could be sold to foreigners. Statistical information from the National Sample Survey, financial information from the Industrial Development Bank of India, the Industrial Credit & Investment Corporation of India, the Exim Bank and the Unit Trust of India, investment information from several State infrastructure Corporations, information from Stock Exchanges, Banks, the Planning Commission and from Universities in the country are all available in book form. I convened a meeting of all such parties on 25 August, 1989, and urged upon them to electronically the information available with them (which were at present in the form of books), put them in computer memories, and link the computers to the telecom network. The VSNL would advertise through its foreign correspondents the availability of the data-bases in India. I specially requested the Computer Maintenance Corporation Limited (CMC) to undertake to electronically the Indian data. The representatives of the Technology Development and Investment Company of India Limited who were present at the meeting, were very much interested. The building up of data-bases is not the business of the VSNL. But their emergence is what would induce or stimulate data traffic which is beneficial to the VSNL. Also their use by foreigners would bring in foreign exchange to the country. I believe such should be the far-sighted view of Indian enterprises. However, the VSNL is severely handicapped in undertaking such roles because it has the inheritance of all the Government officials. Marketing, sales, business promotion, and things like that are generally not in the grain of a Government Department, even if converted into a Company. However, it should be the endeavour of the Chief Executive and enlightened Board members to rapidly bring about a new culture, if necessary by infusion of properly qualified people at different levels into the Company, despite the opposition of the erstwhile bureaucrats, now companified.

The low morale in many organisations is due to the non-dissemination of correct information on various issues affecting the employees and the business of the organisation. The OCS, and the VSNL till I came, did not have any method of internal communication. In June

1987, within two months of my joining the VSNL., we started a House Journal, the Videsh Sanchar Patrika, which came out in the beginning as a quarterly but which was soon converted into a bi-monthly. Writing regularly on matters of concern to the Company and its employees, carrying the comments of the employees, publishing articles and news of interest about telecommunications in India and outside, and about our business and plans, has increased the awareness of the employees. This is very important because mis-information, dis-information and wrong information, especially in an organisation in transition, can be very deleterious.

There is excellent engineering talent in the VSNL. But in order to get recognition for it and in order to enable the engineers to express themselves, there have not been enough opportunities or outlets. The publication of a series of articles under the general title, "*Professional Papers*", was initiated and by October, 1989, 15 papers had been produced for circulation among the engineering staff within the Company and interested parties outside. Our engineers were encouraged to participate in seminars, workshops and symposia, not as audience, but as authors of papers. All these papers were specially scrutinised, the most important ones by me and the others by very senior competent engineers. Our presence in the international fora of the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), has been not passive, but very active. Some of my colleagues had become Rapporteurs, Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Working Groups, and this was for the first time in the history of the OCS/VSNL. I made special efforts to recognise talent and advance talented persons by making them attend special courses in India and abroad and making them participate in seminars and symposia. I especially feel proud that one of my colleagues, Smt. Lakshmi G. Menon, has distinguished herself in every meeting and symposium that she has participated, and after having gone through a management course in the famous college, Henley, in the U.K., her talents were further heightened, leading to her selection as the Chairman & Managing Director of the Public Sector Undertaking, Hindustan Teleprinters Limited, relegating many a person from the DOT and other Government institutions.

I had myself participated in several international meetings, especially as Governor of the International Telecommunications Satellite Organisation (INTELSAT), attending not only the Board meetings, but the meeting of Signatories and the Assembly of parties. My interventions and contributions had been appreciated and because of the VSNL's increased usage of the INTELSAT space segment in the last two years,

our investment share has gone up to such an extent as to justify a permanent seat on the Board of Governors for India. It must be a matter of pride that in the World Headquarters of the INTELSAT in Washington, we have now our own room and our own telephone. At the 19th meeting of Signatories of the INTELSAT in Orlando, Florida, United States, in April, 1989, I was elected as the Deputy Chairman. By dint of this position, I was at the presiding tables of the 15th meeting of the Assembly of Parties of the INTELSAT in Amsterdam, Netherlands, in October, 1989. In the Commonwealth Telecommunications Council (CTC), two meetings of which I attended in Port Louis (Mauritius) and Auckland (New Zealand), India, because of our contributions, obtained, for the first time, the Vice-Chairmanship of the CTC's Consultative Committee on Collaborative Arrangements (CCCA). Also, instead of being ever at the receiving end, we have committed 100,000 SDRs (Special Drawing Rights) as a donor country for training of the Commonwealth telecom engineers in India. In a single year 1989, India held four international seminars and courses. In one of the meetings of the International Maritime Satellite Organisation (INMARSAT), which I attended, our contribution was so much valued we were encouraged to come to the INMARSAT Governing Council (equal to the Board of Governors of the INTELSAT). We formed a group with Korea and thus, from 1989 onwards, India is on the Council of the INMARSAT, a position which we lost several years ago. I was invited to be a panelist at the International Conference on Mobile Satellite Communications conducted by the INMARSAT in London in July 1989 on the occasion of its 10th anniversary. In the Fifth World Telecommunication Forum, in October 1987, in Geneva, I was invited by the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Mr. R.E. Butler, to be a panelist on the symposium on economic and financial issues of telecommunications. Mr. Butler wrote to recognise the work that I had done in preparing a presentation and several were the appreciative comments that I received.

The short-sightedness that was prevailing in the Ministry and the inability of the OCS to overcome it, could be illustrated by one issue. As our utilisation of the INTELSAT was increasing, we were entitled to an increasing amount of capital contribution. The OCS would propose but the Ministry would not accept. I had taken up this issue personally with the Minister and with the Secretaries of the DOT and the Department of Economic Affairs. I had explained to them that we were getting not less than 14% return as compensation for the use of capital and as the value of the Rupees was depreciating, the actual return was more than 14%. This is a very high gain proposition. Besides, countries like the United States were taking up all the unsubscribed amounts, increasing their

voting share as well as making gains, because few Companies in the U.S.A. give 14% return on the capital. I was happy to get the Government's approval for contributing upto 1.6% of INTELSAT's capital, which is a little more than what we were actually entitled to. It is this increasing contribution, occasioned by increasing INTELSAT space segment utilisation that has led to our getting a permanent seat.

One more ticklish and vital issue arose in August/September, 1989. Very soon after I had taken over as the Chief Executive Officer of the VSNL in April, 1987, I had the requirement of international circuits upto the year 2000 A.D. re-worked and we came to the conclusion that as against 1,150 circuits then existing, we would be requiring about 4,400 by the year 1991, about 8,000 circuits by the year 1995, and about 15,000 - 20,000 circuits by the year 2000. The existing analogue electronic Exchanges in Bombay, Delhi and Madras would also require replacement. From 1991 onwards, how do we get the replacement as well as the expansion capacity? We approached the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT), and in the light of the current status of development of the digital switches in the C-DOT, we came to the conclusion that the requirements upto 1992 cannot but be imported, as not even the E10B switch could be adopted as an international switch and that the C-DOT should undertake to supply digital switches for replacement of the existing analogue switches in the three cities from 1992 onwards. We had also concluded that the first C-DOT switch would be of 512 lines and should be tried out in Hyderabad, the fifth international Gateway. We invited international bids and eventually chose the Ericsson AXE 10 international switch for a new Gateway in Calcutta and for the digital switches in the other three cities. All these four amounted to 2,400 additional international circuits, taking the capacity to 4,400 and odd by 1990 end or early 1991. When we were about to put these to tender, we were advised by the Government of India to accept the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) loan, although we were not short of funds. This would however, benefit the country, because the ADB loan carries a very low interest, while the VSNL itself may have to pay 17% interest to the Government. We felt that the country's interests were larger than the VSNL's and readily accepted the ADB loan. But then, in the ADB, there was a powerful objection to our rejection of a Japanese switch in preference to the Ericsson one. Here again, we tested our position thoroughly and in an exhaustive manner. Would we be able to stand up to the ADB and prove that our choice was correct? I am glad to say that here again it was Smt. Lakshmi G. Menon who faced her interlocutors in an extremely capable manner and defended her and our conclusion that among the tenders, Ericsson's was the best.

The Letter of Intent had been issued in March, 1989, and when we were going through the process of obtaining the import licence, the Telecom Commission was formed. It immediately undertook to evaluate all the imports of equipments that were in the pipeline. We feared a disaster. Some officers in the C-DOT as well as in the TRC felt that they would be able to develop the C-DOT digital switch for international working and place it in service before the end of 1990. The amount of work that was involved was stupendous. A new signalling system had to be designed. The international switch would have to have all the facilities that enabled it to work as a node in the global telecom network. The software required for international accounting, network management, and traffic measurement was immense. Not even our specifications were thoroughly read and understood by the C-DOT/TRC and the process of understanding and finalising them to fit what could be designed delivered before 1990, itself would take three months. I took the position that we were not at all interested in any imports. I explained how within a few months of my joining the VSNL, we had prepared a list of all the types and quantities of equipments that would be required by the VSNL in the next eight years and advertised this in the newspapers, inviting Indian entrepreneurs and organisations to come forward to make them, so that nothing, or the least only, would be imported and we were meeting with success. We were prepared to fund research and development and this had also been widely publicised. Indeed, we had already worked out with the C-DOT a joint development scheme which we would be funding. The consequence of not importing the four digital Exchanges was evaluated in monetary terms first, as also the effect it would have on international understanding with our correspondents abroad. 2,400 international circuits would, per year, earn about Rs. 600 Crores, and the foreign exchange earning would be Rs. 80 Crores to Rs. 90 Crores. I submitted that it was for the Commission to decide to do away with this order of earnings. Secondly, the Bombay Gateway, the biggest, had reached its full capacity, and repeated overloads would make it collapse. The expansion of the Madras and Delhi Gateways was prohibitively costly as the original supplier was reluctant to supply the analogue equipment and if he did supply, the time and costs would be very high. India had, in the Global Traffic meeting held annually in Washington under the auspices of the INTELSAT, reached agreements for increasing circuits to different countries. If these increases were to be postponed, it was not only the Indian switches that would be crippled by overloads but our international partners, too. We had to go in for No.7 Signalling and digital switches, as our important partners like the U.S., U.K. and Japan were pressing for it. Such were the international implications. I said that in the light of these submissions, it was left to the Commission to

take a decision whether to allow the import of the digital switches. Finalising this specification was one matter, and working upon software and proto-types, and proving them with an international partner and earning revenues through commercial service, which would all take considerable time, was another. In the event, while the Commission decided to scrap all imports, including VIKRAM, the only import that was found to be justified was that of the VSNL digital gateway switches. I felt vindicated because for the last 15 years I had been holding the DOT as having an insatiable hunger and compulsive urge to import, having done little to support indigenous development. I would be the last person to seek or support imports if indigenous alternatives are available even if they be a little imperfect. Where else can indigenously developed and produced equipments be tried except in the Indian network? In our case we had first consulted the C-DOT, explored the possibility of indigenous development, and only after concluding that it was not possible in the time that we wanted, had we gone for imports. We had already placed a Letter of Intent for three C-DOT digital Exchanges in replacement of the analogue ones in Bombay, Delhi and Madras. What further proof of our intent of supporting indigenous development was needed? I was absolutely certain that but for the foresight I had been showing since 1987 in this regard, and the clarity of thinking and the proper presentation of facts and arguments, a grievous injury would have been done to India's international telecommunications if the import of the digital switches had been countermanded. We were threatened with a disaster and the non-materialisation of the disaster itself is to be taken as a great favour! The pity is that the process of getting an import licence after having obtained every type of clearance over the last 15 months is still taking time. That speaks volumes of the bureaucratic arthritis that has struck several Departments of the Government.

## TRAVEL OVERSEAS

The English educational tradition is that, one's learning is incomplete without travelling to different countries, observing their life and work and learning from them. History and Geography have always interested me. My work in the Department of Telecommunications, especially my years in the Videsh Sanchar Nigam, has enabled me to travel to several countries in all the continents. It is only when we are outside our country that we have more objectivity in comparing our progress and our deficiencies. I had opportunity not only to talk to telecom engineers on communication matters, but move and talk with a variety of people - scientists, lawyers, sociologists and economists, besides engineers. I believe there are several lessons for us.

The most impressive are Singapore and Hongkong, each of which I have visited several times. What strike any visitor are the immaculately clean streets and homes and work-places. Everybody is busy, and none is gossiping. Both places were known earlier for squalor and were also the centres for drug pedlars. Today both of them are very busy industrial, business and services centres. While Hongkong produces a variety of goods, trading is more than production. In Singapore, there is trade in all types of goods, but in the Services Sector like Finance, Insurance, Banking, Shipping and Telecommunications, there is a tremendous upsurge. In fact, the stable Government and the confident future have made Singapore the business capital of South East Asia, especially of the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) countries. There are no slums. Population growth has been controlled to such an extent that currently they are worried that there are not enough births and they may, therefore, face a work-force shortage. The Singapore Airlines and the Telecom Authority of Singapore (TAS) are exemplary service organisations. I was once taken to a business office of the TAS. There was a large number of people coming and going. I was curious. My friend in the TAS told me that that day they had announced the introduction of Radio Paging service. Hundreds of people were coming. They

were filling up a form, paying some money and walking away with a pocket pager. Can it ever happen in the telecommunications in India - somebody coming and walking away with a service, and all within 15 minutes of his coming to a business office? The subscriptions were being entered through a Personal Computer. In contrast, in India, we have got application forms to be collected at one place, payments to be made at another place, and after some weeks a waiting-list number will come. Then one has to make several enquiries over a period of years, and even when he is told that he would get the service, it may take from two to six months before he can actually avail of it.

I visited Spain twice, first in 1984, and then in 1988. On the first occasion, I felt not a little disgust at the total stoppage of work round about afternoon when thousands of people sat watching bull fights on TV. My impression was that they were easy-going people. There was a large gap between the standard of living in Spain and that in the northern countries of Europe. But, in 1988, I witnessed a total transformation. Fewer people were wasting their time. Life was more brisk even in a provincial town like Seville where the meeting of the Board of Governors of the INTELSAT (International Telecommunications Satellite Organisation) was held. I could see people interested in moving forward. Production of cars, electronic appliances and several information services could be seen everywhere. Telephones and their working are representative of how thriving a nation is. There were 20 million telephones. They have Cellular Mobile Radio Telephone and Packet Switched Data Networks. TELEFONICA ventured out and was putting up a telephone instruments factory in the Soviet Union. It has also contracted to build a rural telephone network in the U.S.S.R., and install Pay-Phones in Moscow. It has won a contract for the management of Argentina's telecommunications and also a share in its capital. It has its stocks listed in Tokyo, London and New York, and has become a world player. Presently, it is offering collaboration for joint ventures in services, as well as production of equipment. India has received one such offer. It is preparing for the 1992 integrated Europe, when all the trade barriers between the EEC (European Economic community) Countries will be pulled down and there will be a 320-million-people strong, Europe-wide common Market. It was caring less for ideology and more for achievement. It signed up an agreement with AT & T (American Telephone & Telegraph) Company of the United States to produce telecommunications equipment and also introduce new services. Spain, which until a few years ago, was

considered a backward European country, and which withdrew itself into a shell under Franco's dictatorship, is now a thriving, enterprising country. It would be celebrating the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America by its son, Christopher Columbus, and would be hosting the Olympics. It is vigorously building Teleports and new INTELSAT earth stations. A country which was only an infant, and could transform itself into a vigorous world player in a short period, has a lesson for us.

I was in the Soviet Union for two weeks in 1987, as a guest of their Ministry of Communications. In 1979, was established a Troposcatter Radio link between India and USSR over the Himalayas. Charar-e-Sharif, near Srinagar, is one terminal, and Dushanbe in Uzbekistan, is the other terminal. The radio equipment at both ends was of Russian make, but the antenna in both the cities has been supplied by the Indian company, the Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL). This link has been, from its inception, a sick one. Out of 12 circuits, never more than one or two worked, and even these two were frequently *uncommercial*. Several times, many Russian engineers camped in India for weeks and months, and millions of Rupees worth of spares had also been supplied by them. But, never could this link be effectively used. It has become a "*white elephant*" with so much capital sunk and about 60 people tied up with considerable annual recurring expenditure. India has been asking for its closure, but the Soviets would not agree. They would want India to join the INTERSPUTNIK, the Communist version of the INTELSAT. The INTERSPUTNIK has, besides the USSR and the East European countries, Vietnam, Cuba and Algeria, using the Soviet-built-and-launched communication satellites for their international communications between themselves. We have not much traffic to the USSR. In terms of Rupees, the Indo-USSR and the Indo-American trades are equal. But the Indo-USSR trade is carried out mainly by a few State Enterprises in both the countries. So, the telecommunications traffic is very limited, and even when we introduced International Subscriber Dialling (ISD), no more than four or five circuits were, at any time, busy, although we provided seven. In contrast, for the same volume of business between India and USA, because the businesses are carried out by thousands of firms in either country, the more than 400 working circuits are not sufficient. The immediate need is for 800, and by the mid-1990s they are estimated to come upto 1,500. As regards joining the INTERSPUTNIK, when we are feeling that the Rs. 3 Crore investment in the existing link is itself uneconomic, how would we put in Rs. 16 Crores to

work to the USSR and its allies? All the INTERSPUTNIK countries put together have less than 1% of India's international traffic. But then, the USSR values India's friendship tremendously and somehow wants us to be associated with it. It would be willing for joint studies in millimetre wave propagation. We were quite firm that there was no point in continuing the Troposcatter link and simply switched it off. As regards the INTERSPUTNIK, we wanted them to give us data in respect of costs and other working details and specifications. Later on, while we engineers were able to agree that it should be permanently closed down, and were about to minate the decision, a political official came and said: "*Who are we to close down the troposcatter link commissioned by persons no less than Indira Gandhi and Leonid Brezhnev? We may do whatever we want, but we should never announce it*". However, we went our way to minimise our losses and we have later on even got rid of the building that we constructed, but did not yet occupy, and parted with several properties and "spares" and other equipments.

The impressions that one carries about the Soviet Union are what he is predisposed for. In my boyhood and youth, I had glorious visions of the USSR. But, later on, there was great scepticism when more and more about it was known, especially through Kruschev's revelations at the 20th Party congress, and the USSR's intervention in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Notwithstanding all these impressions gained only through books, I wanted to be objective in knowing about the Soviet Union when I was there. It is a great country, vast, sprawling, undying. Moscow's broad streets and avenues and order and cleanliness are remarkable. The public transport is so cheap, and one ticket is valid for all forms of transport - trolley bus, buses, trams and the famous metro. Undoubtedly, they are about the healthiest people, very well built. They have genuine friendship for India bordering on admiration. Everybody whom we met was going out of the way to please us and to draw near to us. I could see only one reason for this. India is the only country which has, of its own volition, chosen to be friends with the Soviet Union. Every other was either a vassal Communist State or was drawn by some economic assistance in some form or the other. The shortage of consumer goods is too evident, and much of whatever are there, I was surprised to find, are of Indian origin - soaps, plastic buckets, toys and appliances. It is amazing that for a country which can annihilate the United States through missiles, their shops and Departmental Stores do not have even a calculator, and all the sales people are using abacuses!

The TV sets we had in our hotel rooms were using valves instead of transistors. In telecommunications, there appeared to be hardly anything that they themselves were making. The telephone instruments were from Poland, the few PCs and monitors were from Hungary, the switching equipment was from Czechoslovakia and East Germany. When asked what they were producing, they said that they have a system of socialist division of labour. Plainly told, it meant that Russia would produce all the military hardware, and its Communist allies would produce equipments, goods and appliances for civilian use. A Telecom Factory that we saw in Kiev, Ukraine was less modern than even the Indian Telephone Industries. Open-wire lines and carrier systems speak of the primitive nature of their telecommunications. I thought that we should be able to supply them a lot of telecom equipments - telephone instruments, EPABXs and RAXs to our C-DOT (Centre for Development of Telematics) designs. The friendship and openness of my Soviet colleague engineers was remarkable. While in every formal meeting they would talk and talk and talk endlessly about a very small thing, all in Russian in high diplomatic language, translated for us into English, while we were travelling together, unaccompanied by interpreters (who we suspected were planted by the Government), the engineers were very frank about the primitiveness of their equipment and the inefficiencies and the corruption, the waste and the very low productivity. They are only hoping that perestroika and glasnost would improve matters. The Soviet Union is a great country. But in telecommunications they are very backward. Their only great contribution for telecommunications would be their powerful rockets, especially the PROTON, which can outdo any American or European launcher of satellites. But, the launch contracts of the INTELSAT (International Telecommunications Satellite Organisation) are not being given to the USSR, although the PROTON launcher costs are less, because of the West's concerns about their technology being copied while the satellites are being transported in the USSR to their launch sites. The USSR is in desperate need of modern telecom technology, especially the digital one. It would appear that it would permit its allies, like Hungary, to completely open up, and thereby get the digital technologies from the West, and through Hungary get it into the USSR. However, if Gorbachev's perestroika works, it may be that the restrictions on the transfer of the latest micro-electronics and digital technology may be liberalised and there could be a direct transfer from the West to the USSR.

However much we in the Videsh Sanchar tried to publicise and induce more direct dialling of calls, there has not been much growth. Our efforts are a very interesting episode. The U.S.S.R.'s political leadership placed a great value upon direct dialling between the two countries. While we opened up the entire country for the Soviet Union to dial into, they had opened up only Moscow, and there, too, only a few members were made known to us. While we were in Moscow in different meetings, we were being asked how the ISD was working, and everytime I said that there was hardly any conversation because only Moscow was open to us and there, too, only a few numbers were known to our people. The Ministers were furious and expressed their displeasure. The next day, when we met, we found to our surprise that several capital cities of the Republics were all open. It was obvious that, unless specuicely told and authorised in writing, none in the USSR would do any work. Incidentally, this is the over-centralisation and formalism that had completely eliminated initiative and led to the backwardness of their productive machines, as is now being plainly talked about by Gorbachev. We visited their international Gateway Exchange in Brezhnevski located a few kilometers away from Moscow. We could see several calls between the two countries going through. Interestingly, a few months afterwards when we mentioned this name, our Soviet friends just kept quiet. It was obvious that they have changed the name, as Brezhnev had become a "non-person".

The Soviet Union has no telephone directories. When a telephone is installed, the installer may ask the customer what are the parties whose numbers he would like to have, and, later on, type out a sheet and give them the telephone numbers. Of late, some classified telephone directories for Government offices and State businesses are being printed and sold. There are a large number of public telephone booths. The USSR has got impressive plans for increasing its telephones. They are now having over 30 million telephones, and these would be increasing at the rate of 2-3 million per year.

It was while we were in Moscow that a German had landed his small aeroplane, absolutely unobserved and unchallenged by the mighty Soviet Airforce, in the Red Square, near the Kremlin. The next day, the Air Chief lost his job. We were just wondering what would be the consequence if a similar thing happened in India. There would be enquiry

Committees, and finally, some contrived reasons would be given, provided the persons are properly known to the appropriate people. We saw the Panorama, wherein Russia's war with Napoleon's army is depicted. The great Marshal Kutuzov aided by "General Winter" was defending Moscow, and the ever-victorious Napoleon had to eat dust and retreat in ignominy. Great was the massacre. But Russian patriotism prevailed. Seeing the massive, vivified presentation of the battle scene, one would realise how vast is the Soviet Union, how great is its resolve to defend itself, and, no matter who ruled the Soviet Union, how patriotic its people are in their love for their Motherland. That should be a great lesson for us Indians.

My interest to visit the People's Republic of China has been as great as my desire to visit the Soviet Union, and the opportunity came when our Prime Minister visited China in December, 1988. We were introducing direct dialling between our two countries. I was attending a meeting of the Board of Governors of the INTELSAT in Washington, while my visit to China was awaiting approval by the Minister for Communications. I had no Visa, and I hardly had less than 24 hours between the end of my visit to Washington and needed arrival in Beijing. My Chinese colleague in the INTELSAT was very particular that I should visit Beijing. I had some difficulty in getting a Visa from the Chinese Embassy in Washington. But, my colleague, Mr. Yun Zin, spoke to some official in the Ministry of Communications in Beijing, and within a few hours there were people from the Chinese Embassy in Washington to collect my Passport and stamp a Visa. As no information about the approval of my visit to Beijing came while I was in Washington. I had returned to Bombay in the morning. But, that very night, at about 10 p.m., I was told that I could go to Beijing by catching the next morning's flight. Although this was a very tiresome journey from the US to Bombay, followed with in a few hours by the journey to Beijing, because of my intense interest, I went to Beijing, and it was a great experience for me.

China is genuinely trying to re-establish understanding and a reasonable level of friendship with us. Their engineers and officers in the Chinese Ministry of Communications are absolutely open and answered every question and gave facts and figures without any inhibition I visited their international Gateway Exchange and had discussions in the Ministry about telecommunications development and their status in that

country. In the last ten years, without announcing to the world the renunciation of Maoism, China has been quietly modernising itself and opening the country to foreign businesses and investments and collaborations. They have realised that economic progress is quite important and consumer goods and services must be produced and made available in plenty. Telecommunications are essential for their economic development, for promoting their businesses nationally and internationally. They have declared most of their coastal provinces as Special Economic Zones and are allowing foreign investment and joint ventures. Telecommunications have been given special importance. They have given up the doctrinaire approach of general improvement of everybody's telephone all over the country. Instead, in the important cities, and that, too, in the business localities, they are selectively upgrading the telecoms. A few Digital Exchanges have been installed in big cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou i.e., Canton, and important businesses and offices wherever they are located are connected to these Electronic Exchanges which are inter-connected by optical fibre media and connected to the international Gateway through either microwave or optical fibre medium. Thus, the 1-2% of the total number of telephone/telecom users who are involved in international trade are having the most reliable and versatile form and variety of telecommunications, including video-conferencing. Their plans for ISDN are also similar. They have installed a few ISDN Exchanges as PABXs, in certain important localities and buildings and inter-connected all of them by optical fibre media. This selective upgradation was unthinkable under pure Communism conditions, whereas, under pragmatic leadership, different levels of service are being given for different customers and different cities. I believe, that this is what is important in India at this stage in our telecommunications.

In the last ten years, they have consciously loosened the grip of the central authority. They believe that central direction has crippled all individual initiative and accountability. When the central authority was withdrawn, every Province went on its own course. Curiously, the Provinces (the equivalent of our States), are richer than the Central Government, and some Municipalities are richer than even the Provincial Governments. But the central telecommunications authority said it would concern itself only with inter-Provincial and Province to national and international telecommunications. The Provinces were investing in telecommunications. They went on choosing different technologies. When I asked the Director-General how this could be allowed and whether it

would not pose a problem for nation-wide connectivity, he said they believed that enabling the Provincial authorities to think for themselves, to take the initiative and get into the habit of doing things without being directed, was of great value. Now that many of the Provinces have been shaken out of their lethargy and passivity and are able to aggressively act on their own, they are now trying to standardise only three types of Switches, and any Provincial or Municipal Government would be free to seek collaborations for production of any of these three equipments. A number of joint ventures with American, French, Swedish and German telecom Companies, are being implemented. It is quite surprising to know that while a Communist country can allow so much of foreign investment and be not shy of joint ventures, we in India, especially in certain populist quarters, want to shy away from foreign involvement in production, although the result is starvation and poor service.

I was thrilled to see the Great Wall of China, Mao Ze dong's mausoleum, and Tiananmen Square. Like the Soviet Union, China is a vast country. Its main thoroughfares are broad. The discipline of the traffic is something impressive and is worth emulating. In Beijing, for a population of about 10 million, there are about 5 million bicycles. Rows and rows of people, moving on bicycles to work and to homes, is a spectacle. The traffic discipline is tremendous. Of late, because of liberalisation, the motor-vehicle population has been increasing, and with even so few cars, there are already traffic jams. Beijing is concerned as to what would happen if ever they have as many automobiles as other cities of comparable prosperity and population.

For the few days we were in Beijing, we were reading the English newspaper, "*China Daily*". The amount of criticism against the Government that is being published there, and the reports about the corruption in the government, were unbelievable. I think the openness is pervasive, and the liberalisation and democratisation cannot be stopped. For the last 40 years, the salaries have been kept at the same level. While a teacher or a manual worker gets Yuans 100-150 per month, the Director General gets no more than Yuans 500. This low differential is reported to be militating against the productivity of intellectuals. However, if their salaries are to be raised, China is worried as to where they would get so much money. Free enterprise, especially at the individual level, is emerging. People who have got their own car and drive it as a taxi earn as much as Yuans 100-200 a day, compared to that much monthly

salary. As happens with any artificially enforced exchange rate, there is a great black market in foreign exchange. There are two currencies. Foreigners can convert their money - Dollars or Pounds - into a special type of Yuan while the other Yuan is available for the citizens only. The disparity in the two Yuans is quite high. Visitors are allowed to convert their Dollar-exchanged Yuan back into any foreign currency. One can sell these Yuans to the Chinese, of course, in the black market, and get a lot of the latter variety. China is now producing several consumer durables purely for export, and the Koreans and Japanese are very much worried. Already their colour TV sets are selling at prices lower than those of the Koreans and Japanese in the European Market. Refrigerators, Sewing Machines and other household appliances are being produced in millions for export, and its foreign trade, as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is 50% more than that of India. If the whole of China gets as industrialised and as productive as Korea or Japan, we have to imagine how great a transformation there would be. What should interest us is that, when China, in spite of being called a Communist country, is giving up its ideology of State-owned monopolies, and is encouraging private initiative and industry and capitalist production, why should we still stick to our unproductive methods in the Public Sector?

Two countries which have been poor, but which are fast industrialising and developing themselves, are Malaysia and Thailand, both of which I had visited more than once. The Japanese and Americans are investing heavily in Thailand, and Malaysia is seeking collaboration in joint production from any worthwhile source. One can see the transformation coming about from the large number of automobiles that their capital cities are cluttered with, the higher availability of telephones per hundred of population, and the variety of services. In telecommunications, both countries have corporatised erstwhile Government Departments and are now proposing to "peoplesify" them, i.e., give away their equity share holding to the people. Joint production ventures (Ericsson in Malaysia, NEC in Thailand) are coming up. In Bangkok, for miles and miles on end, one can see several new factories coming up, producing automobiles, machine tools and household appliances. It appears that both the countries want to catch up with Korea. Every time I see those countries, talk to their engineers, read about them, I become sadder, for, in our country, populism is preventing the unleashing of our productive forces in the name of ideology, State ownership and socialism. One should wonder how socialism-espousing India is having the largest number of

illiterate people and about the world's lowest per capita income (better than Burma, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, but less than Pakistan), while capitalism-espousing countries like Korea or Singapore and Thailand are having increasing prosperity and competing with advanced countries like Japan.

In Guyana, I worked as a Senior Expert for the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). This country interested me very much, because 52% of its population is of Indian origin. 46% of the population is of African origin, and the rest is a mixture of Chinese, Portuguese and American Indians (Red Indians). It calls itself a socialist country, but is a near dictatorship. The elections are rigged to see that the Indians will never capture power. The British left quite a prosperous country and a good telecommunications network. But, under the late L.F.S. Burnham, it has become nearly totalitarian, with sham elections. That country's greatest allies are North Korea and Cuba, both of which have nothing to offer. I saw the telecommunications equipment fall into pieces, the country not having enough foreign exchange even to get spares. Their talented engineers, Indians as well as the Blacks, are migrating to the United States. The U.S. Dollar gets in the black market, three times the official price of the Guayanese Dollar. Georgetown and other cities are black-dominated, while the rural areas are farmed by the Indians. The country's agricultural, trade and business policies are such as would hurt the Indians. The helplessness that the Indians feel is very obvious and is writ large in their talk and in their faces. There are a number of other Caribbean countries, all of them with population of around a million. How can these countries ever produce their own Switches or afford to get them from abroad? In Africa, there are more than 40 countries. Some of them are very small and can never afford to produce telecommunications equipment, nor can there be sufficient, enlightened engineering personnel to design, install and maintain their own telecommunications systems. In the various international councils, each country has one vote. I have noticed that the representatives from the African countries are very powerful speakers. Many of them air views characteristic of developing countries i.e., hostile to developed countries. However, the surprising thing is that if there is a crucial vote, the result is always in favour of the developed countries.

I had first visited the United States in 1985, both on my way to Guyana where I worked as Senior Expert of the International

Telecommunication Union (ITU), and on my way back to India. During my second visit, I spent three weeks, visiting a number of cities and talking to various telecommunications entities as well as friends. I was with the U.S. Telecom Training Institute for about ten days, attending a course on the use of computers for telecom management. This Organisation, viz., the U.S. Telecom Training Institute, is typical of the American Management's attitude to specialised functions. 1983 was observed as the World Communications Year, and the affluent countries were appealed to by the ITU, to provide training facilities for the developing countries. In the United States, all telecom services are provided by private Companies. Who would, therefore, come forward to set up a Training Institute? The big Companies like the AT&T, IBM, MCI and a host of others got together to found the U.S. Telecom Training Institute and endow it with the necessary funds. They have engaged a specialist educational organisation to run the Institute. It has got a few class and conference rooms and seminar halls, very well equipped with every variety of audio-visual aids. They have got a permanent faculty of no more than five persons, none of them engineers! Every year, the Governing Council of this Institute finalises what courses with what content should be run for the year, and which of the companies would provide facilities for training as well as for the conduct of classes if necessary in their in-house Training Institutes or other places. This Programme of Courses is sent to the developing countries all over the world, seeking nominations. The U.S. Telecom Training Institute also advises as to what type of scholarships and what type of grants are available from what sources, and how they should be applied for by the beneficiaries. In a few cases, it actively helps in the attendees getting this assistance. On its Board of Governors are luminaries from all the leading telecom Companies of the United States. I was fascinated by this Organisation. This is the least-cost, most effective way of extending training facilities. In India, or some other countries, we would have thought of land, buildings, permanent faculties (from Peons to Directors), and most of the money and effort would have been spent upon the internal administration itself, with the Institute becoming starved of funds. Later, when we were planning to set up in India, a Centre for Telecom Management & Studies, I had quickly made up my mind that the U.S. Telecom Training Institute would be the model. Indeed, it has become a model for Canada also. As a consequence of the World Communication Year's appeal, all the Canadian telecom Companies and the Canadian Ministry of

Communications have come together to establish an Institute - Telecom Executive Management Institute of Canada (TEMIC) - 100% modelled on the U.S. Telecom Training Institute. I had occasion to undergo a course in the TEMIC also, in 1988. These two Institutes, the U.S. Telecom Training Institute and the TEMIC are more or less competing with one another in the excellence of the courses and the composition of the groups of attendees from several countries.

The vitality, dynamism and the broad sweep of telecom and information services in the United States are amazing. The underlying source of energy is, of course, competition. Every conceivable advance in telecom and information services had first been effected in the United States. The U.S. constitutes 35-40% of the world's telecommunications market. 98% of the homes and all businesses have telephones. Universal telephone service at affordable prices had been achieved by the late 1970s. The telephone was invented in the United States. The World's first telephone Exchange functioned in 1878 in the United States, and upwards of 2,000 Companies sprang up to provide telephone service. In the first few years, it was common that several Companies were offering service in the same city, and inter-connections became a nightmare. The situation led to the threat of nationalisation of the telephone Companies. But the great telecommunications Statesman, Theodore N. Vail, the Chief Executive of the AT & T concluded that it would be a disaster and a setback to the American spirit of enterprise. As he was both an engineer, economist and manager with great vision, he propounded the theory that telecoms should be a "natural monopoly", and the objective of the United States should be universal service at affordable rates with the monopoly being regulated by the Government in public interest. This philosophy was easily acceptable to the United States, and, then, licenses were given territory-wise to service providers. Although, even today, there are over 800 telephone Companies, over 82% of the telephones were provided by one system - the American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT & T), with 22 Regional Bell Operating Companies and the nation-wide long-distance network was, till recently, provided only by the AT & T. With the revolutionary advances in micro-electronics, developments like Integrated Circuits (ICs), with very large-scale and mega-scale integration, digital microwave radio, communication satellites and optical fibres, there has been an increasing convergence of computers and communications, and the "natural monopoly" basis got increasingly undermined because of the reducing costs of entry into the

market, and the scale of services ever increasing. The story of how the telecommunications have arrived at the present state in the United States is a fascinating one. But, underlying that was the fact that the computer Companies were realising that without communications, the full exploitation of computing power and information services was impossible, and the regulated telecom Companies, notably the AT & T were feeling that if they confined themselves only to the traditional telecom services, they would be losing a world of business opportunities. The unregulated computer companies were itching to enter the telecom business and the telecom Companies were wanting to enter the computer business. The Federal Communications Commission, which was the regulator, opened up several enquiries called, Computer I, II, III, and its earliest decision, which came to be famously known as the "Carter Phone Decision", has led to increasing amount of de-regulation and competition, and, finally, under the Anti Trust Act, the mammoth AT & T had to be broken up, technically called, "divestiture", by the Department of Justice, under Federal Judge Green. The AT & T had to divest itself of the local telephone business and be satisfied with the long-distance national and international carriage, also retaining the famous Bell Telephone Laboratories and its manufacturing arm, the Western Electric Company. The result is, almost every year, because of competition, the long-distance charges have been falling between 10% - 15% inspite of inflation, and the local telephone services which were feared to cost more, have not gone up in prices in real terms. In fact, since 1984 till 1989, the real price of local telephone service fell by about 14%. There is a proliferation of domestic satellites (7 Companies with 32 satellites in orbit). Two challengers to the AT & T viz., MCI and the US SPRINT, have put up coast-to-coast and North-South fibre optic broad-band media, challenging the AT & T's supremacy. This fierce competition between these three and over 90 others, in addition to the domestic satellite Companies, is what is bringing down the cost of long-distance calls. Competition has led to the introduction of scores of tariffs, aimed at different segments of the market and users. There does not appear to be an end to the fall in telecom prices. This is in amazing contrast to what is happening in our country, where, in spite of the talk of hi-tech and modernisation and research and indigenous production, year after year, the telecom prices are being increased by whopping amounts.

One striking fact is that most of the telephone Companies are headed, not by mere engineers, but by persons with managerial

qualifications. Many of them also have an Engineering degree. The amount of inquiry, analysis and literature that is available on telecom policy, economics, competition, new-technology, their need, regulation, pricing and provision is extraordinarily large. It is a pity that in India, there are hardly any studies. It is for this reason that telecommunications in India are inadequate, poorly planned, badly executed, highly priced and mostly despised by the users. Since joining the Videsh Sanchar Nigam in 1987, and after becoming India's Governor on the Board of the International Telecommunications Satellite Organisation (INTELSAT), whose Signatory the Videsh Sanchar is, I had been going almost once every three months, to the United States. My meetings with several people and several countries' representatives increased. I visited homes, educational institutions and top management groups. While in the States, every time for about a week or so, viewing the TV and reading the newspapers, I could comprehend the several issues that are of vital concern to the U.S. citizens. Their political postures and leadership concerns are too well-known to require any comment. I have always felt a little sadness while having increasing admiration, every time I was in the United States. While the country's fierce commitment to freedom, individual liberty, competition, innovativeness and enterprise are superb, exemplary and inspiring, may be, because of our philosophical attitudes and different system of values, I come sadder every time. The society is losing values for families. If a person loses his job for any good length of time, surely he would lose his wife also. More than 50% of the marriages lead to divorce, and there are women who have been married several times. The destruction of a stable family is the beginning of the decadence of a society. Following this increasing divorce rate is the awesome spectacle of drug addiction and increase of juvenile crime. Families, especially mothers, are worried about their children's drug addiction. Intimate conversations reveal that 60%-70% of the children in schools, and 100% of the blacks are drug addicts, and drugs are being pushed by criminal gangs from the South American Republics. Drug addiction breeds crime, the worst type like mugging and raping and assault of women and burglaries. Cities like Washington are having to spend increasing amounts of money on crime control. The U.S. jails are not having enough rooms for the criminals, and they are now talking of open-air jails. America's black population is 10%. Racial discrimination has completely disappeared.

I was in Canada in 1988 to attend a fortnight's course for very senior telecom executives conducted by the Telecommunications Executive Management Institute of Canada (TEMIC) in Montreal. The TEMIC is an organisation founded and funded by a number of telecom Companies with the blessings of the Commonwealth of Canada, in response to the call of nations, in the world Communications Year, 1983. The TEMIC is doing excellent work by bringing, twice every year, 20-30 leaders of telecom organisations, especially from the developing countries, and putting them in discussion with Chief executives of the leading telecom companies in Canada. The TEMIC took the participants from Vancouver in the West to Montreal in the east, covering Ottawa, the nation's capital, for discussions with the Government agencies. There are ten separate companies covering all the provinces of Canada. Some are private, some are State Government-owned, some are even municipality-owned, but none by the Central Government. Inter-provincial telecommunications are all planned, facilitated and managed by an organisation in the nature of a Club - Telecom Canada - with Headquarters in Montreal. It is remarkable how such a Club has been able to ensure commonwealth-wide standards, inter-connectivity and continuous upgradation. The regulation of the rates and services is done in some cases by the Provincial Governments, and in some cases by the Commonwealth Radio and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) (much like the Federal Communications Commission [FCC] in the United States, and the Office of Telecommunications [OFTEL] in the United Kingdom). In competition with Telecom Canada and its members is another trans-Canada long-distance private line and telex service provider, owned by the private Canadian Railways. There is a third trans-Canada transmission facility provider in the form of TELESAT, which launches, maintains and operates a series of domestic communications-providing satellites. One characteristic is the large traffic between Canada and the United States, and the large concentration of most of the population within about 100 Kms. of the unpolluted US-Canada border from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Canada places high value on the provision of first-class telecommunications even to the Eskimo inhabitants of the Arctic regions. Hence is the extensive satellite-based telecom service provision. Of late, like elsewhere in the world, there is a tremendous urge for liberalisation and competition. Being a small (in population) neighbour of a giant and powerful country, the United States, Canada sometimes wants to put protective barriers across border information flows, but all that has been settled with

mutual agreement. It is noteworthy that Canada and the United States have got a linked integral telephone numbering scheme. The international access code of either country is "1", and the three digit area codes for Canada are part of the US-Canada territory. Canada values India's friendship, and both are together in the Commonwealth Telecommunications Council. Canada's international telecom carrier, TELEGLOBE, was just like the Overseas Communications Service (OCS), a Government Department first, and then a Crown (Commonwealth) Corporation. In 1988, it was privatised and taken over by a much smaller company - MEMOTEC. TELEGLOBE plays very vigorously in international telecommunications Councils. In preparation for the competitive entry of a second international carrier in the next few years, it is trimming its work-force, undergoing a cultural transformation into a truly market and customer-oriented competitive private company. In the process, it has been reducing international telecommunications charges by 10% to 16% a year.

New Zealand is a very small (compared to continental countries) Pacific Island country, settled in the last 250 years only by English speaking people. It has a highly developed agriculture and animal husbandry-based economy. Just about a thousand miles away, it has a big neighbour, Australia. The populations are in contrast - 2 million New Zealanders as against 14 million Australians. A number of Pacific island countries like Vanuatu, Kiribata and Fiji have extensive trade and educational links with New Zealand. The original inhabitants, the Maoris, are a Polynesian race, spread over all these island countries. Like the United States having the red Indians, New Zealand has the Maoris as the aboriginal population, forming less than 10% of the population. Polynesian people from all the island countries almost deem it a right to be able to come to New Zealand, seek employment, and stay there. Many of the lower-end jobs in hotels and offices are performed by the Maoris. Of course, the Government is doing a great lot to bring them up economically, educationally and into the mainstream of life.

I went there to attend a meeting of the Commonwealth Telecom Council in Auckland in December 1988. I was pleasantly surprised that it has a number of Indian settlers - Parsis, Sindhis and a few Anglo-Indians mainly. Indian restaurants in Auckland are quite popular.

New Zealand has been having a Labour Government for the past few years. Like elsewhere in the developed world, New Zealand holds

telecommunications as very essential for its trade and commerce, and for the general improvement of the quality of life. It is linked to the world's countries through under-ocean cables across the Pacific and through communications satellites. Recognising that telecommunications have undergone a tremendous technological change, very surprisingly, the Labour Government has come to the conclusion that they should no longer be administered through a Government Department. They were restructured into a Corporation for eventual privatisation. As small a country as New Zealand, with one-fourth of India's telephones, has formed seven domestic telephone companies on regional basis and a long-distance company for national and international telecommunications, holding the regional companies and several other venture companies to provide information services. Competition is allowed in the customer premises equipment, value-added services and newly emerging information services. It has scouted for managerial talent all over the world for heading the Corporations. There are Americans, Englishmen and Australians as the Chief Executive Officers of some of these companies. Telecom New Zealand, the holding company, is headed by a lumber man (or woodcutter, if you prefer), who was previously heading the country's large private forest company, i.e., lumber company. Simultaneously, the New Zealand Government constituted the Postal Services also into a Corporation, fashioning it as a private company and opened up certain postal services for competition by private companies. New Zealand, like Japan, U.K. and U.S.A. believes that the benefits of technology could be brought to the market place in the service of the customers only by a competitive process.

I had visited the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain several times, the former in connection with the establishment and commissioning of the under-sea cable jointly owned by India and UAE between Bombay and Fujairah. The UAE is a much bigger entity and is a Federation of Emirates. It is said that the majority of the population is of Indian origin, although they do not have any citizenship rights. Over the years, in both the countries, Indians have been doing well and a large number of rich and enterprising Indians have emerged. They are very eager to bring in their skills, talents, money and expertise to India to found new companies. For example, the UAE engineers and entrepreneurs are wanting licence for providing Pay-Phone service, cellular mobile radio telephone and radio paging services in several cities of India. I really wonder why these cannot be allowed. In the beginning,

very low-skill people used to go to these countries to provide labour. Afterwards, professionals started going and they have become affluent as well as masters of the latest technologies, because the oil rich Gulf countries went in for digital electronic exchanges, satellite communications, packet switched data networks, cellular mobile radio and so on. The telecommunications services are cheap and affordable and one can have a telephone within one or two days of asking. Sometime ago, the Cable & Wireless of U.K. owned and operated the telecom services in many of the Gulf countries. But slowly, its companies were taken over by the local Governments. But partnership remains. For example, in Bahrain, the BATELCO (Bahrain Telecommunications Corporation) gave 40% of the equity to Cable & Wireless. The rest is owned by the Government as well as the citizens (in mid-1989, Cable & Wireless gave half of its equity to Bahrainese). Because of the excellent, most modern and cheap telecommunications provided by Bahrain, it has become the hub for banks and financial services, especially after Lebanon became an untenable place due to incessant civil wars.

I had witnessed the very sorry spectacle of Indians, mainly workers, coming from the Gulf countries, being very unsympathetically handled at the Customs. Our people had gone to the Gulf countries leaving their families here. We could not offer them jobs. In the Gulf countries they worked hard, suffered a lot and underwent separation from their families. I wonder why they should not be allowed to bring either gold or entertainment and consumer durable articles. Just by the sweat of their labour and the characteristic savings habit, they earned foreign exchange. Why should they not be allowed to bring out of their savings goods, including gold worth, say, upto Rs. 100,000? I had occasion to point out this to my Minister, Shri Arijun Singh, who, I am sure, felt the same way as I did, but was constrained in expressing any opinion by his ministerial rank.

I visited Mauritius in 1987 to attend the Commonwealth Telecommunications Council meeting. This is one of the little India's that the French and British Empires acquired for Mother India. A large number of Indian labourers were taken as indentured labour to work in the sugarcane fields. The French lost this island to the British at the conclusion of the Anglo-French Napoleonic wars. One of the conditions of the French to make over this island to the British was the preservation of the French language and culture. Although 180 years are nearly over, it

is a pleasure to see that French is the beloved lingua franca of the variety of people of Indian origin (Biharis, Andhras, Tamils, and Maharashtrians mainly). The British tried persuasion to give up French and take up English. But the Indian people said that English was the language of India's imperial enemies, the British and therefore, they would not learn the language of their enemies, but persist in learning French, the language of an unimical people. Between 70% to 80% of the people are of Indian origin, and this is the only country (in Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname and Fiji, the Indian people are reduced to second-class citizenship, despite their being a majority) where the Indian majority and majority rule by them is preserved. The international telecommunication used to be by Cable & Wireless, but have been constituted into a Public Sector Corporation now. In 1989 their domestic telecommunication have also been constituted into another Public Sector Corporation. It is noteworthy that even this small country sees the wisdom of providing telecommunication services not by a Government Department, but through a Corporation. Modernisation and expansion are being effected rapidly. One significant fact that I noticed was that Mauritius has quite good trade and commerce relations with South Africa, just about a thousand miles across the Indian Ocean. They are pragmatic. All of them have very fond memories of and reverence for India, the land of their forefathers. Many come to Bombay and other parts of India for study, but they cannot understand our condescension to them. I believe that cultural institutions like the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and the Arya Samaj should be the ambassadors of goodwill and strengthen the bonds between the mother country and its little Indias abroad, by opening libraries, providing scholarships, and arranging the exchange of cultural troupes. The Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanam, which is our richest temple, can do a lot by giving scholarships for Sanskrit, Vedic and other studies in India for people from these little Indias.

During my several visits to the European and American countries, I have noticed the increasing gap between the technology and services in those countries and in India. It is sad to contemplate that in spite of our 40 years' talk of self-reliance and monopoly Public Sector production, our telecommunication equipment is without quality, is not in sufficient quantity, and we have been having to import them repeatedly. I have often wondered how we, intelligent people, can prevent Indian private entrepreneurs from producing telecommunication equipment, but would not hesitate to import it from multinational, capitalist

Companies from capitalist and imperialist nations. Obviously, imports must be more beneficial than production within India, at least in some cases, to some people. It is only since 1983, that there is a new thinking, leading to liberalisation, permitting the production of certain types of telecom equipment by private and joint sector enterprises.

Telecommunications monopolies are being broken up in several countries, especially in those which are wanting to maintain their leadership and competitiveness in international trade and national development. In our country, the telecom bureaucracies are to the detriment of the nation, acting to preserve their sectoral power. An instance is the use of VSATs (Very Small Aperture Terminals) and IBS (INTELSAT Business Service) and other satellite telecommunication systems for the delivery of information. Many countries think that India is very rich in brain power and would be the greatest developer and exporter of software and telecommunication services. But our policies are inhibiting the growth of telecommunications and information services. Every time I come back from the US or the UK, I can see the growing gap between the advanced countries and us. It makes me sad that when we have the talent, the money and the enterprise, our bureaucracies and our mono-poly-promoting policies are pulling us down. We may miss the great opportunities, especially in information technology and telecommunications.

One of the reasons for the persisting gap between the demand for telephones and the supply in our country is inadequate manufacturing capacity. From the earliest times, the erstwhile P&T Department was making the elementary equipments required, viz., manual switchboards and telephone line materials like galvanized mild steel tubes, cast iron sockets, brackets, etc., in departmental workshops, and to this day, there has been no upgradation of the techniques, or change in the product makes. Automatic switching and transmission equipment was till recently, as a matter of policy, confined to be produced by the DOT's own Companies, the Indian Telephone Industries or the Hindustan Teleprinters. Neither these enterprises nor the Telecom Research Centre of the Department undertook research and development to produce an indigenous switch. One after another, three technologies - Strowger, Crossbar and Digital Electronic - had been purchased from abroad. The production costs have been very high, and the quality of the Crossbar and Strowger equipments has been none too good. There were some valid

reasons like high customs duty on imported components as well as poor quality of indigenously available components. The first serious effort at indigenous development is that of the Centre for Development of Tele-matics (C-DOT), which, in spite of various types of negativism, hostility and undermining, has definitely produced a successful PABX and a good enough Rural Exchange, both digital. The confidence generated out of these successes could ordinarily be sufficient for the development of higher capacity and more versatile switches of world-class. It can be easily conceded that no new generation switch has ever been faultless in its first appearance and it is only through a series of improvements, both in the laboratory and then in service, that a stabilised product could be obtained. It is, therefore, necessary that the Indian user, whether it be the telephone customer or the service provider, shows a friendly, encouraging and helping attitude. Even then, our fundamental difficulty has been in getting components of an acceptable quality and in the development of proper production techniques. For component availability, mass markets are required, and traditionally these emerge from consumer electronics. Production techniques and productionisation are engineering prowesses. It is here that the lessons from certain other developing countries are pertinent. It will appear to be extraordinarily patriotic to assert that we are capable of doing anything and that self-reliance is of highest value. Granting that both are true, at what cost and in what time and how do we attain these?

Let us take Korea. Till 1971, in telecommunications or in electronics, its production levels or telephone availabilities were less than that of India. We have claimed ourselves to be a socialistic country, whereas the Koreans have no such claims or professions. After identifying that electronics and telecommunications are not only growth industries, but would significantly contribute to the country's wealth, Korea entered into several collaborations, even for the same product, with different foreign companies for switching as well as transmission equipments. This went on in parallel with the production of consumer electronics, also in collaboration with several foreign companies. There was even equity participation of the foreign companies in the Korean entities. While a production culture was thus initiated, the Koreans had also resolved to come up with their own design and their own production. First, the Korean Electronics and Telecommunications Research Institute (KETRI), and later the Electronics & Telecommunications Research Institute (ETRI), were collaborative efforts, participated in by several

giant Korean companies. Starting at about, or a little later than the C-DOT, they produced their Digital Switches - PABXs, Rural Exchanges and bigger Exchanges - the same strategy that the C-DOT has adopted, but much more successfully. They did not deny to themselves, while their Switch was being developed, the availability of adequate switching equipments produced within their country, albeit with foreign collaboration. Today, Korea is in a position not only to completely fulfil its native demand, but to export its Digital Switches in competition with the world's established companies. This is true in regard to transmission equipment also. The People's Republic of China is also adopting more or less the same pattern. Brazil's is another interesting example. Three international companies - NEC, Siemens and Ericsson - were each producing about 300,000 lines per year of switching equipment of their own brands. Brazil decided to design, develop and produce its own Digital Switch just like Korea. When once its field trails proved successful, it told the foreign companies that while they could continue with the current levels of their brand of Switches, any expansion of their manufacturing capacity could only be if they produced the Brazilian Digital Switch. Brazilian companies had been licensed the indigenous technology, and it is only at the peril of not getting a slice of the cake of massive telecom expansion that the foreign companies can refuse to produce the Brazil-designed switches.

Taiwan is another example of startling success. Like (but earlier than) Korea and Brazil, Taiwan went into foreign collaborations both for consumer electronics, basic electronics and telecommunications switching and transmission equipments. It has developed an excellent indigenous manufacturing capacity and can now export technology as well as products.

Of late, Thailand seems to have realised the wisdom of the path trodden by Korea, Brazil and Taiwan. It is giving up the policy of only imports and is taking to the path of indigenous production through collaborations. It is estimated by many observers that in the next few years, Thailand will no longer be classed a developing country, but will be on par with Korea and Taiwan. Next in line is Malaysia.

All these countries are attaining much higher levels of prosperity, less unemployment and more egalitarianism, despite their not having socialism as their objective, and despite their not having centrally-planned

economies and licensing and "quotaing" of their industries. How is it that our great metropolises like Delhi and Bombay, despite world-level needs for a variety of services, are starved of them? Should we still have to be the prisoners of philosophies and inflict unnecessary privations and disadvantages upon ourselves? Can we not turn the potential of our highly educated entrepreneurial, scientific and technological talents for the production of goods and services? Could we not turn these into engines of economic development and creators of wealth?

Electronics and telecommunications technologies are seeing such tremendous advances that both the traditional economies of scale and scope have vastly changed, and multiple production and services are easily possible and affordable. It is this recognition that is leading to a fundamental re-thinking of the regimes, both for production and delivery of telecom services in country after country. Particularly, the computer and communications convergence, and the synergy of these two, has opened up the vast possibility of information - voice, picture, text, data exchange at falling prices and expanding services everywhere. One can already see what the revolution has brought about in the matter of air and rail reservations by the use of computers and communications. How much more could be there in other services like banking, insurance, trade, tourism, travel and even non-formal education, is very well known to computer and communication engineers. Computers and communications are profoundly changing the working methods and the concept of work itself in the U.K. and U.S. Even the Soviet Bloc countries are not shy of having western technologies and western companies producing goods and services in their countries. How long can we afford to be happy in our denial of a world-wide trend for rapid realisation of technology? For how long can we console ourselves that the poverty and lack of services and facilities are worth while and necessary sacrifice to have socialism?

*"Fame is a bee, it has a song, It has a sting Ah! it has a wing!"*

## Appendix FIRSTS, INITIATIVES & INNOVATIONS

For the first time in the country (which later became policies and programmes of the Department), the following were undertaken:

- (a) Pressurisation of telephone cables - Bombay - 1969-71
- (b) Cable duct (using PVC pipes in concrete) - Bombay - 1970-71. (Schemes and designs were developed, engineering done and materials identified and procured, experimented for both).
- (c) Computerised listing and setting of the Telephone Directory - Bombay 1971.
- (d) Coaxial cable project for providing inter-exchange junctions in local telephone system - Bombay 1971 (He prepared the report, got it accepted and prepared the project).
- (e) Information Bulletins for subscribers and staff - "No Cable pairs?", "STD", "Getting a New Telephone - The Right Way", "Public Telephones", "Fault Repairs", "The Telephone Directory", "Trunk Calls" - and so on in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Pune and Hyderabad.
- (f) Public meetings to hear and explain subscriber criticisms about telephones - Ahmedabad - 1972-73 (Ex Chief Justice of Gujarat High Court, Shri Mia Bhai, presided over the first meeting on, "Inflated and Wrong Telephone Bills".
- (g) Registered Reminder Scheme for telephone bills (1972-74) at subscriber's option.
- (h) Payment of average first on disputed bills, rest kept in suspense for settlement - Ahmedabad - 1972-74.
- (i) Guaranteed private public telephone with CCB - Payment according to meter, instrument and cash box keys given to hirer. Designed to stop embezzlement by collusion between collector from Department and hirer - Ahmedabad - 1972-74.
- (j) Information Bulletins - Mailing to important subscribers on matters of how to correct and improve the Department's image - Ahmedabad - 1972-74.

- (k) Attended Public Telephones on commission basis Pune - 1975.
- (l) Creche for Departmental officials - Pune - 1975-76.
- (m) "Night Only" STD - Idea advanced, got accepted and introduced from Pune to Delhi in 1974, to increase revenues and subscriber satisfaction, by utilising the spare traffic-carrying capacity of TAXs in the light-load hours (night and early morning).
- (n) Awards for excellence for different ranks of telephone persons introduced in Pune - 1975-76. Best Lineman, Driver, Operator - Awards were instituted by public bodies.
- (o) Manual Subscriber Trunk Dialling - Scheme, designs and fabrication of equipment, service introduced in five towns - 1979-83 - in Andhra Pradesh.
- (p) STD from MAX IIIs (Yanam-Kakinada). 1981-82
- (q) Group-dialling involving MAX IIIs, MAX IIs and MAX Is (over 600 village Exchanges in Andhra Pradesh), eliminating loss involving Rs. 1/- per call on trunk calls. Circuitry developed and fabricated in a workshop set up in Hyderabad. 1979-83
- (r) Public Telephones placed in Grocer shops and other than-Post Office premises to extend working hours without late-fee, and free messenger service on incoming calls. 1979-83
- (s) Procurement of sites for telephone buildings by donation from individuals and panchayats in the rural areas - Andhra Pradesh - 1979-83,
- (t) Long-distance STD Public Telephones - Circuit design, fabrication and introduction of service (Gooty and Jachherla in Andhra Pradesh - 1980-83).
- (u) Printing of Divisional Directories at no cost to Department by private parties by allowing them to print advertisements on paper supplied by them (Visakhapatnam and other Divisions in Andhra Pradesh - 1979-82).
- (v) Extending MAX III capacity beyond 100 lines by re-engineering (Pamaru, Vijayapuri etc., in Andhra Pradesh - 1979-82).
- (w) Incentive scheme for trunk telephone operators - Vijayawada and other places 1979-82.
- (x) Public Telex in Hyderabad, Secunderabad, Vijayawada and Kakinada (Andhra Pradesh).
- (y) RMTX - Concept of a separate trunk exchange to handle trunk calls of small outlying exchanges at a radius of about 50 Kms. around a big city/town, and overcome the inattention at the big place (Vijayawada and Hyderabad in 1980-81).
- (z) Use of FAX for public telegrams in Telugu and English between Kurnool and Secunderabad - 1982.
- Record-setting works
- (a) Utilisation of 90% of expansion/new exchange capacity within 4 weeks of commissioning by advance commercial, cable and outdoor work (Ahmedabad's Railwayapura in 1972).
- (b) Setting up the Regional Telecom Training Centre in Ahmedabad within 45 days of sanction in 1973.
- (c) Doubling the system capacity from about 16,000 to over 33,000 lines in a two-and-a-half years - Ahmedabad - 1972-74.
- (d) Publication and distribution of Telephone Directory with no more than 15 days' gap between the last date upto which corrections were incorporated and distribution started - Ahmedabad in 1973, and Pune in 1975-76.
- (e) Largest number of
- Long-Distance Public Telephones (LDPTs) opened for five years in succession in Andhra Pradesh - 1979-83.
  - Exchanges.
  - Open-wire carrier systems commissioned.
  - Line-length constructed.
  - Group-dialling Exchanges.
  - Sites acquired.
  - Percentage of villages having a telephone (25%) (after Kerala which is one large village State). Andhra Pradesh 1983.

- DTOs opened in Andhra Pradesh - 1980-83.

- Towns having national STD - Andhra Pradesh - 1978-83

(f) Fastest network expansion - Andhra Pradesh - 1978-83. From 13 to 27 Telecom/Telephone Divisions and creation of a Telephone District.

(g) Largest number of Public Telephones manned by the physically disabled. (Tamilnadu was given the President's Award, though Andhra Pradesh's figures were more. The then Member (TO) asked him not to raise the issue).

(h) Extension of International Telephone Subscriber Dialling (ISD) from 19 (that had existed for 11 years before he took charge) to 177 countries within one year. Videsh Sanchar Nigam 1987-88.

3. Department's image enhanced through literary and cultural and writing activities

(a) Founded Bombay Telephones Fine Arts Association. Wrote and staged dramas before public and departmental audiences 1970-71.

(b) Got "Kalavahini", the cultural organisation of Telecom Staff in Hyderabad to produce and publish dramas, stories and poetry. Plays were staged over the radio, Television and in theatres in several parts of Andhra Pradesh.

(c) In Pune, published a quarterly journal for the public with paid subscription, to act as an instructional, informative and opinion-exchanging medium.

(d) In Andhra Pradesh, started such a journal for the public. Doorvani Sandesh was a monthly in English and Telugu edition with a paid subscription exceeding 15,000 (several times more than "DAKTAR")

(e) The Andhra Pradesh Telecom News Letter, "Narada" monthly, set the pace for such News Letters and induced the Department to have them for every Circle/District. In Andhra Pradesh every Telecom Division produced a newsletter, some regularly.

(f) Telecommunications Andhra Pradesh, was the first to participate in the Republic Day Parade with a float in Hyderabad from 1980 onwards. (The P&T's participation in Delhi was later). Rural telephony, satellite, radio telephones, STD were the themes, endearing the Department to the public.

(g) All over Andhra Pradesh, where-ever there is one exchange, there are boards, "Namaskar, Telecommunications Andhra Pradesh". These boards give lot of demographic, agricultural, industrial, educational, industrial information about the town, and have drawn excellent, laudatory reports in newspapers and are liked by the people. All vehicles carry on the rear, the greeting, "Namaskar, Telecommunications Andhra Pradesh", so much so that people called our Department a "Namaskar Department".

All officers who worked with me in Ahmedabad, Pune and Andhra Pradesh always answer the telephone, "Namaskar, . . . . .", presenting an amiable and pleasurable image.

#### IV. Customer-oriented Actions

1. If the telephone did not work for more than 48 hours, a rebate in rental was given wherever he held charge, beginning with Ahmedabad (1971). This has now become the rule in the Department, but the period is 16 days all over India, excepting in Calcutta, where it is 15 days.

2. When subscribers complained about the high telephone bills due to Subscriber Trunk Dialling (STD), their telephones used to be disconnected for non-payment of bills. He introduced the system of provisional bills, based on averages, with the extra amount under investigation. The customer was not inconvenienced, and the Department would take its own time, at the same time realising part of the money at least.

3. He introduced a new system of registered reminders for customers, so that their telephones were not disconnected for non-payment, by the Department simply ringing up the number and delivering the message to anybody - a Peon, or a child, or somebody else. Customers could opt for registered reminders at a cost of Rs. 2/-. This was first introduced in Ahmedabad, and is now a standard practice all over.

4. Shifting of telephones within the same exchange area, long cards, plugs and sockets, additional extensions to PBXs could be given to customers putting in a telephonic request to the Sub-Divisional Officers themselves, who would send them reverse order books, and carry out the works by just taking the signature of the customer (Pune 1974-76).

5. **Attended Public Telephones: As coin-collecting type of Public Telephones would hardly work, and there would be a lot of embezzlement, he introduced the system of ordinary telephone instruments, which are entrusted to attendants on a commission basis, to work as Public Telephones. The first one was started in Pune from the Railway Station there. As an extension of this principle, at the Pune Airport he placed an Honour Telephone i.e., an ordinary telephone instrument, and the users were to drop in a Rupee for each call.**

6. **Giving part-time telephones in Pune when one of the Crossbar exchanges had overload problems during the day time, night-only-working telephones were provided for those who would go in for them, at half the rental. Similarly, the Pimpri Telephone Exchange had underground line plant capacity for about 1,000 lines, but the exchange could carry a load of only 500 to 600 lines. Here also night-only-working telephones were given. In both these instances, customer-satisfaction was enhanced, and the Department gained money from the capital it invested.**

7. **Directory Under Licence : As the Departmental rules and procedures led to the bringing out of a new telephone directory months after it was due, production of telephone directories was given away under licence in the Telecom Divisions in Andhra Pradesh, and it is now the standard practice in the Department.**

8. **Public Telephone in Grocer Shops :**

As the Public Telephones in the villages were placed in 4-5 hours-only-working, extra-departmental, agent operated Post Offices, a facility, costing about Rs. 1 lakh, was hardly being used by the intended beneficiaries. Hence, the Public Telephones were removed from the Post Offices and placed in the Grocer Shops which were working from about 7 a.m. to about

9 p.m. and the Grocers were also not charging any money for calls during the rest of the time. Initially objected to, it has now, eight years after its introduction, become the standard practice. Not only that, the Grocers are being given commission now, while when it was first introduced, even explanations were called for.

9. Commissions for Linemen and their families operating Public Telephones from the village exchange, was introduced in Andhra Pradesh. This gave an incentive to the Linemen to ensure that the exchanges and the lines worked for long hours.

10. Independent surveys were conducted to ascertain the quality of service. Public-spirited people like journalists or the Chambers of Commerce, or Users' Associations could go with the telecom officials at any time of the day to a number of premises, make calls, and find out how many of them succeeded, how many were wrong numbers, what time the operators took to answer, and what type of response they gave. The results used to be published in the newspapers in several districts of Andhra Pradesh, periodically.

11. In order to increase the utilisation of the village exchanges and to open more exchanges, telecom persons were given honorarium for doing marketing work. For every telephone application they brought, they were given Rs. 10/-

12. In the Videsh Sanchar Nigam, agents were appointed for collecting and delivering Fax messages from different parts of the city.

13. As the Annual General Meeting of a public sector enterprise is a farce (none but a few government officers as proxies to the president attend), he invited public to attend a 'general' meeting as a substitute of AGM, presented the Directors' Report and Accounts and activities that is, public scrutiny of a public sector company - Videsh Sanchar Nigam-1989.

In recognition of his outstanding public service through telecommunication, he was given a public service Award by the L.V. Ramaiah Foundation of Madras, in January 1989.



An eminent telecommunications engineer and manager who held important positions in national and international telecommunications organisations (General Manager of Telephones and Telecoms, Dy. Director General in the Department of Telecoms, Chairman and Managing Director of Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited, Governor of INTELSAT, Washington, and INMARSAT, London, Senior Expert of the International Telecommunications Union) Tripurarenji Hanuman Choudary has extensive knowledge of telecommunications systems, services and the revolutionary changes coming all over the world. He sees telecommunications as a facilitator of business, industry, management wealth creation, social inter-course and national economic development. He believes that provision of telephone services by a Government monopoly is inefficient, non-enterprising, unsatisfactory and should be ended. Rendering services at prices related to costs and bringing down costs by application of technology is more important and sensible than administering code book rules. He is author of several hundred popular articles propagating the vision of universal telecommunications and information services at affordable prices by people's enterprises.

In this book, he records how in thirty and more years of telecommunications even as a Government servant, he innovated and initiated people-oriented practices battling against bureaucracy all the while. He believes that telephones are to be extended to rural areas as a development process just like community development or family planning, or illiteracy eradication and shows how it was done in Andhra Pradesh. He points out the lessons that even other developing and socialist countries have for India.

He is the Chairman of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and also the founder Vice-President of the Centre for Telecommunications Management and Studies besides being the President of the Institution of Electronics and Telecommunication Engineers (IETE).