

AS INTRODUCED IN LOK SABHA

Bill No. 123 of 2019

THE INDIAN POST OFFICE (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2019

By

SHRIMATI SUPRIYA SULE, M.P.

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BILL

further to amend the Indian Post Office Act, 1898.

BE it enacted by Parliament in the Seventieth Year of the Republic of India as follows:—

1. (1) This Act may be called the Indian Post Office (Amendment) Act, 2019.

Short title and
commencement.

(2) It shall come into force on such date, as the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint.

Insertion of new Chapter IIA.

2. After chapter II of the Indian Post Office Act, 1898, the following Chapter and sections thereunder shall be inserted, namely:—

“CHAPTER IIA

COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE OF POST OFFICES

Constitution of Post Offices Comprehensive Development Authority.

6A. (1) With effect from such date as the Central Government may, by notification, appoint, there shall be constituted, for the purposes of this Chapter, an Authority, to be known as the Post Offices Comprehensive Development Authority to ensure comprehensive coverage of post offices in the country. 5

(2) The Authority shall consist of,—

(a) Minister of State, Union Ministry of Communications—*ex-officio* Chairperson; 10

(b) Chairman and Managing Director, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), Union Ministry of Communications—*ex-officio* Vice-Chairperson;

(c) Secretaries to the Union Ministries of Communications, Electronics and Information Technology, Finance and Statistics and Programme Implementation—*ex-officio* Members; and 15

(d) Chairperson, State Bank of India—*ex-officio* Member.

(3) The Central Government shall appoint such number of officers and staff as it considers necessary for the functioning of the Authority.

(4) The salary, allowances and terms of conditions of services of officers and staff of the Authority shall be such, as may be prescribed. 20

Meetings of the Authority.

6B. (1) The Authority shall meet at such times and places and shall observe such rules of procedure in regard to transaction of business at its meetings as may be prescribed.

(2) The expenditure incurred by the Chairperson, vice-chairperson and the members to attend meetings shall be borne by their parent organisations. 25

Functions of the Authority.

6C. (1) The Authority shall discharge such functions as may be necessary to ensure comprehensive coverage of Post Offices in the country and formulate a policy, within one year of its constitutions, to be put in action to achieve this objective.

(2) Without prejudice to the provisions contained in sub-section (1), the Authority shall,— 30

(a) undertake a baseline study to collect comprehensive data about the current state of post offices in the country and various facilities available there which shall be completed within one year of the constitution of the Authority;

(b) recommend to the Central Government to establish post offices in every village having population of more than one thousand; 35

(c) recommend to the Central Government to provide all those comprehensive set of facilities in rural area post offices which are available in post offices situated in urban areas;

(d) formulate guidelines to establish post offices as implementing agencies to deliver various services in rural areas; 40

(e) formulate guidelines to ensure post offices to act as intermediaries promoting connectivity in villages which shall include,—

(i) digital, telecom and internet connectivity in rural areas and complete computerisation of post offices; 45

(ii) financial inclusion by providing core banking facilities including Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) services in all post offices;

5 (iii) formulation of policy guidelines to mandate the institution of Post Payment Banks in all post offices which accepts deposits of upto rupees one lakh; and

(iv) enable Post Payment Banks to act as an interface between Government and citizens and serve as a tool to deliver direct benefit transfer services to citizens in rural areas;

10 (f) recommend to the State Governments to recognise post offices as enrolment centres for citizens to obtain voter card, pan card and other identity cards and household enrolment of in-house drinking water and electricity connections;

15 (g) frame guidelines for modernising the existing post offices which shall include,—

(i) making all the post offices disable friendly;

(ii) to upgrade the existing post offices and include all facilities prescribed herein;

20 (iii) setting up grievance redressal cells and call centres for resolving customer related complaints;

(iv) facilitating e-commerce parcel delivery through post offices by proposing e-commerce booking centre at every post office;

25 (v) establishing passport seva kendras at every post office headquarters at block level; and

(vi) setting up Passenger Reservation Counters (PRS counters) at every post office in rural areas with population of more than one thousand;

30 (h) frame guidelines to promote use of banking facilities by women in rural areas through post offices which shall include,—

(i) opening of all women post offices at block level; and

(ii) recommending higher interest rate for deposits and fixed deposits done in post offices in the name of women and girl child;

35 (i) ensure effective functioning of the post offices which shall include,—

(i) mandating long operational hours for post offices;

(ii) prescribing harnessing of solar power through solar panels installed on post office terraces as an alternate source of power in rural areas with connectivity issues;

40 (iii) directing the postmaster to employ local citizens in cases of shortage of manpower; and

45 (iv) recommending to the Central Government that extra work force deployed at the post offices may be included in the rural developmental works undertaken under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS); and

(j) such other activities as may be prescribed by the Central Government, from time to time.

Annual
report.

6D. (1) The Authority shall prepare once every year a report containing statement of its annual accounts and the summary of its activities and schemes it has undertaken during the previous year.

(2) A copy of the report shall be forwarded to the Central Government which shall cause the report to be laid before each House of Parliament as soon as it is received. 5

STATEMENT OF OBJECTS AND REASONS

Making the rural economy self sufficient by equipping it with telecom and internet connectivity, banking and other comprehensive set of facilities compared to the urban areas is required today. With more than 1,54,000 post offices across the country and with 89.9 per cent. of them being concentrated in rural areas, post offices are proposed to be the implementing agencies delivering these services in rural areas.

The Bill formulates that every habitation with population of more than one thousand should have a post office, which would act as an intermediary promoting connectivity in villages. The Bill provides for certain facilities including secure network connectivity (digital and internet) for computerisation of post offices. The Bill also provides for Automated Teller Machines, core banking facilities in all post offices. Every post office is also mandated to have a Post Payment Bank which accepts deposits of up to rupees one lakh and provides direct benefit transfer services to citizens, by acting as an interface between the Government and citizens. The Bill proposed post offices to facilitate enrolment of citizens for voter identity cards, pan cards, other identity cards and household enrolment for in-house drinking water and electricity connections.

The Bill also proposes to make all post offices accessible to differently-abled. The post office premises will also be directed to accommodate grievance redressal cell and a call centre to resolve any customer related complaints. To facilitate delivery of parcels of e-commerce, every post office is proposed to accommodate an e-commerce booking centre. Extending such goods delivery service to rural and backward areas will also generate income.

At the block level, the Bill proposes to establish post office passport seva kendras mandatorily in every block. Such passport Kendras will aid the youth in the rural areas aspiring to study or work abroad. At present, there are only two hundred and eighty post offices across the country with centers to facilitate railway ticket reservation. The Bill formulates provision for compulsory Passenger Reservation Counters at every post office in a rural habitation with more than one thousand population. To promote use of banking facilities by women in rural areas, the Bill provides for all women post offices to be opened at block level with the provision of higher interest rate for deposits and fixed deposits made in post offices in the name of women or girl child.

In terms of functionality, the post offices are directed to be operational for long hours and the solar power through the solar panels installed on their building terraces. Additional work hours are proposed to be adjusted in the one hundred work days quota under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). Thus any additional work done at the post offices is proposed to be considered as developmental works under MGNREGS.

The Bill thus endeavours to enable rural dwellers access to basic services of decent internet and telecom connectivity, and overall development of banking infrastructure in rural areas.

Hence this Bill.

NEW DELHI;
June 6, 2019.

SUPRIYA SULE

FINANCIAL MEMORANDUM

Clause 2 of the Bill *vide* proposed section 6A provides for the constitution of Post Offices Comprehensive Development Authority to ensure comprehensive coverage of post offices in the country. It also provides for appointment of such number of officers and staff for its functioning. The Bill, therefore, if enacted, will involve recurring expenditure of around five hundred crore rupees per annum from the Consolidated Fund of India.

A non-recurring expenditure to the tune of around rupees one hundred crore is also likely to be involved.

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(Shrimati Supriya Sule, M.P.)