

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

**RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 684
TO BE ANSWERED ON 8TH DECEMBER, 2023**

DIGITAL DIVIDE

684 Dr. Anil Sukhdeorao Bonde:

Will the Minister of Communications be pleased to state:

- (a) the structural and procedural reforms which Government has implemented to enhance the telecom sector and foster its development;
- (b) the measures taken by Government to improve the ease of doing business and encourage investments in the telecom sector; and
- (c) the initiatives taken by Government to narrow the 'Digital Divide' in the nation?

ANSWER

**MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMUNICATIONS
(SHRI DEVUSINH CHAUHAN)**

(a) to (c) In the Telecom Sector, Government has brought various reforms in last 10 years. This has led to a transformation in telecom sector and resulted in increase of Telecom subscribers from 93.3 crores in March 2014 to 117.2 crores in March 2023 and internet users from 25.15 crore in March 2014 to 88.12 crore in March 2023. The cost of data has reduced drastically from ₹269 per GB in March 2014 to ₹9.94 per GB in March 2023. India has seen the fastest rollout of 5G services in the world with 3.99 lakhs Base Trans-receivers Station (BTS) deployed across around 738 districts. Median speed for mobile broadband has also improved from 1.30 Mbps in March 2014 to 75.80 Mbps in October 2023. Number of Base Trans-receivers Station (BTS) increased from 6.49 lakhs in March 2014 to 25.42 lakhs in March 2023. As on 13.11.2023 a total of 2,07,346 Gram Panchayats (GPs) has been made Service ready under BharatNet project.

The growth in Telecom Sector has happened due to various structural and procedural reforms implemented by the Government in the last few years to promote healthy competition, infuse liquidity, encourage investment, reduce regulatory burden on Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) and protect interest of consumers. Some of the major reforms are as below:

- (i) Rationalization of definition of adjusted gross revenue.
- (ii) Allowing spectrum trading/sharing
- (iii) Incentivizing spectrum sharing
- (iv) Ensuring adequate spectrum through open and transparent auction.

- (v) Permission for 100% foreign direct investment(FDI) in telecom sector under automatic route subject to safeguards
- (vi) Launch of Gati Shakti Sanchar Portal for centralized Right of Way (RoW) approvals.
- (vii) To facilitate faster and easier deployment of telecom infrastructure, the Indian Telegraph Right of Way Rules (RoW), 2016 amended on 17th August 2022 and 7th August 2023.
- (viii) Simplification of Standing Advisory Committee for Radio Frequency Allocation (SACFA) clearance process for installing telecom towers.
- (ix) With an aim to achieve Ease of Living and Ease of Doing Business, 104-compliance burdens removed or reduced.

The Government is further committed to bring reforms for continued growth of telecom sector, improved quality of services, safety of the users and security of the telecommunication networks. To bridge the digital divide, the Government is implementing various schemes through Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) to provide the telecom coverage to all uncovered 54,808 villages at an outlay of more than ₹41,331 crores for installing 41,160 number of Towers. Further, the Union Cabinet has approved the Amended BharatNet Program with funding of ₹1,39,579 crore for extending the scope of BharatNet to all 6.4 Lakhs inhabited Gram Panchayats (GPs)/villages across 28 States and 6 UTs.
