

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

**RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 4341
TO BE ANSWERED ON 02ND APRIL, 2026**

DIGITAL BHARAT NIDHI

4341 SHRI RAJINDER GUPTA:

Will the Minister of Communications be pleased to state:

- (a) the objectives, structure and operational framework of Digital Bharat Nidhi which has replaced the Universal Service Obligation Fund;
- (b) the manner in which funds collected through the five percent universal service levy on the adjusted gross revenue of telecom operators are proposed to be utilised for expanding telecommunication infrastructure in rural and remote regions;
- (c) whether any financial incentives or viability gap support mechanisms are being considered to encourage private telecom operators to invest in commercially unviable areas; and
- (d) the details of safeguards to ensure equitable access to digital connectivity in geographically difficult regions?

ANSWER

**MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
(DR. PEMMASANI CHANDRA SEKHAR)**

- (a) Following are the objectives of Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN), as defined in the Telecommunications Act, 2023:
 - i) support universal service through promoting access to and delivery of telecommunication services in underserved rural, remote and urban areas;
 - ii) support research and development of telecommunication services, technologies, and products;
 - iii) support pilot projects, consultancy assistance and advisory support towards provision of service under clause (i) above;
 - iv) support introduction of telecommunication services, technologies, and products.

DBN is administered by an Administrator, appointed by the Central Government. The Administrator selects project implementers through competitive bidding or invitation of applications. DBN can fund research, R&D projects, and technical standards and provides for various funding models, including full funding, co-funding, and pilot projects for emerging technologies.

- (b) The sums of money received towards the Digital Bharat Nidhi, shall first be credited to the Consolidated Fund of India, and the Central Government may, if Parliament by appropriation made by law in this behalf so provides, credit such proceeds to the Digital Bharat Nidhi from time to time for being utilised exclusively to meet its objectives.

(c) Yes, the Government actively considers and provides financial incentives and viability gap support mechanisms to encourage private telecom operators to invest in commercially unviable rural and remote areas.

(d) Ensuring equitable access to digital connectivity in geographically difficult regions, the Government has taken many steps including proactive policies, implementing the Telecommunications Act 2023 for regulatory ease, creation of Digital Bharat Nidhi (formerly Universal Service Obligation Fund) for providing financial support for establishing, operating, and maintaining telecom services in commercially unviable rural and remote areas etc.
