

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

**LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.4269
TO BE ANSWERED ON 21ST MARCH, 2018**

FREE DATA TO RURAL TELECOM USERS

4269. SHRI BHEEMRAO B. PATIL:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has recommended to offer 100 MB free data to rural users;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether any consultations have been held with telecom companies and other stakeholders in this regard and if so, the details thereof;
- (d) the manner in which funds collected under Universal Service Obligation Fund will be used for meeting expenses for providing such services;
- (e) whether TRAI has also commented on the poor quality of internet offered by telecom companies to rural area users; and
- (f) if so, the details thereof and the steps taken by the Government in this regard?

ANSWER

**THE MINISTER OF STATE (IC) OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS &
MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS
(SHRI MANOJ SINHA)**

(a) to (c) Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) had suo-moto initiated Consultation Paper on Free Data dated 19.05.2016. After a consultation process involving obtaining comments and counter comments from stakeholders and organising an Open House Discussion (OHD) with stakeholders on 24th October 2016, TRAI had given its recommendations to Department of Telecommunications (DoT) on "Encouraging Data Usage in Rural Areas through Provisioning of Free Data" dated 19.12.2016. The Recommendations inter-alia state that:

- (i) In order to bridge the affordability gap for the persons residing in rural areas and to support Governments efforts towards cashless economy by incentivising digital means, the Authority recommends that scheme under which a reasonable amount of data, say 100 MB per month, may be made available to rural subscribers for free.
- (ii) The cost of implementation of the scheme may be met from Universal Services Obligation Fund(USOF).

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(d) TRAI has recommended that Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) offering mobile data services to target users will be required to furnish details of data consumed on covered mobile connections to the USOF. The USOF will provide support to the TSP for the total data consumed during the month, subject to the cap of 100 MB, at a pre-determined rate per MB.

(e) & (f) TRAI in its recommendations has not commented on the quality of internet offered by telecom companies to rural area users; however, TRAI has highlighted the rural-urban disparity in terms of telecom subscribers.

In order to provide internet access in rural areas to bridge rural –urban disparity, Government is providing broadband connectivity through BharatNet project in all the Gram Panchayats of the country in a phased manner.
