

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

**LOK SABHA  
STARRED QUESTION NO. 346  
TO BE ANSWERED ON 18<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2020**

**USOF**

**†\*346. SHRI PASHUPATI NATH SINGH:**

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

- (a) the objectives of the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF);
- (b) whether the Government has not been able to achieve the above objectives of USOF, if so, the details thereof and the reasons therefor;
- (c) whether the Government has fixed the accountability for non-fulfilment of the said objectives; and
- (d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

**ANSWER**

**MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS, LAW & JUSTICE AND  
ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
(SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD)**

- (a) to (d) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

**STATEMENT TO BE LAID ON THE TABLE OF LOK SABHA IN RESPECT OF PARTS (a) to (d) OF LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. \*346 FOR 18<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2020 REGARDING “USOF”.**

(a) & (b) Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) was established with effect from 01.04.2002 under the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Act 2003, as amended from time to time, to provide financial support for the provision of telecom services in commercially unviable rural and remote areas of the country. The scope of USO Fund covers all telecom services including mobile services, broadband connectivity and creation of infrastructure like Optical Fibre Cable (OFC), etc. in rural and remote areas.

A number of schemes have been taken up with funding from USOF for expansion of telecom services in rural and remote areas of the country as given below:

- (i) Under **BharatNet project** to provide broadband connectivity in all the Gram Panchayats (approx. 2.5 lakh) in the country, as of February 2020, a total of 1,36,693 Gram Panchayats (including Block Headquarters) have been made Service Ready.
- (ii) Public **Wi-Fi hotspots at the 25,000 rural telephone exchanges** of BSNL are being provided. As of February 2020, a total of 24,289 Wi-Fi hotspots are installed and out of them, 23,787 are providing services.
- (iii) For provision of **mobile services in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected areas**, the Phase-I scheme has been completed by installing 2343 towers.
- (iv) Under **Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan (CTDP) for mobile connectivity in the North Eastern Region**, as of February 2020, a total of 1269 towers have been installed, and out of them 1153 sites are already providing services.
- (v) **Laying of submarine optical fibre cable between Chennai and Andaman & Nicobar Islands** for providing high bandwidth connectivity to Andaman & Nicobar Islands is in progress and is targeted to be completed by June 2020.
- (vi) For providing **mobile connectivity in 354 villages of uncovered border areas**, Letter of Intent (LoI) has been issued to the successful bidder.

USOF projects such as BharatNet, LWE scheme, CTDP for North Eastern Region (NER) are of mega nature and the sites are widely dispersed across the country in difficult rural and remote areas. Implementation of the projects in hilly and forest areas, LWE affected areas and getting Right of Way (RoW) and other permissions pose a challenge and require close coordination with various Central and State Government Authorities. All out efforts are made to expeditiously implement the projects.

(c) & (d) The implementation of the USOF schemes is carried out through the Service Providers after entering into contracts, and action is taken as indicated therein for not meeting the stipulated targets.

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