INVESTMENT IN NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE OF RURAL AREAS

†3648. SHRI SUKHBIR SINGH JAUNAPURIA:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government is aware that the private telecom companies are reluctant to invest in network infrastructure of rural areas resulting in poor condition of broadband access;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reaction of the Government thereto along with the corrective action taken by the Government in this regard;

(c) the steps taken by the Government to ensure intensive digital access in urban and rural areas of the country; and

(d) the funds earmarked and spent by the Government to make available the internet broadband services separately in urban and rural areas during 12th five year plan?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMUNICATIONS, EDUCATION AND ELECTRONICS & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
(SHRI SANJAY DHOTRE)

(a) & (b) The private telecom companies are given licenses to provide telecom services in the country. As per the Notice Inviting Application (NIA) for auction of spectrum and respective license conditions, Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) are required to fulfill minimum rollout obligations which include coverage of District Headquarters, Block Headquarters and rural SDCAs (Short Distance Charging Areas). Further expansion beyond rollout obligations lies with the TSPs depending on their business decision.

As per data collected from TSPs in 2020, it is estimated that around 5,72,551 villages out of 5,97,618 inhabited villages in the country have mobile network coverage. However, State/UT-wise details of inhabited villages having 3G/4G mobile internet coverage are given in Annexure. Mobile coverage in uncovered villages in the country is being provided by the Government and TSPs in a phased manner. In this regard, the measures taken by Government are inter-alia given below:
• Government has prioritized to reach remote areas of the country such as North-Eastern States, Islands, Himalayan States, Western Border States and more importantly the Left Wing Extremism affected areas in the first phase.

• BharatNet project is being implemented in a phased manner to provide broadband connectivity to the all Gram Panchayats (GPs) (approx. 2.5 Lakh) in the country.

• Under Left Wing Extremism (LWE) Phase -I scheme, 2343 mobile towers have been installed for provisioning of mobile services. Project has been completed.

• LWE Phase-II scheme has provision for 2,542 number of towers locations for providing 4G mobile services.

• A Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan (CTDP) is under implementation for North Eastern Region to provide mobile coverage in uncovered villages, along with National Highways and to strengthen transmission network.

• Scheme for providing mobile connectivity in 354 uncovered villages of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, J&K, Ladakh, border areas and other priority areas is under implementation.

• A scheme for provisioning of 4G based mobile services in 502 uncovered villages of Aspirational districts of four states Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh & Rajasthan has been finalized.

(c) BharatNet project is being implemented in a phased manner to provide broadband connectivity to the all GPs (approx. 2.5 Lakh) in the country. As on 27.01.2021, a total number of 1,51,431 GPs (including Block Headquarters) have been made Service Ready under the project. Moreover, the proposal of the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) for proliferation of Broadband through Public Wi-Fi Networks under the framework of Prime Minister’s Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM-WANI) has recently been approved by the Government. The proposal will enable proliferation of Broadband internet through public Wi-Fi hotspots which will facilitate broadband access in the country including rural areas.

The Government has also taken several policy initiatives to facilitate infrastructure growth in the country which include permitting trading/sharing/liberalization of spectrum, permitting passive & active infrastructure sharing, notification of Right of Way Rules 2016 etc.

(d) The Government does not specifically earmark funds for providing internet broadband services separately in urban and rural areas. However, 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 USOF covers all telecom services including mobile services, broadband connectivity and creation of infrastructure like Optical Fibre Cable (OFC), etc. in rural and remote areas.
Annexure referred to in reply of para (a) & (b) of Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 3648 to be answered on 17th March, 2021 raised by Hon’ble Member of Parliament Shri Sukhbir Singh Jaunapuria, regarding “Investment in Network Infrastructure of Rural Areas”

State/UT-wise number of inhabited villages with 3G/4G mobile internet coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>State/ UT Name</th>
<th>Number of inhabited villages as per census 2011</th>
<th>Number of inhabited villages with 3G/4G mobile internet coverage as per 2020 data</th>
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**TOTAL** | 5,97,618 | 5,60,179

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