

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
**LOK SABHA**  
**STARRED QUESTION NO. \*261**  
TO BE ANSWERED ON: 11.03.2026

**DIGITAL EXCLUSION IN RURAL AND LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS**

**\*261. SMT. PRATIMA MONDAL:**

Will the Minister of ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

- (a) the manner in which the Government addresses persistent digital exclusion in rural and low-income households particularly in States like West Bengal where central digital infrastructure funds have reportedly lagged;
- (b) the manner in which the Government is addressing anti-competitive practices of dominant digital platforms while ensuring innovation and consumer protection; and
- (c) whether the Government has assessed the economic and reputational costs of frequent internet shutdowns on the country's digital economy ambitions and if so, the details thereof?

**ANSWER**

MINISTER FOR ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
(SHRI ASHWINI VAISHNAW)

(a) to (c): A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

**STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN THE REPLY TO LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. \*261 FOR 11.03.2026 REGARDING DIGITAL EXCLUSION IN RURAL AND LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS**

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(a) to (c): In line with Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision to democratize technology and empower citizens, the Government of India had launched the Digital India programme in July, 2015.

Through this programme, Bharat has bridged the digital divide using a three-pronged strategy: Increasing access to internet, making internet affordable and providing digital public infrastructure. This has resulted in inclusive digital growth.

Today, Bharat is uniquely placed among the large economies which have successfully implemented digital public infrastructure. In fact, in the recent AI Impact Summit, President Macron of France stated that India has built something that no other country in the world has built. Steps taken by Government of India are as below:

**A. Increasing access to internet:**

Internet access has increased manifold in the last decade.

Year	2014	2025
Internet connectivity	25 Crore	103 Crore

(Source: TRAI)

Rapid expansion of 4G and 5G networks, vast network of optical fiber cables, and focus on digital infrastructure has resulted in this massive increase in access to internet.

**B. Making internet affordable:**

India has among the lowest data tariffs in the world. The table compares the tariffs as available on various public sources:

Country	Approx. Cost per 1 GB (USD)
<b>India</b>	<b>~ 0.08 – 0.10 (lowest)</b>
Bangladesh	~ 0.23-0.34
Nepal	~ 0.27-0.43
Sri Lanka	~ 0.25-0.35
Pakistan	~ 0.12-0.18
France	~ 0.16-0.20
Germany	~ 2.14
<b>Global Average</b>	<b>~ 2.59</b>

As evident from above, India's telecom tariffs are 25 times less than the global average. This has been made possible because of the transparency in telecom sector brought by the Hon'ble Prime Minister.

### **C. Providing digital public infrastructure:**

India has developed a unique digital public infrastructure which has enabled large scale digital solutions for our people.

**Aadhaar:** Over 1.43+ billion Aadhaar numbers have been generated, providing a universal digital identity. This has enabled access to welfare schemes and financial inclusion.

Through Aadhaar-linked Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT), cash benefits from various welfare schemes (328 Schemes of 56 Ministries) are directly transferred into beneficiaries' bank accounts. This has done with the requirement of multiple documents and eliminated duplicate or fake beneficiaries.

More than 16,600 crore authentications have been carried out by various organizations in order to avail various services. 10.67+ Crore Aadhaar IDs have been generated in the state of West Bengal.

**Unified Payments Interface (UPI):** UPI has enabled large-scale digital payment adoption with over 460 million users and billions of transactions monthly. This platform serves 6.5 crore merchants, and connects 685 banks on one platform, making it the world's largest digital payment system.

UPI powers 81% of India's digital payments and nearly 49% of global real-time digital payments. Therefore, the three pronged strategy has resulted in inclusive digital growth in the last decade in our country.

### **Safeguards for public safety and public order**

The Central Government and State Governments are empowered to issue orders for temporary suspension of internet to address the public emergency and public safety concerns. This is done as per the Telecommunication (Temporary suspension of Services) Rules, 2024 and the Guidelines of Supreme court in this regard.

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