

The total number of landline connections of BSNL and MTNL working as on 31st March of the year during the last five years are given below:

(figures in lakhs)

Number of landline connections as on					
Year	31.03.2004	31.03.2005	31.03.2006	31.03.2007	31.03.2008
BSNL	354.3	358.6	354.2	337.4	315.6
MTNL	43.3	40.1	38.2	37.2	36.8

(b) The number of landline connections surrendered which includes disconnections due to non-payments during the last five years of BSNL and MTNL are given below:

Total landline telephones surrendered including disconnection due to non-payments

(figures in lakhs)

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
BSNL	32.6	34.2	38.1	42.6	43.8
MTNL	3.8	2.9	2.5	2.3	2.1

(c) The reasons for withdrawal of landline connections by the customers are given below:

- (i) Preference of customers for mobile telephone over landline telephone.
- (ii) Surrendering of 2nd and above telephone taken for internet etc. due to availability of broadband.
- (iii) Shifting of landline customer to BSNL Mobile.
- (iv) Shifting of landline customer to private operator.
- (v) Surrender of excess landline telephone connections.
- (vi) Shifting of office/company/residence.

Mobile call charges

2662. SHRI T.T.V. DHINAKARAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is proposed to decrease the Mobile call charges in rural areas in order to increase the connectivity;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI JYOTIRADITYA MADHAVRAO SCINDIA):
 (a) No, Sir. At present there is no such proposal. The power to regulate telecom tariffs has been mandated to Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). TRAI has put most of the Tariffs for telecom services in the country under forbearance. Thus, the service providers have the flexibility to offer the tariff packages keeping in view the requirements of customers and market conditions.

(b) Does not arise in view of (a) above.

(c) As explained above, the telecom tariffs are mostly under forbearance and various operators are free to provide services at competitive rates. Tariffs offered by Government PSU BSNL are reviewed from time to time on the basis of needs of the customers, prevailing market conditions and TRAI guidelines. The rates offered by BSNL for its mobile services are either cheaper or competitive to the tariff offered by private operators.

Disruptions of internet connectivity

2663. DR. M.A.M. RAMASWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Internet connectivity in India was severely hit due to disruptions of under-sea Internet carrying cables; and

(b) if so, the steps taken by Government to ensure uninterrupted Internet connectivity in such eventualities in future?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI JYOTIRADITYA MADHAVRAO SCINDIA): (a) Yes, Sir. Internet connectivity was affected as one international under-sea cable system near Malaysia and two international under-sea cable systems near Egypt broke down in the month of January, 2008.

(b) International Long Distance (ILD) sector has been liberalized. International Long Distance (ILD) service providers are permitted to make techno commercial agreement to provide restoration capacity on alternate submarine cable systems to meet such eventualities. Further, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has already issued regulations "International Telecommunication Access to Essential Facilities at Cable Landing Stations Regulations, 2007" for access facilitation to the essential facilities at cable landing station.

Development of North East

2664. SHRI PENUMALLI MADHU: Will the Minister of DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH EASTERN REGION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is ready to declare North East as a priority region for development; and

(b) if not, the alternative measures being taken up by Government to arrest disruptive and violent activities in Assam, Manipur and Bangladesh territories?

THE MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH EASTERN REGION (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) The Central Government has been according priority to the holistic development of the North-East Region. In this regard some important measures that have been taken are:

- All the eight North Eastern States are treated as Special Category States.
- Since 1998-99, the Central Ministries, except those which are specifically exempted, are required to earmark at least 10% of their GBS for the North-East Region.
- The Government has set up a Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR) out of the unspent balance of Central Ministries from their mandatory allocation for