

mechanism through Catering Monitoring Cell at Head Quarter and Division level. About 27875 inspections have been carried out regularly by the Zonal Railways at all levels, in the last one year from November, 2010 to October, 2011, as a result of which 37.07 % complaints have come down during the same period, as compared to corresponding period of last year, when the management of catering services was under IRCTC.

Operating a special train to Buddhist Circuits

*164. SHRI BAISHNAB PARIDA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the proposal of Government of Odisha for operating a special train to Buddhist circuits in Odisha connecting Bodhgaya/Varanasi is under consideration of the Ministry;
- (b) if so, by when the proposal would be cleared; and
- (c) if not, the teething problems in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI DINESH TRIVEDI): (a) No, Sir. No proposal is under consideration in the Ministry for operating a special train to Buddhist circuits in Odisha connecting Bodhgaya/Varanasi.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

Utilization of USOF for broadband services in rural areas

*165. SHRI B.S. GNANADESIKAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government has proposed to utilize the funds under the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF), to give subsidy to the telecom operators for providing broadband services in rural areas of the country; and
- (b) if so, the details thereof and the steps taken by Government to permit private players in rural connectivity and the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI KAPIL SIBAL): (a) and (b) Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) has a number of ongoing and planned schemes to increase broadband penetration in rural and remote areas of the country by

providing minimum viability gap funding as determined through a competitive bid process. The details of the schemes of USOF are given in Statement (See below).

Any licensed telecom operators/registered infrastructure providers, including private players, can participate in the USOF Schemes, subject to meeting the eligibility criteria and terms & conditions of the USOF Schemes.

Statement

USOF Broadband Schemes

- (a) The Universal Services Obligation Fund (USOF) has been established under the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Act with the primary objective of providing access to the telegraph services to people in the rural and remote areas at affordable and reasonable prices. Universal access levy @5% of the adjusted gross revenue of telecom service providers is collected and credited to the Consolidated Fund of India and made available to the USOF after due appropriation of the Parliament. The USOF assists schemes only in the rural and remote areas.
- (b) For expansion of Broadband Services, USOF has adopted a two pronged strategy i.e. launching of scheme for provision of broadband to the end users (such as Wireline/ Wireless/ Satellite Broadband Schemes) as well as augmentation of OFC backhaul media for carrying the broadband traffic from rural areas to the core network. Accordingly, for rural and remote areas, the following schemes have been undertaken by USOF :

1. Rural broadband Schemes: undertaken/planned by USOF

The Indian Telegraph Rules have been amended, and stream IV has been added under the title "Provision of broadband connectivity to villages in a phased manner" to bring provisioning of broadband connectivity to the rural areas under the purview of the USOF.

The rural broadband connectivity will cover Institutional Users, such as Higher secondary schools, Public Health Centres etc., as well as Individual Users, located in the villages. The Schemes are as under :

(a) Ongoing Scheme: "Rural Wireline Broadband Scheme (under Stream-IV of USOF Rules):

Brief and background note: For providing broadband connectivity to rural & remote areas,

USOF has signed an Agreement with BSNL on January 20, 2009 under the **Rural Wireline Broadband Scheme** to provide wire-line broadband connectivity to rural & remote areas by leveraging the existing rural exchanges infrastructure and copper wire-line network. **This scheme is being implemented at pan-India level.** The objective is to make the rural and remote areas broadband enabled by facilitating the service providers in creating Broadband.

The speed of each of the broadband connections shall be at least 512 kbps always on, with the capability to deliver data, voice and video services in the fixed mode. The rural broadband connectivity will cover Institutional Users, such as Gram Panchayats, Higher Secondary Schools and Public Health Centres, as well as Individual Users, located in the villages.

Under this scheme, BSNL will provide 8,88,832 wire-line Broadband connections to individual users and Government Institutions and will set up 28,672 Kiosks over a period of 5-years, i.e., by 2014. The subsidy disbursement is for (i) broadband connections, Customer Premises Equipment (CPE), Computer/Computing devices (ii) setting up of Kiosks for public access to broadband services. The estimated subsidy outflow is Rs. 1500 crore in 5 years time that includes subsidy for 9 lakh broadband connections, CPEs, computers/computing devices and Kiosks.

Present Status: Under this scheme, as of October 2011, a total of 3,29,169 broadband connections have been provided.

Roadmap ahead with target dates: The scheme has an overall target to provide 8,88,832 wire-line Broadband connections by 2014.

b) Planned Schemes:

- 1. General Infrastructure Augmentation - Optical Fibre Network Augmentation, Creation and Management of Intra-District SDHQ-DHQ OFC Network for backhauling**

Background

The Indian Telegraph Rules have been amended, and Stream-V enables USOF to provide support for creation of general infrastructure in rural and remote areas for the development of telecommunication facilities.

Salient Features of the Schemes:

For provision of broadband in rural areas, sufficient back-haul capacity is required to integrate the voice and data traffic from the access network in the rural areas to their core network by strengthening the OFC network. Accordingly, this scheme considers OFC Network augmentation between the blocks' HQ and Districts' HQ to begin with. The States of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, & Nagaland have been taken up for implementation.

This OFC Schemes would be undertaken on BOO model, i.e. build, operate & own basis, and accordingly, the Telecom Service Providers, implementing the schemes would build, operate, own and manage all the equipment/infrastructure for the execution of the scheme.

All locations shall be connected on physical OFC Ring Route(s) with the DHQ node ensuring the cable route diversity and ring capacity of at least 2.5 Gbps, with the capability to efficiently transport various protocols, including TDM, IP, Frame Relay, etc., for integrated voice, data and video signals in all the specified districts.

The following **Optical Fibre Network** schemes have been taken up :

- a) **"Optical Fibre Network Augmentation, Creation and Management of Intra-District SDHQ-DHQ OFC Network in ASSAM"**

Brief and background note: The State of **Assam** has been taken up first for implementation. As per the outcome of the tender for implementation of this scheme in Assam, BSNL has been declared the successful bidder at a subsidy quote of Rs. 98.89 Crore, and subsequently, an Agreement has been signed with them on 12.02.2010 in this regard. This Scheme is envisaged to be rolled out in a phased manner during the current Five Year Plan (2007-2012).

This OFC Scheme would connect 354 total locations in Assam in total 27 Districts within 24 months from the date of signing of the Agreement. The Agreement shall be valid for a period of **seven years from the effective date.**

At least 70% of the subsidized bandwidth capacity, created under the scheme, shall be shared with the licensed service providers in the area of ASSAM at a rate not more than 26.22 % of the current TRAI ceiling tariffs.

Present Status: As of October 2011, about 163 nodes have been installed so far (Out of 354).

Roadmap ahead with target dates: The scheme has an overall target to install 354 nodes in Assam. The target for 2011-12 and 2012-13 has been fixed as 140 & 122 nodes respectively.

b) **"Optical Fibre Network Augmentation, Creation and Management of Intra-District SDHQ-DHQ OFC Network in NE-I Circle (comprising states of Meghalaya, Mizoram & Tripura),"**

Brief and background note: The States of **Meghalaya, Mizoram & Tripura** have been taken up for OFC augmentation in this scheme. As per the outcome of the tender for implementation of this scheme, M/s RailTel Corporation of India Limited has been declared the successful bidder at their subsidy quote of Rs. 89.50 Crore.

This OFC Scheme would connect 188 locations in 19 Districts within 24 months from the date of signing of the Agreement. The Agreement shall be valid for a period of **eight years from the effective date**.

At least 70% of the subsidized bandwidth capacity, created under the scheme, shall be shared with the licensed service providers in the area at a rate not more than 12% of the current TRAI ceiling tariffs.

Present Status: Network roll out is yet to start.

Roadmap ahead with target dates: This OFC Scheme would connect 188 locations in 19 Districts within 24 months from the date of signing of the Agreement.

c) **"Optical Fibre Network Augmentation, Creation and Management of Intra-District SDHQ-DHQ OFC Network in NE-II Circle (comprising states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur & Nagaland),"**

Brief and background note: The States of **Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur & Nagaland** have been taken up for OFC augmentation in this scheme. As per the outcome of the tender for implementation of this scheme, M/s RailTel Corporation of India Limited has been declared the successful bidder at their-subsidy quote of Rs. 298.50 Crore.

This OFC Scheme would connect 407 locations in total 30 Districts within 30 months from the date of signing of the Agreement. The Agreement shall be valid for a period of eight years from the effective date.

At least 70% of the subsidized bandwidth capacity, created under the scheme, shall be shared with the licensed service providers in the area at a rate not more than 27% of the current TRAI ceiling tariffs.

Present Status: Network roll out is yet to start.

Roadmap ahead with target dates: This OFC Scheme would connect 407 locations in total 30 Districts within 30 months from the date of signing of the Agreement.

2. National Optical Fibre Network

Government has approved creation of National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN) for providing broadband connectivity to all Panchayats. The plan is to extend the existing optical fibre network initially upto Panchayats by utilizing the Universal Services Obligation Fund (USOF) and creating an institutional mechanism for management and operation of the NOFN for ensuring non discriminatory access to all service providers.

The cost of initial phase of the NOFN scheme is likely to be about Rs. 20,000 crore. A similar amount of investment is likely to be made by the private sector complementing the NOFN infrastructure while providing services to individual users. The project will be funded by Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF).

National Informatics Centre (NIC) has been assigned a project by DoT/USOF for carrying out the Geo Information System (GIS) mapping of the existing OFC Network of the various Telecom Operators such as BSNL, RailTel, Power Grid etc. and the work is in progress. The mapping of the existing OFC will enable to calculate the incremental length of the cable required for connecting all the 2.5 lakh Panchayats with OFC.

As per the approval of the Cabinet, the action for establishing and operationalising Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) has been initiated for management and operation of the NOFN and ensuring non-discriminatory access to all service providers. The network proposed, under the scheme, is to be completed in 2 years' time.