

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD): (a) to (c) Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) has launched a plan offering, its postpaid and prepaid customers, free incoming voice call facility while in national roaming initially for a period of one year w.e.f. 15.6.2015 under its free national roaming tariff plan.

Laying of Optical Fibre Network under Digital India Programme

1345. DR. K.V.P. RAMACHANDRA RAO: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Centre and Andhra Pradesh are at logger heads over laying of Optical Fibre Network under Digital India Programme;

(b) if so, what is the bone of contention and in what way the Centre proposes to resolve the issue;

(c) whether pace of the programme is undermined by the non-availability of qualified contractors to execute the project; and

(d) if so, how Government is going ahead to address the issue?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD): (a) No, Sir. Government of Andhra Pradesh has submitted a Detailed Project Report (DPR) to Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) for laying of optical fibre network, which is under examination.

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

(c) and (d) National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN) project was planned to connect all Gram Panchayats (approx. 2.5 Lakh) in the country through Optical Fibre Cable (OFC) by bridging the connectivity gap between Gram Panchayats (GPs) and Blocks for providing broadband connectivity by all categories of service providers on non-discriminatory basis. The pace of implementation of the project was, however, slow. As on 19.07.2015, OFC laying in 22,946 Gram Panchayats have been completed.

In order to review the strategy and approach towards speedy implementation of National Optical Fibre Network, Government of India constituted a Committee on 14th January, 2015. The Committee submitted its report on 31st March, 2015.

The issues in the implementation strategy identified by the Committee were as follows:

(i) Lack of accountability, financial or otherwise, in project implementation.

- (ii) Lack of ownership of the project by the CPSUs and inability of BBNL in ensuring timely project implementation.
- (iii) Fragmented nature of project implementation design both in terms of geographical spread while phasing implementation and in assignment of responsibilities for project components leading to inter-agency co-ordination problems that have arisen and also anticipated to arise in future.
- (iv) In Phase I, the Blocks to be connected were selected based on the least length of incremental optical fibre to be laid. While this was intended to speed up implementation, it has meant non-contiguous coverage on ground which is likely to render service layer integration difficult, besides making alternative options of implementation an issue to be addressed.
- (v) Excessive emphasis on cost controls leading to lack of empowerment of implementing agencies.
- (vi) Absence of competitive price discovery for project management.
- (vii) Network rollout on a nationwide scale through limited agencies.
- (viii) The procurement process for PLB duct and tendering process for trenching and laying have been delayed due to BBNL's rigidity in decision-making along with the CPSU's trepidation of taking decisions that could be questioned later.
- (ix) Inadequate human resource and technological tools available within BBNL to monitor and manage the project.
- (x) Lack of adequate advance planning in BBNL to various elements of NOFN – service provision, bandwidth utilization, operations, repairs and maintenance etc.
- (xi) Lack of adequate empowerment of BBNL has affected expeditious decision-making impacting project timelines.
- (xii) The near absence of any inter-linkage with the providers of content and services is sure to lead to a situation where even if the network were established, its utilization would be extremely low, hindering the vision of Digital India.

The Committee, *inter-alia* recommended that the project be renamed as BharatNet to reflect the national aspiration to establish highly scalable broadband network infrastructure accessible on a non-discriminatory basis, to realize the vision of Digital India, in partnership with States and the private sector.

The Committee also recommended to revise the architecture, implementation and utilisation strategies to reach affordable broadband in rural areas across the country.

Utilisation of USO fund

1346. DR. CHANDAN MITRA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

- (a) the total collection of Universal Access Levy (UAL) *vis-a-vis* the amount credited to Universal Service Organisation (USO) fund since its inception year-wise;
- (b) the reasons for diversion of USO fund for purposes other than the stated objectives for which the levy is meant; and
- (c) the corrective steps taken by Government to ensure utilisation of USO fund exclusively towards the stated objectives?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI RAVISHANKAR PRASAD): (a) The total collection of Universal Access Levy (UAL) *vis-à-vis* the amount credited to Universal Service Obligation (USO) Fund since its inception year-wise is enclosed as Statement-I (*See below*).

(b) and (c) Not applicable. The USO fund is being utilized exclusively for meeting the Universal Service Obligation as per provision made under clause 9B of the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Act, 2003. This has also been confirmed by the Ministry of Finance *vide* their letter no. F2(35)-B(AC)/2009 dated 03.05.2012 (Statement-II) wherein it has been stated that the funds transferred to USOF are only available for USO activities and expansion of rural telephony.

Statement- I

*Statement showing the balance of UAL amount available
as potential fund under USO as on 30.06.2015*

(₹ in crore)

Year	UAL collections (Booked figures as per DoT A/cs)	Funds allocated and disbursed through USOF	Reimbursement of LF and Spectrum Charges	Balance (CB)
1	2	3	4	5
2002-03	1653.61	300.00	2300	
2003-04	2143.22	200.00	2300	
2004-05	3457.73	1314.59	1765.68	