

empowers Central/State Government, on occurrence of public emergency or in the interest of public safety, to take temporary possession of licensed telegraphs and to order interception or detention or non-transmission of messages.

In pursuance of these provisions of Indian Telegraph Act and in order to streamline the process of temporary suspension of telecom services, the Department of Telecommunications has notified “Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017” on 07.08.2017. As per these rules, the directions for temporary suspension of telecom services, including internet services in an area, can either be issued by the Union Home Secretary or the State Home Secretary, as the case may be, due to public emergency, or in the interest of public safety. These directions are then reviewed by the Review Committee constituted in the Central or State Government under the Chairmanship of Cabinet Secretary or Chief Secretary, as the case may be, within five working days of issue of such directions.

Before finalizing these rules, inter-ministerial consultations were held with Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Law and Justice, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Ministry of Finance and NITI Aayog.

Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has informed that it does not maintain records of internet shutdowns ordered by the State Governments. Further, MHA has not exercised its power under the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017 till date.

#### **Free data services to rural masses**

850. DR. PRADEEP KUMAR BALMUCHU: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has suggested Government to consider providing free data services to the rural masses;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether Government has taken any decision in the matter; and
- (d) if so, the details thereof, if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI MANOJ SINHA): (a) and (b) The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) had suo-moto initiated a Consultation Paper on Free Data on 19.05.2016. Subsequently, TRAI provided its recommendations to Department of Telecommunications (DoT) on “Encouraging Data Usage in Rural Area through Provisioning of Free Data” dated 19.12.2016. The recommendations *inter alia* state that:

- (i) In order to bridge the affordability gap for the persons residing in rural areas and to support Government's efforts towards cashless economy by incentivising digital means, the Authority recommends that scheme under which a reasonable amount of data, say 100MB per month, may be made available to rural subscribers for free.
- (ii) The cost of implementation of the scheme may be met from Universal Services Obligation Fund (USOF).

(c) and (d) The recommendations were referred back to TRAI for clarifications by DoT *vide* letter dated 25-09-2017. The response from TRAI dated 29-11-2017 has been received and is being examined in DoT.

#### **Use of drones for delivering parcels**

851. SHRI SANJAY RAUT: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is considering to provide postal services by using latest technology with support of drones, for delivering mail and parcels at various parts of the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof along with indicating details of study done so far in this regard; and

(c) by when this system will be started in the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI MANOJ SINHA): (a) No Sir. No proposal to use drones for delivery of mail or parcels is under consideration of the Department at present. However, the Department has taken measures such as development of a smart phone based Postman Mobile Application through which, delivery information can be updated on a real time basis and electronic signature of customers can be obtained on the smart phone.

(b) and (c) Do not arise, in view of (a) above.

#### **Interconnectivity regulations for service providers**

852. SHRI N. GOKULAKRISHNAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has issued new interconnectivity regulations, mandating service providers to enter into an interconnection agreement on non-discriminatory basis within 30 days of receiving a request from another operator;