

- (i) Under Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected areas Phase-II project, installation of 2,217 mobile towers has been approved for providing mobile connectivity covering the States of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal;
- (ii) Mobile connectivity in 354 villages of uncovered border areas including Ladakh and Kargil Region, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and other priority areas has also been approved;
- (iii) A Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan for mobile connectivity in the North Eastern Region to provide mobile coverage in uncovered villages and alongwith National Highways and to augment transmission network;
- (iv) Laying of submarine optical fibre cable between Chennai and Andaman & Nicobar Islands for providing connectivity to Andaman and Nicobar Islands;and
- (v) Mobile connectivity to cover uncovered villages and along National Highway (NH 223) in Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Finalisation of revival package for MTNL and BSNL

1926. SHRI BINOY VISWAM: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that the revival package for the ailing MTNL and BSNL has been finalized and announced by Government;
- (b) if so, the details of the plan and the steps being taken for its implementation;
- (c) whether the employees of these two public sector companies have been taken into confidence before finalizing the revival package; and
- (d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD): (a) to (d) The Cabinet in the meeting held on 23.10.2019 approved a revival plan for Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) and Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) which, *inter-alia*, includes measures to reduce the staff cost by offering Voluntary Retirement Scheme

(VRS) to the employees of age 50 years and above, administrative allotment of spectrum for providing 4G services, monetisation of assets, debt restructuring by raising of sovereign guarantee bonds and in-principle approval for merger of BSNL and MTNL. Accordingly, BSNL/MTNL have offered Voluntary Retirement Scheme to their employees on 04.11.2019 which is open till 03.12.2019. The revival plans for BSNL and MTNL were proposed after considering all relevant aspects including, *inter-alia*, the recommendations of consultants, suggestions received from different Unions/Associations and approval of the revival plan by the respective Boards of BSNL and MTNL.

Impact of VRS on smooth functioning of BSNL

1927. SHRI M.P. VEERENDRAKUMAR: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government has announced VRS in BSNL and MTNL and if so, the details thereof, including the reasons for the decision;
- (b) the number of people who have opted for VRS so far; and
- (c) whether there is an apprehension that it will badly affect the smooth functioning of BSNL especially the exchanges in rural areas?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD): (a) The Cabinet in its meeting held on 23.10.2019 approved the revival plan for Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) which *inter-alia*, includes measures to reduce the staff cost by offering Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) to the employees of age 50 years and above.

(b) As on 27.11.2019, 79101 employees of BSNL and 14050 employees of MTNL have applied for voluntary retirement under the scheme. However, the scheme is open till 03.12.2019 and the actual number will be known thereafter.

(c) BSNL has reported that it is making all necessary arrangements to ensure smooth functioning of BSNL including the exchanges in rural areas.

Enhancing efficiency of Speed Post services of India Post

1928. SHRI SAMBHAJI CHHATRAPATI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state: