

As regards monitoring at District level, the State-level officers/officials of BBNL carry out weekly monitoring and their reports are compiled at BBNL corporate office.

(b) As part of BharatNet project, the Last Mile connectivity, through Wi-Fi or any other suitable broadband access technology, is to be provided in all Gram Panchayats.

As on 24.02.2020, Wi-Fi hotspots have been installed in 45,769 Gram Panchayats (GPs) and out of them, services are being provided in 18,683 GPs, catering to about 12.67 lakh subscribers. Further, 32,927 Fibre to the Home (FTTH) broadband connections have been provided.

The broadband connectivity to all the 2.5 (approx.) lakh Gram Panchayats is targeted to be provided by August 2021. As on 24.02.2020, a TOTAL of 1,36,341 Gram Panchayats (including BHQs) have been made Service Ready.

(c) As per the original Union Cabinet approval dated 25.10.2011 for creation of National Optical Fibre Network (now known as BharatNet) for broadband connectivity to panchayats, an indicative requirement of ₹ 20,100 crore was approved. Subsequently, the Union Cabinet on 19.07.2017 approved a modified strategy for implementing BharatNet at a TOTAL cost of ₹ 42,068 crore. As on 28.02.2020, a sum of ₹ 22,089.25 crore has been disbursed under BharatNet Project from Universal Service Obligation Fund.

Launching of National Broadband Mission

1606. SHRI DHARMAPURI SRINIVAS: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has recently launched National Broadband Mission with a view to provide broadband services to all the villages in the country by 2022;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the other objectives of the mission; and

(d) in what manner it is different from BharatNet programme?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI DHOTRE SANJAY SHAMRAO): (a) and (b) National Broadband Mission (NBM) was launched on 17th December 2019 which *inter-alia* envisages providing broadband access to all villages in India by 2022.

- (c) Following are the main objectives of the National Broadband Mission:—
- (i) To facilitate universal and equitable access to broadband services for growth and development throughout the country and especially in rural and remote areas
 - (ii) To address policy and regulatory changes required to accelerate the expansion and creation of digital infrastructure and services
 - (iii) Creation of a digital fiber map of the digital communications network and infrastructure, including Optical Fiber Cables (OFC) and towers, across the country
 - (iv) Work with all stakeholders including the concerned Ministries/ Departments/ agencies and Ministry of Finance, for enabling investment for the Mission
 - (v) Work with the Department of Space, to make available adequate resources required for extending connectivity to far flung areas of country through satellite media
 - (vi) To encourage and promote adoption of innovation technologies for proliferation of broadband especially by the domestic industry
 - (vii) Seek cooperation from concerned stakeholders by developing innovative implementation models for Right of Way (RoW)
 - (viii) To work with States/UTs for having consistent policies pertaining to expansion of digital infrastructure including for RoW approvals required for laying of OFC
 - (ix) To develop a Broadband Readiness Index(BRI) to measure the availability of digital communications infrastructure and conducive policy ecosystem within a State/UT
 - (x) Promote direct and indirect employment as a result of development of digital communications infrastructure across the country and through the digital economy.

(d) BharatNet Programme is a flagship programme which is being implemented in a phased manner to achieve the goal of the Government for development of broadband highways under the Digital India campaign. The project, financed mainly through the

Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF), is targeted to provide Broadband connectivity to all the 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats (GPs) in the country.

BharatNet is a project under Digital India campaign to provide broadband connectivity to all rural areas of the country whereas the National Broadband Mission aims to fast track growth of digital communications, infrastructure, bridge the digital divide for digital empowerment and inclusion, provide affordable and universal access of broadband for all.

Voluntary Retirement Scheme in BSNL

1607. DR. BANDA PRAKASH: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has commenced the Voluntary Retirement Scheme in respect of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) employees;

(b) if so, the number of employees applied for VRS and the Total number of targeted employees proposed to be given VRS and whether this VRS will be more profitable and increase efficiency in BSNL and the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI DHOTRE SANJAY SHAMRAO): (a) to (c) The Cabinet in the meeting held on 23.10.2019 approved the revival plan for Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) which *inter-alia* includes, reduction in staff cost through a Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) for the employees of age 50 years and above.

The VRS was offered by BSNL to its employees on 04.11.2019. The scheme was closed on 03.12.2019. After the closure of the scheme, 78,569 employees of BSNL opted for the VRS. All VRS optees have retired voluntarily on 31.01.2020. BSNL has informed that the VRS scheme will help in reduction in wage bill of the company by 50%.

Accessibility to internet facilities

†1608. SHRIMATI KANTA KARDAM: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of percentage of people having access to computer and internet facilities in the country, including Uttar Pradesh;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.