

Losses to telecom companies due to internet shutdowns

510. SHRI DEREK O'BRIEN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) how many times have internet shutdowns been initiated by Government in the last five years, year-wise and State-wise data thereof;

(b) what is the loss suffered by telecom companies due to these shutdowns, the details thereof; and

(c) whether Government has taken any steps to compensate the telecom companies for the losses suffered by them due to internet shutdowns, if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI DHOTRE SANJAY SHAMRAO): (a) In order to streamline the process of internet shutdowns in the Country, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) 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 that of internet services in an area, can either be issued by the Union Home Secretary in case of Central Government or the State Home Secretary in case of State Government, due to public emergency or in the interest of public safety.

Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) granted permission to Delhi Police for temporary shutdown of telecom services in certain parts of Delhi on 19 and 20th December, 2019, under the provisions of Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017. However, it was exercised only on 19th December, 2019.

Police and public order are State subjects as per the Constitution and States are responsible for prevention, detection and investigation of crimes through their law enforcement machinery. Concerned State Governments are empowered to issue orders for temporary suspension of internet services to maintain law and order in the State or part thereof under the provisions contained in the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017. Records related to internet shutdowns ordered by State Governments are not maintained by either DoT or MHA.

(b) and (c) Telecom companies have not reported any quantum of loss incurred by them due to the internet shutdowns.