(b) if so, since how long these vacancies are lying in the Circle;

(c) the details of posts which are more than 2, 3 and 5 years old; and

(d) the efforts made to fill in the above vacancies and by when they are going to be filled?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI DHOTRE SANJAY SHAMRAO): (a) As on 31-12-2019, there were 2530 vacancies of Multi Tasking Staff, Postman, Postal Assistant and Sorting Assistant Cadre in Karnataka Circle.

(b) and (c) Vacancies had occurred during 2009 to 2019. Vacancies which are more than 2, 3 and 5 years old are as under:-

Number of vacancies more than 2 years	Number of vacancies more than 3 years	Number of vacancies more than 5 years
516	454	444

(d) Recruitment to fill up vacant posts is a continuous process and is being done regularly by holding Departmental Promotion Committee, Departmental Examination and Direct Recruitment through Staff Selection Commission and also by Postal Circle as per the provisions of the relevant Recruitment Rules.

Free internet facility for poor

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

(a) whether it is a fact that large number of people are unable to access free internet facility and are unable to get online in the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof and Government's response thereto;

(c) whether Government is considering to provide free internet facility, particularly for those unable to afford it; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and by when it would be implemented in various parts of the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI DHOTRE SANJAY SHAMRAO): (a) to (d) Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

(TRAI) submitted its recommendations to Department of Telecommunications (DoT) on 'Encouraging Data usage in Rural Areas through Provisioning of Free Data' dated 19-12-2016.

The recommendations were an outcome of the Consultation Paper on 'Free, Data' that was *suo-moto* floated by TRAI on 19-05-2016 to address the issue of providing free Internet access to consumers and to explore model(s) that could achieve the benefits of offering 'free data' without infringing upon the 'Prohibition of Discriminatory Tariffs for Data Services Regulations, 2016' of TRAI. The recommendations of TRAI are as under:

(1)   In order to bridge the affordability gap for the persons residing in rural areas and to support Governments efforts towards cashless economy by incentivising digital means, the Authority recommends that a scheme under which a reasonable amount of data say 100 MB per month may be made available to rural subscribers for free.

(2)   The cost of implementation of the scheme may be met from USOF.

(3)   To increase participation of other entities for incentivizing free data, there is a need to introduce third party (Aggregator) to facilitate schemes which are TSPs agnostic and non-discriminatory in their implementation.

(4)   Scheme for free data must be TSP-agnostic, must not involve any arrangement between the TSP and the aggregator/content provider and should not be designed to circumvent the "The Prohibition of Discriminatory Tariffs for Data Services Regulations," notified on 8th February, 2016.

(5)   The following mechanism is recommended:–

•   The Aggregators will need to register with DoT.

•   The registrant must be a company registered under Indian Companies Act, 1956.

•   The validity of registration shall be 5 years.

•   The registrant shall not either directly or indirectly, assign or transfer the Registration in any manner whatsoever to a third party either in whole or in part.

The recommendations were examined by the then Telecom Commission in its meeting held on 08-09-2017 and were referred back to TRAI for clarifications / reconsideration *vide* DoT letter dated 25-09-2017. TRAI submitted its response dated 29-11-2017 to the above reference from DoT.

The Government deliberated on the response of TRAI and decided not to accept the recommendations of TRAI due to the following reasons:–

(i)   TRAI Recommendation No. 1 & 2: The concern with regard to availability of affordable data services has been mitigated through competition in the market. Therefore, for the holistic development of Internet ecosystem in the country, a larger focus is required on connectivity, content availability in local language and Digital literacy, instead of affordability.

(ii)   TRAI Recommendation No. 3, 4 & 5: The aggregator model is targeted towards those who are existing users of Internet but their usage may be limited due to the price of data services. The issue of affordability has been mitigated through competition in the market.

Besides, similar models of offering discounts through websites/ portals/ apps (analogous to aggregator) are at present prevalent in many other sectors of the economy wherein consumers are offered discounts for transactions through the websites/ portals/ apps. At present, there is no direct Government intervention which regulates such websites/ portals/ apps. Therefore, there is no need for Government intervention to regulate the aggregators through registration process.

Status of the public WiFi project WANI

489.   SHRI MAHESH PODDAR: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a)   what is the status of the public Wifi project WANI;

(b)   whether the Ministry has carried out any pilots for the project, if so, the details thereof; and

(c)   the list of companies which have expressed interest in the project WANI?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI DHOTRE SANJAY SHAMRAO): (a) and (b) Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) had issued *suo moto* Recommendations on "Proliferation of Broadband through