

and Short Message Service (SMS) remain available during the suspension period of internet services, through which people in the region can communicate.

5G spectrum auctions

497. SHRI MD. NADIMUL HAQUE: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government plans to conduct 5G spectrum auctions soon;
- (b) if so, whether telecom companies already reeling under debt burden will be given some leeway to ensure competition in the market; and
- (c) whether BSNL will participate in the 5G spectrum auctions and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI DHOTRE SANJAY SHAMRAO): (a) The Government had sought the recommendations of TRAI on the auction of spectrum in various bands. The recommendations of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) and the subsequent reply from TRAI to the back reference from the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) were considered in DoT and by the Digital Communications Commission (DCC). Subsequently a Draft Cabinet Note (DCN) has been prepared for the auction of the spectrum. The DCN is presently under consideration in the Department. The spectrum acquired through auction, as being held from time to time, is permitted to be used in a technologically agnostic manner. The successful bidders of the spectrum auction can deploy mobile services using any technology including 5G.

(b) The Government has recently decided to give relief to financially stressed Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) by permitting deferment of spectrum auction payment instalments, in respect of earlier auctions, for next one or two years (2020-21 and 2021-22).

(c) The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) in its letter to the Solicitor General of India on the matter of assignment of spectrum to BSNL had mentioned that - "DoT is of the view that BSNL and MTNL being public sector undertakings, their participation in the auction conducted by the Government for allotment of spectrum may perhaps create unwarranted apprehensions in the telecom industry related to efficacy and fairness of the auction process. It may also lead to a situation of conflict of interest".