

Standing Committee Report Summary

Progress of Implementation of BharatNet

- The Standing Committee on Information Technology (Chairperson: Mr. Anurag Singh Thakur) submitted its report on “Progress of Implementation of BharatNet” on August 7, 2018. The Committee examined the BharatNet project, which was launched in 2011 to provide connectivity to 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats (GPs) through optical fibre. Key observations and recommendations made by the Committee include:
 - **Implementation of Phase I:** Under Phase-I of BharatNet, a target of connecting one lakh GPs through optical fibre cable was set. However, the Committee noted that inadequate planning and design coupled with lack of preparedness affected the project from 2011 to 2014. Because of deficiencies in various aspects such as planning, design, procurement, and non-participation of states, the implementation could start only after 2014. The Committee observed that the target of completing one lakh GPs had been achieved on December 28, 2017.
 - **Last-mile connectivity:** The Committee observed that last-mile connectivity (connectivity to households) was not in the scope of BharatNet till July 2017. Since 1,09,099 GPs were service ready by May 1, 2017, the Committee stated that focus should be on provision of last-mile connectivity in these GPs. Further, the Committee emphasised the need to set up Wi-Fi hotspots under Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana. It recommended that while setting up Wi-Fi hotspots, emphasis should be given to participation of village level entrepreneurs, so as to generate employment.
 - **Implementation of Phase-II:** Under Phase-II of BharatNet, a target of covering the remaining 1,50,000 GPs by March 2019 has been set. The Committee recommended that effort should be made for timely completion of targets for Phase-II. Further, it recommended that in Phase-II emphasis should be given to employment generation, particularly in states like Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and North-eastern states.
 - **Participation of states:** The Committee noted that non-involvement of states in Phase-I has resulted in slow progress and non-utilization of infrastructure. To address this issue, a modified strategy was adopted where GPs in eight states were provided connectivity through state-led model. Under this model, states undertake the responsibility of laying of optical fibre cable and radio. The Committee stated that a mechanism should be put in place whereby best practices adopted in one state can be shared with all other states.
- **Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSUs):** The Committee noted that Phase-I of the project had been allotted to three CPSUs (Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, RailTel, and Power Grid Corporation of India Limited). Despite having expertise in optical fibre technology, performance of these CPSUs has not been satisfactory. This included delays in achieving targets under Phase-I. The Committee recommended in this regard that stringent measures, such as penalties for failure to achieve the targets, should be imposed on the CPSUs.
- **Private sector participation:** The Committee noted that there is high private sector participation in implementation of Phase-II. Two projects will be implemented under private sector-led model in Bihar and Punjab. The Committee recommended that there should not be any scope for laxity by private participants in timely execution of projects. Further, penalty clauses should be included in agreements with them.
- **Right of way (RoW) issues:** The Committee noted that Indian Telegraph Right of Way Rules, 2016 have been framed to ensure grant of RoW permissions in underground and over ground infrastructure. However, as of May 1, 2018, 296 RoW cases are pending with different agencies, which affect 1,241 GPs. In this regard, the Committee recommended that there should be a single window clearance system to ensure smooth implementation.
- **BharatNet Phase-III:** Phase-III of the BharatNet involves upgrading the network to meet future requirements. However, the Committee observed that Phase-III has not been approved by the Union Cabinet. Given the size of Phase-III, the Committee recommended that all necessary planning and implementation strategy should be worked out in advance. Further, it recommended that Department of Telecommunications should take necessary steps for getting approval of the competent authority at the earliest.

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