

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
LOKSABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO.531
TO BE ANSWERED ON: 20.07.2022

BLOCKING OF WEBSITES

531. DR. T SUMATHY (a) THAMIZHACHI THANGAPANDIAN:

Will the Minister of ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government has taken any steps with regard to blocking of several websites by Internet Service Providers and if not, reason therefor?;
- (b) the details of the current status of 4G network in rural areas along with the Government plan to subsidize communication processes in rural settings;
- (c) the details of the major domains in which the telecom industry holds financial debts and the manner in which the Government plans on mitigating them;
- (d) whether the market is at the verge of becoming a duopoly (Jio and Airtel) and the steps taken to ensure that adequate competition is present in the telecom industry; and
- (e) whether the Government is aiming to address key hurdles that would slow down the integration of 5G in the market, namely Low Fiberization Footprint with 30% fibre connectivity across India High Spectrum Pricing compared to global average and banning of foreign telecom original equipment manufacturers, which most of 5G is dependent on?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE FOR ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
(SHRI RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR)

(a): Internet Service Providers (ISPs) does not block websites suo-moto. In line with the objective of the Government to ensure an Open, Safe & Trusted and Accountable Internet for all its users, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) issues directions for blocking for access of information by public under provision of section 69A of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000 and the Rules therein, namely, the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information for Public) Rules, 2009. MeitY issue directions to Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to direct the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to block access of website/domains. DoT, being licensors to ISPs, directs them to block website/domain when it receives directions for blocking from MeitY or a competent court order.

(b): Mobile services are provided in a phased manner by the Government and Telecom Services Provider (TSPs) in the uncovered remote villages in the country. The Government has the following schemes under Universal Service Obligation Fund in this regard:

- 1) 354 Uncovered Villages Scheme, covering villages of Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttarakhand and other priority areas.
- 2) Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan (CTDP) for mobile connectivity in the North Eastern Region
- 3) Scheme for providing mobile services in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected areas
- 4) Schemes for providing mobile services in Aspirational Districts
- 5) Scheme for providing mobile services in Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

As per data provided by Telecom Services Providers (TSP) and field units of the Department of Telecommunications, out of 5,97,618 inhabited census villages in the

country (as per Census-2011), 5,57,179 numbers of villages have got mobile connectivity through 4G technology, till December, 2020.

(c) and (d): Step taken by the Government to address the issue of financial stress in the telecom sector in September 2021 are as under:

- 1) Rationalization of Definition of Adjusted Gross Revenue.
- 2) Moratorium/Deferment of up to four years in annual payments of dues arising out of the AGR judgment and spectrum purchased in past auctions.
- 3) Option to the TSPs to pay the interest amount arising due to the said deferment of payment by way of equity.
- 4) Rationalization of Interest rates and removal of Penalties for delayed payments of License Fee (LF)/Spectrum Usage Charge (SUC).
- 5) Reduction in Bank Guarantees BG requirements to 20% of the stipulated amount against License Fee (LF) and other similar Levies.
- 6) Removal of levy of Spectrum Usage Charges (SUC) on the spectrum to be acquired in future auctions.
- 7) For spectrum auctions held henceforth, Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) will not be required to submit Bank Guarantees (BGs) to securitize spectrum auction instalment payments.
- 8) For the current spectrum auction Telecom Service Providers have no compulsion of upfront payment. They can pay yearly instalments.
- 9) The entry and exit barriers for License and Spectrum have been released.
- 10) To encourage investment, 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) under automatic route permitted in Telecom Sector. All safeguards will apply.

These reforms are expected to promote healthy competition, protect interests of consumers, increase & encourage investments, and reduce regulatory burden on Telecom Service Providers (TSPs).

(e): Based upon the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recommendation dated 11.04.2022, Union Cabinet in its meeting dated 14-06-2022 has approved the reserve prices in various bands for Spectrum Auction 2022. In most of the LSA-Band combinations, reserve prices, when compared to that of 2021 Auction were reduced up to 40 percent. For example, the reduction of total reserve prices per MHz for pan-India, for Spectrum Auction 2022 with respect to that of Spectrum Auction 2021, in 700 MHz, 800 MHz, 1800 MHz and 3300 MHz bands are 40.33%, 23.71%, 35.7% and 35.83% respectively.
