



KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY
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India will have 1 billion internet users by end of this fiscal year

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Context

- With increasing data usage, the **Internet market has grown from around 250 million to 974 million subscribers**, says Jyotiraditya Scindia, Minister of Communications and Development of North Eastern Region (DONER).
- India has already proven itself to be the **second largest telecom market in the world**. In the last 11 years of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, the mobile market grew from roughly 1 billion to 1.2 billion customers; we have also hugely grown data usage and the Internet market from around 250 million to 974 million Internet subscribers. **We should be able to hit one billion Internet users** within the first half of next year, or even within this fiscal year.
- **Calling prices have gone from 50 paise to 0.003 paise a minute; and data has gone from ₹287 to ₹9 a GB.** We are today **the cheapest data market in the world**.

BharatNet Project

- The **National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN) was launched in 2011 and later renamed the BharatNet Project in 2015 under the Ministry of Communications**.
- It aimed at **providing high-speed broadband connectivity to every Gram Panchayat (GP) across the country**.
- It is **one of the largest rural telecom projects in the world**, designed to offer affordable broadband access and enable the delivery of **e-health, e-education, and e governance services in rural India**.
- The project initially aimed to connect approximately 2.5 lakh GPs across the country.

Phase I: Connected 1 lakh GPs using optical fiber (OF) cables and existing infrastructure, completed in 2017.

Phase II (ongoing): Expands coverage to 1.5 lakh GPs using optical fiber, radio, and satellite technologies, with collaboration from state governments and private entities.

Phase III (ongoing): Focuses on integrating 5G technologies, increasing bandwidth, and enhancing last-mile connectivity.

- **Funding and Execution:** BharatNet is primarily funded through the **Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN), a fund that replaced the Universal Service Obligation Fund**.
- The project is **executed by the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL)**, incorporated under the Indian Companies Act 1956.

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- Under the ABP, **Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL)** serves as the **Project Management Agency** for the **operation and maintenance of the network**.