

Enhanced telecom in LWE regions

To enhance mobile communication in regions affected by left wing extremism (LWE), the government plans to install more than 4,000 mobile towers across 10 States at an estimated cost of over Rs. 7,300 crore, to be funded through the Universal Obligation Fund. The proposal, which will soon be taken up for approval by the Union Cabinet, aims to provide calling as well as internet facility to security forces and citizens in 96 districts.

This will be the second phase of the project. The first phase, under which setting up of about 2,200 towers with a project cost of Rs. 3,568 crore, was approved by Cabinet in August 2014 and completed in about 18 months. However, while only 2G connectivity was provided in the first phase, the second phase will have 3G and 4G connectivity.

“The completion of Phase 1 of the project has enabled better communication and coordination between security forces, leading to a reduction in the number of Naxal attacks. There is a need to fast track Phase 2, set up basic infrastructure,” said a government official, who did not wish to be named.

A draft note on the proposal has been circulated and will be brought up for approval from the Cabinet soon.

However, it is likely that the government may not be able to complete the project before the 2019 general elections.

Phase 1 of the project was implemented by Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), a public sector enterprise, due to security reasons. However, BSNL currently does not have 4G spectrum. It has requested the Department of Telecom (DoT) for it and is hopeful of rolling out pan India 4G services (except in Delhi and Mumbai) next year.

The official added that it has been decided to upgrade the technology after the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) raised no objection to 2G and 4G technology for voice and data services “as it does not have any security implication”.

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