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News: BharatNet

Bharat Net

- Bharat Net is the **world's largest rural broadband connectivity programme** using **Optical fiber**.
- It is a **flagship mission implemented by Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL)** a **special purpose vehicle (SPV)** set up by Government of India under the Companies Act, 1956.
- Currently, it is being implemented by **the Department of Telecommunication under the Ministry of Communications**.
- The project is being executed by BSNL, RailTel, Power Grid & is being funded by Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF).
- It aims to **connect all of India's households, specifically rural households through demand, affordable high speed internet connectivity** to fulfill the objectives of Digital India programme in partnership with the states & private sector.
- It intends to **cover all 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats for E-governance, E-Commerce facilities**.

- Ministry of Communications recently said that the **scope of BharatNet has now been enhanced to connect all the 6,43,000 inhabited Villages of the country.**
- **National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN) was launched in October 2011 and was renamed as Bharat Net Project in 2015.**

National Optical Fibre Network

- It was envisaged as an information superhighway through the creation of a robust middle-mile infrastructure for reaching broadband connectivity to Gram Panchayats.
- The **Ministry of Communications has launched the National Broadband Mission** that will facilitate universal and equitable access to broadband services across the country, especially in rural and remote areas.
- The Union Cabinet recently, **approved a viability gap funding support of up to ₹19,041 crore for the implementation of the BharatNet project** through Public Private Partnership (PPP) model in 16 States.
- The project will be extended to all inhabited villages beyond the gram panchayats in 16 States — **Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.**

- Recently, Bharat Broadband Network Limited has invited global tender for the Development of BharatNet through Public Private Partnership model in 9 separate packages across 16 states.

Viability Gap Funding (VGF)

- Viability Gap Funding (VGF) means a **grant one-time or deferred, provided to support infrastructure projects that are economically justified but fall short of financial viability.**
- If the sponsoring Ministry/State Government/ statutory entity aims to provide assistance over and above the stipulated amount under VGF, it will be restricted to a further **20% of the total project cost.**