

Govt set to spend ₹42,068 cr for broadband link to gram panchayats

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NEWDELHI: In a big push for digital India, the Cabinet on Wednesday approved a modified implementation strategy for the BharatNet project, which aims to provide broadband connectivity to all village bodies or gram panchayats by March 2019, a person with direct knowledge of the matter said.

The government now plans to spend ₹42,068 crore on the project, more than triple its earlier budget of ₹13,000 crore for village connectivity under the Output-Outcome Framework for Schemes 2017.

The project will be funded by the Universal Service Obligation Fund. Divided in phases, as much as ₹11,148 crore will be spent to connect 100,000 gram panchayats in the first phase, while ₹18,792 crore will be invested to connect the remaining 150,000 gram panchayats in the second phase.

The rest of the money will be spent on last mile connectivity architecture, operation, maintenance and replacement of BSNL's poor quality fibre that is being used in the project between block to gram panchayat, the person cited above said requesting anonymity.

As on January 29, optical fibre was laid to connect 76,089 gram panchayats, out of which 16,355 have been provided broadband connectivity.