

● BHARATNET PROJECT

Third-party auditors to verify connections

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TO SPEED UP the BharatNet project and fix accountability, the government has appointed third-party auditors to conduct physical and electronic verification of wi-fi and fibre-to-home (FTTH) connections, installed by CSC E-Governance Services (CSC SPV), in around 76,000 gram panchayats.

The Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF), Bharat Broadband Network (BBNL) and CSC SPV have signed a tripartite agreement for operation and maintenance of incremental cable networks, first line maintenance of equipment, and to provide wi-fi access points and FTTH connections. USOF has appointed third-party auditors for the verification of last-mile connectivity.

The project is divided into four zones; work for Zones 1 and 2 has been awarded to IBI Group India, while , a Rudrabhishek Enterprises (REPL)-led consortium will audit Zones 3 and 4. Zones 1 and 2 have 36,700 gram panchayats, and Zones 3 and 4



■ Auditors will conduct physical and electronic verification of wi-fi, fibre-to-home connections in 76,000 gram panchayats

■ Project is divided into four zones, with about 36,700 gram panchayats in Zones 1 and 2, and 40,000 in Zones 3 and 4

have 40,000 . This is the first time the government has empanelled third-party auditors for CSC SPV work.

Harish Sharma, ED-REPL said, "REPL, in consortium with its subsidiary RIPL (Rudrabhishek Infosystem), shall conduct the physical and electronic verification of wi-fi access points and FTTH connections installed in the gram panchayats. Verifications will be done on physical visits as well as electronically, from the network management system of BBNL."

The BharatNet project,

which aims to connect 600,000 villages with fibre broadband, has been facing several delays. The government's desire to bring private players on board for the project has failed, as no bidder participated in the tender floated as part of a public private partnership (PPP). The government will now come out with a revised PPP strategy.

The delay in the BharatNet project has resulted in costs escalating by ₹20,100 crore to ₹61,109 crore. The government plans to merge BBNL with BSNL for better synergies.