K-Fon - Kerala's Internet Connection Project

Why in news?

The Kerala government has officially cleared the K-Fon project to provide free high speed Internet connection to over 20 lakh BPL families in the state.

What are the key provisions?

- The government accorded administrative sanction for the Rs. 1548 crore project to be completed by December 2020.
- The project envisages a State-wide optical fibre network to link houses and offices.
- This is to be set up by Kerala State Electricity Board Limited and Kerala State IT Infrastructure Limited.
- The project will also provide Net connectivity at affordable rate for families that do not fall in the BPL bracket.
- Licensed Internet service providers and cable TV operators can utilise the optic fibre network to provide services to citizens.
- The scheme is being implemented with financial assistance from the KIIFB (Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board).

What are the benefits?

- As many as 30,000 government offices and educational institutions would be linked through the high speed network.
- It would also give a push to the digitalisation of government services like the e-health programme.
- IT parks, airports and seaports would also be benefited from the linkage.
- Small-scale enterprises using e-commerce platforms stand to gain from K-Fon.
- High quality video conferencing and transport management are other significant advantages.
- The K-Fon will also link all mobile towers in the State for better mobile Internet services.

What is the significance?

- If things go as per plan, Kerala could have near-universal Internet access in a little over a year's time.

- Kerala is a State that already tops in human development indicators in the country.
- When K-Fon is complete, Kerala will be ready for a steep digital evolution.
- What makes it commendable is its recognition that Internet access is a basic human right.
- No other Indian State has recognised Internet access in this manner till now.
- This is also in sync with what the UN has been articulating in recent years.
- Internet's role is increasingly recognised by it in enabling freedom of speech and reducing inequality, among other things.

How is internet penetration in India?

- India has made huge leaps in providing Internet access to its people in recent years.
- However, internet have-nots still exist in the millions in India.
- The best-performing State, Delhi-NCR, has an Internet penetration of 69%.
- The second-best is Kerala, with just 54%.
- Internet penetration is significantly higher in urban areas than it is in rural areas.
- It is also significantly higher for men than it is for women.
- So, the governments need to play an interventionist role in plugging this gap.
- In this context, Kerala's plan for Internet roll-out is worthy of emulation by other States as well.

Source: The Hindu

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