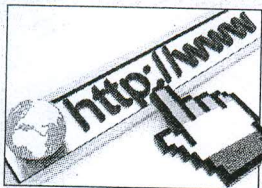


# ₹20,000-crore deals in push for rural broadband

**NATIONWIDE** As many as 200,000 Indian villages to have high-speed links by 2014

## CONNECTING BHARAT



**200,000**

No. of villages across India that will get broadband connections by April 2014

**400,000 km**

Total length of network to be linked by optic fibre

- Sterlite, HFCL, Birla Ericsson and Teracom have submitted bids to provide optical fibre cable (OFC)
- The project also plans to utilise existing OFC net-

works of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL), Railtel and Power Grid

- At present, OFC connectivity is available only up to block level.

### Manoj Gairola

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**NEW DELHI:** The government's ₹20,000-crore project to provide high-speed broadband in 200,000 villages across India has finally taken off.

Bharat Broadband Nigam Ltd (BBNL), a special purpose vehicle (SPV) created for this purpose, has invited bids for procuring 400,000 kms of optical fibre cable (OFC). About 200,000 villages will get broadband connections by April 2014, said N Ravi Shankar, chairman, BBNL.

Sterlite, HFCL, Birla Ericsson, and Teracom have submitted bids, said sources.

"Procuring OFC is the first step of the project," said MF Farooqui, secretary, DoT. "The project is being implemented

on a priority basis."

In a review meeting held last month, Ravi Shankar informed IT minister Kapil Sibal that BBNL aims to connect 100,000 Gram Panchayats by December end and total 200,000 villages by April 2014.

The government aims to provide e-education, e-health and various e-governance services to villages through this network.

In order to maintain high-speed and quality of services, the Gram Panchayats are to be connected through OFC. At present, OFC connectivity is available only up to block level. The project also plans to utilise existing OFC networks of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL), Railtel and Power Grid. Once the network is complete it will be called National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN).