

le: Regarding digital divide and steps to boost the digital literacy.

**SHRIMATI SARMISTHA SETHI (JAJPUR):** Hon. Chairperson, Sir, millions of Indian citizens living in rural areas do not have access to education and job opportunities because of the digital divide and digital illiteracy in the country. The Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan scheme was rolled out in 2017 to usher in digital literacy in rural India. The scheme was expected to make six crore rural households, that is, one person per household digitally literate by 2019. Although steps were taken to adequately implement the scheme, this goal was not met by 2019. In the Budget of 2022-23, allocation to this scheme has been decreased by 16.67 per cent as compared to the revised and budget estimates for the year 2021-22. This decrease in the Budget is especially alarming as being digitally literate is of utmost importance in the current tech-savvy times.

As per ITU's World Telecom database, only 43 per cent of the population in India uses internet. There are 58 per cent male internet users and 42 per cent female internet users. The National Family Health Survey (2019-21) shows a significantly larger gender gap in internet usage. The NFHS Report suggests that only 57.1 per cent of the male population and 33.3 per cent of the female population had ever used the internet. This is a matter of great concern as inability to use computers and electronic devices was one of the causes of high dropout rates amongst girls during the pandemic.

I urge upon the Government to scale up digital literacy programmes so as to bridge the digital divide between rural and urban India.

Thank you, Sir.

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**12.44 hrs**

**HON. CHAIRPERSON:** Now, Item No. 21A, Shri Ravneet Singh Ji.