1. **Critically examine whether the provisions of draft national telecom policy resemble a wishlist without addressing the key issues plaguing the telecom sector?** **(250 words)**

Answer:

Background:-

- Recently the draft of National Telecom Policy (NTP) 2018 i.e., National Digital Communications Policy 2018 has been released for public consultations by the government.

Draft telecom policy:-

- The key strategies in the draft talks of recognizing spectrum as a key natural resource for public benefit to achieve India's socio-economic goals
- The policy aims to accomplish some of the strategic objectives by 2022 including:
  1. Provisioning of Broadband for all
  2. Creating four million additional jobs in the digital communications sector
- Enhancing the contribution of the digital communications sector to eight percent of India's GDP from around six percent in 2017
  1. Enhancing India's contribution to global value chains
  2. Ensuring digital sovereignty
- It has a three point action plan
  1. 'Connect India' under which it plans to set up a robust digital communications infrastructure
  2. 'Propel India' where the power of emerging digital technologies, including 5G, artificial intelligence (AI), Internet Of Things (IoT) will be harnessed
- 'Secure India' to focus on ensuring individual autonomy and choice, data ownership, privacy and security

Features of the draft policy:-

- There would be the optimal pricing of the spectrum to ensure sustainable and affordable access to digital communications
- Enabling light touch licensing/ de-licensing for broadband proliferation
- Promoting the co-use/ secondary use of spectrum
- It also outlined roadmap for high in demand backhaul spectrum for transmitting signals between mobile towers in E and V band as per international best practices.
- Constituting a Spectrum Advisory Team (SAT) consisting of experts, industry, and academia to facilitate the identification of new bands, applications and efficiency measures to catalyze innovation and efficient spectrum management
- It proposes identifying and making available new spectrum bands for access and backhaul segments for timely deployment and growth of 5G networks and making available harmonized and contiguous spectrum required for deployment of next-generation access technologies

- **Setting up National Broadband Mission**
  - The draft talks of establishing a 'National Broadband Mission -Rashtriya Broadband Abhiyan' to secure universal broadband access for implementation of broadband initiatives, to be funded through USOF and PPP:
    - BharatNet for providing 1Gbps to Gram Panchayats upgradeable to 10 Gbps
    - GramNet for connecting all key rural development institutions with 10Mbps upgradeable to 100 Mbps
    - NagarNet for establishing one- million public Wi-Fi Hotspots in urban areas
    - JanWiFi for establishing two-million Wi-Fi Hotspots in rural areas
    - Implementing a 'Fibre First Initiative' to take Optical fiber to the home, to enterprises, and to key development institutions in tier I, II and III towns and to rural clusters
- **Setting up Telecom Ombudsman**
  - It talks about establishing effective institutional mechanisms to protect consumers' interests including a Telecom Ombudsman and a centralized web-based complaint redressal system
  - The Telecom Commission has already approved setting up of the Telecom Ombudsman and has asked TRAI to take care of it
- **Roadmap for Green Telecom in India**
  - The Policy talks of incentivizing the use of renewable energy technologies in the communications sector
  - This includes utilization of small cell fuel batteries, lithium-ion batteries or other similar technologies and promoting research and development of green telecom

Benefits:-

- High spectrum price and related charges have been main concern of telecom services segment which is reeling under a debt of around Rs 7.8 lakh crore. The draft policy also proposes recognising of mid-band spectrum, particularly the 3 GHz to 24 GHz range, for next-generation networks.
- The policy recognises the importance of continued improvement in the regulatory framework for attracting investments and ensuring fair competition, to serve the needs of Indian citizens.
- Given the sector's capital-intensive nature, the policy aims to attract long-term, high quality and sustainable investments
- It aims to pursue regulatory reforms to ensure that the regulatory structures and processes remain relevant, transparent, accountable and forward-looking.
  - Policy promises to remove regulatory barriers and reduce the regulatory burden that hampers investments, innovation and consumer interest.
- Draft of the policy is progressive and the government is keen to deliver widest range of new services and technologies to the Indian consumers at affordable costs.
- It has placed significant emphasis on building a strong fiber network in India.

Criticism:-

- Government did not do anything about spectrum prices which were increased due to restricted supply.
- Implementation could be a big challenge in the light of existing licensing regime.
- Proposals in the draft National Digital Communications Policy 2018 policy have found mention in earlier regulations and vision statements of the telecom regulator or the Department of Telecom.
  - For example, making broadband access available to every citizen. This was already the stated objective of the Centre when the National Telecom Policy was rolled out in 2012.
  - Restructuring C-DOT as a premier telecom research and development centre:-
    - This was the intent with which C-DOT was set up in 1984
  - Similarly, there is mention of finding synergies between telecom public sector undertakings. This exercise was first started in 2002 but nothing has come of it till date.
- **Woes of telecom industry:-**
  - Telecom industry is in the middle of a massive crisis
  - On the one hand operators are under a massive financial strain, with declining profits and growing debt while on the other there is tremendous pressure on them to invest more into building networks to satiate the growing demand for data services.
  - The 2018 policy very emphatically states that it envisions investments of $100 billion in the digital communications sector but the reality is that none of the existing players is in a position to put that money on the table
  - There is no clarity or any roadmap on reduction of the financial stress of the industry.

Way forward:-

- Government should focus on putting together a roadmap explaining how it will execute these initiatives.
  - For instance, the new policy states that incentivising manufacturing of semiconductor chips is one of the top priority areas. The Centre has already rolled out a policy in this regard which has failed to attract any player so far due to a number of reasons.
  - The new policy should have gone into these reasons and proposed a plan to fix the shortcomings.
- Need to offer a clear roadmap of how it plans to provide fiscal relief to the industry rather than merely restating that the plan is to rationalise government taxes and levies for the sector in addition to giving critical infrastructure status to the industry.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Answer the following Questions

1. Analyze whether capitalism was the reason for or an outcome of industrial revolution? Examine the factors that led to the rise of capitalism? (250 words)

2. To enable greater efficacy of public policies, it is necessary to ensure meaningful public participation. Discuss. (250 words)