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Google’s Project Loon to test balloon-powered Internet in India, may partner BSNL

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November 3, 2015: After testing the Project Loon in California, New Zealand, Australia and Brazil, **Google (http://www.dealstreetasia.com/?s=google)** has received a green signal from the Narendra Modi government to test the project in India, *PTI* reported citing sources. The Project Loon is run by Google X Labs.

The govt has set up a committee to work on this project, which is being chaired by Secretary DeitY (Department of Electronics & Information Technology). Google sought the permission to launch the Project Loon and drone-based Internet transmission, but the government has approved it for testing only as of now.

Through this, Google will provide internet connectivity by using large balloons that will float at a height of 20 kilometers above earth surface, the report said. By using a wireless communications technology named LTE or 4G, each balloon can provide connectivity to a ground area of around 40 km in diameter. The balloons will stay floating for six months at a time.

This comes within a week after the Internet giant **partnered (http://www.dealstreetasia.com/stories/google-announces-deal-with-indonesias-telkomsel-**

axiata-indosat-on-web-access-17399/) with Indonesia's three mobile operators, PT Indosat Tbk (ISAT), PT Telekomunikasi Selular and PT XL Axiata Tbk, to begin testing its Project Loon balloons to deliver internet access to remote regions of the country.

Initially, Google may partner with Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) for testing the technology by using broadband spectrum in 2.6 Ghz band and internet giant may operate as the technology service provider and not like an internet service provider.

The 4G services can be replaced with this technology as it will transmit signal on 4G mobile phones through balloons rather than towers.

Most of the people are yet to take 4G connections in India and it remains to be seen if Google will be successful in running these projects.

According to a report by Bank of America Merrill Lynch (BofA ML), India is expected to have 9 crore 4G subscribers and 18 crore 4G smartphones by 2018.

Bharti Airtel Ltd (http://www.dealstreetasia.com/?s=airtel), India's largest cellular services provider, which officially launched its 4G services in August 2015, has rolled out its high-speed broadband services across over 300 towns. **Vodafone (http://www.dealstreetasia.com/?s=vodafone)** and Idea Cellular have already launched their 4G services while Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Jio commercial might take time to launch the service.

Rohan Dhamija, partner, head – India and South Asia, Analysis Mason commented on Google's project, saying, "Its a great add to the internet landscape in India because fixed lines are so limited in the country. To serve the Internet in the rural area, this is a great initiative by Google and I think, this will absolutely be successful."

"I think experiments like Project Loon are very important for a country like India. Laying down towers across rural India and in hilly terrains is time-consuming and very expensive. With technology like LTE, balloons can be used to cover large areas of otherwise untapped land mass. The act as transmission towers and can certainly add value. From a regulatory perspective, these will have to be in an experimental phase with government approval since the technology needs to be first validated and the licensing framework needs to be compatible," commented Vivek Kathpalia, partner, Nishith Desai Associates.

In July, **Facebook (http://www.dealstreetasia.com/?s=facebook)** had rolled out its Aquila solar-powered drone for internet access in remote parts of the global. This drone will be able to float for

three months at a time. The company will partner with local ISP to offer the services instead dealing with customers directly.