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Telecom panel okays policy for satellite phones

Paves way for BSNL-INMARSAT deal

OUR BUREAU
New Delhi, June 17

The Telecom Commission has given the approval for introducing satellite-based mobile services in the country. The approval comes after a recommendation from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) to introduce a regulatory mechanism to govern satellite phones.

Initially the services will be offered by Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd through a partnership with INMARSAT.

Satellites provide telephone and broadcasting services, covering large geographical areas. A

satellite-based communication system provides an ideal solution for connecting remote and inaccessible areas. In addition, satellite communication is widely used for the transmission of emergency traffic, such as distress and safety messages, to and from vessels at sea or remote locations.

Currently, in India, the satellite services of INMARSAT are used by maritime users through the Tata Communications Ltd under its International long-distance licence. Some limited number of users of land mobile have also been permitted by the DOT on a case-to-case basis.

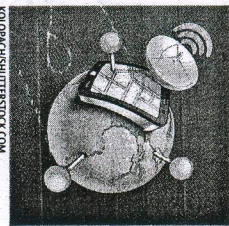
INMARSAT or International Mobile Satellite Organisation provides its satellite services

with a constellation of four satellites which are located in the Geo-stationary earth orbit.

Global coverage

These constellations of satellites provide global coverage. The present constellation, namely 13 satellites were launched in 1996. In view of the aging of these satellites, the INMARSAT has announced the retirement of some of its services from September 2014. INMARSAT has, meanwhile, launched the next generation satellites services.

While the INMARSAT services cater to maritime communication, the Government had envisaged satellite services, namely, Global Mobile Personal Commu-



ko.gov/bsnl/inmarsat/occcom

nication by Satellite (GMPCS) in the new telecom policy 1999. Under this licence, satellite-based communication services were permitted.

However, establishment of GMPCS Gateway in India by the licensee was a mandatory license

condition, which dampened interest from potential investors. This required substantial financial expenditure which was not feasible to be recovered from the limited number of users.

Until now, DOT was giving permission to procure the INMARSAT handsets and taking services from a foreign service provider was given to meet the requirement of paramilitary forces and disaster management.

However, there are security-related limitations in this arrangement.

There is a possibility of monitoring of calls outside the country as the earth station is located outside the country.

In view of the above drawbacks, the Defence forces have

not procured these handsets. They are continuing to use the old terminals.

However, as declared by the INMARSAT, some of these old terminals will cease to be supported by their satellites from September.

Thus, the decision by the Telecom Commission to permit BSNL to offer satellite services could help tide over the problems.

"It is a step in the right direction. This policy has been much delayed. Hopefully, this will trigger the Government to move ahead on other policy issues related to satellite communication," said BK Singal, Former Chairman, Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd.

Vodafone, Loop Mobile resolve interconnect usage charges issue

OUR BUREAU
Mumbai, June 17

GSM operator Vodafone India and Loop Mobile have resolved an interconnect usage charges (IUC) issue that had put the latter's nearly 3 million customers are in a spot. The companies were in the process of resuming the services.

On Monday, Vodafone India barred all incoming calls from Mumbai's oldest operator, citing non-payment of IUC. Users, who tried to call Vodafone numbers, got a recorded message stating the calls cannot be completed due to non-payment of interconnect usage charges. It also urged



Connectors restored On Monday, Vodafone India barred all incoming calls from Mumbai's oldest operator, Loop, citing non-payment of IUC.

the subscribers to get in touch with their telecom service provider (Loop Mobile).

"We have reached an agreement for payment settlement with Loop Mobile.

"Accordingly, the connection is being restored," a Vodafone India spokesperson said in an e-mail reply.

"Loop Mobile regrets the inconvenience caused to subscribers in Mumbai. This was due to a financial disagreement between Loop Mobile and Vodafone which has now been resolved. The voice calling services shall start shortly," a Loop Mobile spokesperson said.

The companies, however, did not disclose the amount of IUC dues.

Largest operator
Loop Mobile has operations only in Mumbai circle. At present Vodafone India, a subsidiary of British telecom major Vodafone Group, is the largest operator by users in Mumbai circle.

Interconnection is linking up of one telecom operator to the infrastructure facilities of another and an operator levies charges depending on the network usage. It also includes termination charges, currently at 10 paise per minute.

In February, Bharti Airtel - the country's largest operator by revenue and subscribers - had acquired Loop Mobile to strengthen its presence in the metro. While financial details of the deal were not disclosed, media reports had pegged the deal size at ₹700 crore.

Under the agreement, Loop Mobile's 3 million subscribers in Mumbai will join Airtel's more than 4 million subscribers, making it the largest service provider on user basis in the metro.

On completion of the acquisition, the New Delhi-based GSM operator would also be leader average revenue per user front.