

As debate over Net telephony rages, Govt to re-examine services offered by Skype, Google

Our Bureau

Hyderabad, Feb. 11

The Union Government will re-examine the legality of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services offered by global Internet companies such as Skype and Google.

This comes in the wake of Government's move to bring Net telephony under the unified licence regime.

While Indian telecom companies and Internet service providers will have to pay a revenue share for offering voice over Internet, global players such as Skype are offering the service without paying anything to the Government.

Addressing a press conference on Monday, Killi Kruparani, Union Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology, said the Government would soon look into these services.

Kruparani was at an event to launch video calling the services for the South and Eastern zones of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd.

Though the call rates are 'affordable' at Rs 2.50 a minute and no broadband consumption involved, the users would



Video calling: Union Minister For Communications & IT Kapil Sibal launching the video telephony service of BSNL in New Delhi on Monday. — Shiv Kumar Pushpakar

have to spend huge sums on the equipment.

When cited the examples such as Google Hangout (which offers a free video-conferencing facility), BSNL (AP) Chief General Manager V Srinivasan, said the video calling services being offered by companies such as Skype were ille-

gal and unlawful. "What we are offering is a legal service," he said.

GSM PLAYERS VS RELIANCE

This comes even as a fresh war is brewing between GSM operators and Reliance Industries, over the latter's plan to offer

voice services using broadband spectrum.

The GSM operators' industry association, representing firms such as Airtel, Vodafone and Idea Cellular, has told the Department of Telecom that Reliance's game-plan is an attempt to enter the voice market through the backdoor. The battle is over Reliance Infotel's plans to offer voice services using 4G spectrum.

Infotel had acquired broadband spectrum in 2010 under an Internet Service Provider licence. According to the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), Reliance Infotel had the option of taking a unified access licence in 2010 by paying an additional Rs 1,650 crore, which would have allowed it to offer voice services. But the company chose to pick an ISP licence at no additional cost, with the knowledge that the licence did not permit telephony service.

Under the new unified licence policy, Reliance Infotel would be able to get into the voice market by acquiring a pan-Indian-unified licence for just Rs 15 crore, the COAI said in a letter to the DoT.

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