

THE WEEKLY NEWS SUMMARY

IAFI News

Happy New Year – 2024



ITU-APT Foundation of India (IAFI) wishes a joyous Happy New Year -2024. May the coming year bring health, happiness and continued success to you and your loved ones.

Telecom Act 2023 passed



A new Telecom Act 2023 was introduced by the Hon'ble Minister of Communication in the Parliament on 18-12-2023. This was passed by the Lok Sabha on 20-12-2023 and Rajya Sabha passed it on 21-12-2023. Bill received the assent of the Hon'ble President of India on 24-12-2023. It shall come into force, when Central Government will issue notification in the Official Gazette.

Bill seeks to replace the existing regulatory framework for the telecommunication sector, based on the Indian Telegraph Act, of 1885, the Wireless Telegraphy Act (1933), and the Telegraph Wires (Unlawful Possession) Act (1950). In addition, amendments in the existing Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) Act, 1997, used to set up TRAI as the telecom regulator, for regulating tariffs for the telecom sector and having provision to establish the Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT), for adjudicating the disputes and dispose of appeals, were also provisioned.

The structural reforms envisaged under The Telecommunications Bill - 2023 is aimed to streamline the existing complex licensing system in the telecom sector and instead ushers-in a simple authorisation mechanism.

Major highlights of the bill are:

- The power to issue licenses for providing telecom services will remain with the central government.
- Authorisation for telecom-related activities:** Prior authorisation from the central government will be required to: (i) provide telecommunication services, (ii) establish, operate, maintain, or expand telecommunications networks, or (iii) possess radio equipment. Existing licences will continue to be valid for the period of their grant, or for five years, where the period is not specified.
- Assignment of spectrum:** Spectrum will be assigned by auction, except for specified uses, where it will be allocated on an administrative basis. Specified purposes include: (i) national security and defence, (ii) disaster management, (iii) weather forecasting, (iv) transport, (v) satellite services such as DTH and satellite telephony, and (vi) BSNL, MTNL, and public broadcasting services. The central government may re-purpose or re-assign any frequency range. The central government may permit sharing, trading, leasing, and surrender of spectrum.
- Powers of interception and search:** Messages or a class of messages between two or more persons may be intercepted, monitored, or blocked on certain grounds. Such actions must be necessary or expedient in the interest of public safety or public emergency, and must be in the interest of specified grounds which include: (i) security of the state, (ii) prevention of incitement of offences, or (iii) public order. These actions will be subject to procedure, safeguards, and duration as may be prescribed. Telecom services may be suspended on similar grounds.
- The government may take temporary possession of any telecom infrastructure, network, or services on occurrence of any public emergency or public safety. An officer authorised by the government may search premises or vehicles for possession of unauthorised telecom network or equipment.
- Protection of users:** The central government may provide for measures to protect users which include: (i) prior consent to receive specified messages such as advertising messages, (ii) creation of Do Not Disturb registers, and (iii) a mechanism to allow users to report malware or specified messages. Entities providing telecom services must establish an online mechanism for registration and redressal of grievances.
- Right of way:** Entities laying telecommunication infrastructure may seek right of way over public or private property. Right of way must be provided on a non-discriminatory and non-exclusive basis to the extent possible.
- Appointments to TRAI:** The Bill amends the TRAI Act to also allow individuals with: (i) at least 30 years of professional experience to serve as the Chairperson, and (ii) at least 25 years of professional experience to serve as members.
- Digital Bharat Nidhi:** The Universal Service Obligation Fund has been established under the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 to provide for telecom services in underserved areas. The Bill retains this provision, renames the fund as Digital Bharat Nidhi, and also allows its use for research and development in telecom.
- Offences and penalties:** The Bill specifies various criminal and civil offences. Providing telecom services without authorisation, or gaining unauthorised access to a telecom network or data, are punishable with imprisonment up to three years, a fine up to two crore rupees, or both. Breaching terms and conditions of authorisation is punishable with a civil penalty of up to five crore rupees. Possessing unauthorised equipment, or using unauthorised network or service, is punishable with a penalty of up to ten lakh rupees.
- Adjudication process:** The central government will appoint an adjudicating officer to conduct inquiries and pass orders against civil offences under the Bill. The officer must be of the rank of joint secretary and above. Orders of the adjudicating officer may be appealed before the Designated Appeals Committee within 30 days. Members of this Committee will be officers of the rank of at least Additional Secretary. Appeals against the orders of the Committee, in connection to breach of terms and conditions, may be filed with TDSAT within 30 days.
- Need for biometric verification** - The Bill provides that telecom service providers must verify the identity of their users through any verifiable biometric-based identification
- Maximum number of SIM Cards** - One of the civil offences in the Bill is the use of Subscriber Identity Modules (SIM cards) in excess of the number notified (nine). The penalty for this offence is up to Rs 50,000 for the first offence and up to two lakh rupees for each subsequent offence.
- The central government may provide for measures to protect users such as requiring prior consent to receive specified messages, and creation of a do not disturb register.

Indian Telecom Bill -2023 as passed by Lok Sabha is attached for reference.

TRAI Consultation Papers

Consultation Papers	Submission Dates	status	Submission
Digital Transformation through 5G Ecosystem	22nd Jan 2023	Under Development	-

Important Meeting that IAFI will attend

Meeting	Dates	Submission Dates	IAFI preparatory Meetings
ITU-T: ITU Focus Group on Autonomous Networks (FG-AN)	18th Jan 2024	11th Jan 2024	-
ITU-T: First Inter-regional Meeting for WTSA-24 Preparation	18th Jan 2024	11th Jan 2024	-
ITU-R: Working Party 4B (WP 4B)	23rd Jan 2024	16th Jan 2024	-
ITU-T Third meeting of the Telecommunication Standardization Advisory Group (TSAG)	22nd Jan - 26th Jan 2024	15th Jan 2024	-
ITU-R: Forty-fifth meeting of Working Party 5D	31st Jan - 7th Feb 2024	24th Jan 2024	12th Jan 2024
APT: The 32nd Meeting of the APT Wireless Group (AWG-32)	04th Mar - 8th Mar 2024	26th Feb 2024	-

Telecom Stories:



MeitY in collaboration with MyGov invites and encourages organizations to explore and submit proposals on Responsible AI themes for building tools and frameworks.

Following is a list of Responsible AI themes that can be explored by organizations, in collaboration with other partners, to build tools and frameworks that promote the just and ethical development and deployment of AI across different sectors:



Polar to a flying start, ISRO on Monday ushered in 2024 with the successful launch of its first X-Ray Polarimeter Satellite that would offer insights into black holes in the space, making the country only the second to conduct experiment into such celestial objects.

Among the payloads that piggybacked the space agency's ever reliable Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) was one made by women, prompting ISRO to call it an inspiration for the country. The PSLV-C58 rocket, in its 60th mission, carried the primary payload XPoSats and deployed it in an intended 650 km low earth orbit.



The Telecom Sector Skill Council (TSSC) is planning to place over 1.5 lakh candidates in telecom and related emerging technologies in the next financial year to reduce the demand-supply workforce gap. The increasing convergence of telecom with the technology sector and especially the launch of 5G has resulted in a higher demand for skilled/unskilled/reskilled workforce in the industry. "As we witness this increasing demand in the telecom workforce, TSSC aims to empower the youth in tier II, III cities and rural areas with digital and core telecom and tech skills. In the next fiscal year, we plan to train and place over 1.5 lakh candidates in telecom and related emerging technologies," TSSC CEO Arvind Bali said on Thursday.

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