

Net neutrality gets Telecom Commission nod

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THE INTER-MINISTERIAL Telecom Commission Wednesday cleared the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's (Trai) suggestions on net-neutrality that bar service providers from discriminating against internet content and services by blocking, throttling or granting them higher speed access. Along with this, the apex decision-making panel of the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) also cleared the National Digital Communications Policy 2018, and the department will now seek the Cabinet's approval to notify the same.

In November last year, the telecom and media sector watchdog had proposed restrictions on service providers from entering into pacts which lead to

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discriminatory treatment of content, while also suggesting a multi-stakeholder body comprising telecom and internet service providers, content providers, civil society organisation and consumer representatives for monitoring violations. Trai had also exempted specialised services such as autonomous cars, remote surgery, that are mission critical applica-

tions to be excluded from the purview of the framework, along with content delivery networks.

With the Commission accepting Trai's suggestions, India has formally taken a view on the issue. On the other hand, the US Federal Communications Commission has repealed the 2015 laws that aimed at upholding the broad principle of neutrality, giving consumers equal access to web content, and barring broadband providers from blocking or slowing access to content, or charging consumers more for certain types of content.

The telecom industry, while supporting the recommendations, has called for light-touch approach on regulations. "...we reiterate our earlier position that a light touch regulatory approach should be adopted so that innovation is not hampered by the rules. Many of the 5G ap-

plications will have stringent data communication requirements, such as high reliability or minimal delay which require traffic management techniques," said Rajan S Mathews, director general, COAI.

The National Digital Communications Policy 2018, which was also cleared by the Telecom Commission, aims to attract \$100 billion investment in the sector and ensure a broadband speed of 50 Mbps for each citizen, along with creating 40 lakh jobs by 2022. The policy, which will be the roadmap for the other government decisions in the digital sector once it gets the Cabinet nod, also proposes reviewing licence fees, spectrum usage charges, and the universal service obligation fund levy, which add to the cost of telecom services, with an aim to enhance ease of doing business.