



Government Approves Net Neutrality in India

The Government of India has approved the principles of net neutrality in India. The decision will ensure that netizens continue to have free and fair access to the internet. The Telecom Commission had approved the recommendations of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).

Key Highlights

- The recommendations (net neutrality rules) bars service providers from discriminating against Internet content and services by blocking, throttling or granting them higher speed access.
- Telecom and Internet service providers must treat all data on the Internet equally, and not discriminate or charge differently by user, content, site, platform, or application.
- They cannot engage in practices such as blocking, slowing down or granting preferential speeds to any content.
- However, some mission-critical applications or services like remote surgery and autonomous cars will, however, be kept out of the purview of net neutrality framework.

Telecom Commission

- The Telecom Commission was set up with administrative and financial powers of the Government of India to deal with various aspects of Telecommunications.
- It consists of a Chairman, four full-time members, and four part-time members.
- The Secretary in the Department of Telecommunications is the ex-officio Chairman of the Telecom Commission.

The Telecom Commission is responsible for:

1. Formulating the policy of the Department of Telecommunications for approval of the Government
2. Preparing the budget for the Department of Telecommunications for each financial year and getting it approved by the Government
3. Implementation of Government's policy in all matters concerning telecommunication.

Background

- In December 2015, social media giant, Facebook launched 'Free Basics' (earlier known as internet.org) while Indian telecom giant Airtel launched 'Airtel Zero'.
- Both 'Free Basics' and 'Airtel Zero' let users access certain apps and websites for free (they were just charged for the data used). However, both the companies decided to charge or subsidize other companies that wanted to be a part of the 'Free Basics' or 'Airtel Zero' program.
- Facebook and Airtel's arguments were that they were trying to make the internet more accessible to people, especially the ones that could not afford high data charges.
- In 2016, TRAI banned both the projects as it went against the very principles of net neutrality since the companies could inevitably favor some content over the others.

What is Net Neutrality?

- The Oxford dictionary defines net neutrality as 'the principle that Internet service providers should enable access to all content and applications regardless of the source, and without favoring or blocking particular products or websites.
- This means when a customer pays an internet service provider or ISP for a data plan, he/she should be able to access all content online – news, social media, videos, games etc – at the same broadband speed which he had opted for.

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