

# Licensing and Regulation of Submarine Cable Landing in India

#### Why in News?

The Department of Telecom (DoT) raised concerns about **Indian International Long-Distance Operators (ILDOs)** without any stake in submarine cable systems seeking clearances for laying and maintaining submarine cables in India.

 In this context, the <u>Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)</u> has released recommendations on the "Licensing Framework and Regulatory Mechanism for Submarine Cable Landing in India".

#### What are the Recommendations of TRAI?

- Two Categories of CLS:
  - Amending the ILD/ISP-A (international long distance/Internet service provider Category A)
    permits to include two categories of Cable Landing Station (CLS) locations Main CLS
    and CLS "point of presence".
    - Main CLS facility be mandated to seek all approvals for an international submarine cable (SMC) landing in India.
    - CLS 'point of presence' needs to allow lawful interception and meet the requisite security drill.
- Critical and Essential Service:
  - The submarine cable operations should be recognized as critical and essential services due to their crucial role in maintaining seamless national and international communication networks.
  - Submarine cable operations should have the highest level of importance for obtaining necessary permissions and security clearances.
- Proposed Legislative Amendment:
  - Addition of a section on "Submarine cable" and "Cable Landing Station" in the Indian Telecommunication Bill, 2022.
    - It will provide legal and regulatory support, contributing to the growth and robustness of the digital communications sector.
- Custom Duty and GST Exemptions:
  - TRAI proposes **exemption from custom duty and** GST for goods and items required for CLS, submarine cable operation, and maintenance.
  - This will address critical challenges in the sector, particularly related to cable repair and maintenance.

# What is the Significance of the Recommendations?

- Strengthening Data Flow:
  - TRAI's recommendations have the potential to unlock the full potential of crossborder data flow, fuel innovation, and fortify India's position as a data powerhouse.
- Reduced Reliance on Foreign Providers:
  - The requirement for Indian entity-owned vessels for undersea cable maintenance will

reduce delays and decrease reliance on foreign providers for repairing subsea cables.

## What is a Submarine Communications Cable?

#### About:

- It is a cable **laid on the seabed between land-based stations** to transmit telecommunication signals across stretches of ocean and sea.
- Modern submarine cables use <u>fiber-optic technology</u>. The optical fibre elements
  are typically coated with plastic layers and contained in a protective tube suitable
  for the environment where the cable will be deployed.

#### Significance:

• Compared to satellites, **using internet connection through submarine cables** is more reliable, cost efficient and of larger capacity.

## • Examples:

- MIST Submarine Cable System (connecting India with Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore)
- **Reliance Jio Infocomm's India Asia Xpress (IAX)** (India to the Maldives, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand)
- India Europe Xpress (IEX) (India to Italy via Saudi and Greece)
- **SeaMeWe-6 project** (Singapore to France via India, Bangladesh, Maldives)
- Africa2 Cable (India with the UK via several African countries

**Source: PIB** 

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