The Telecom Commission (TC) which is scheduled to meet on February 21, 2018, is likely to take up the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's (TRAI) recommendations on net neutrality and allocation of spectrum in E bands (71-76 GHz and 81-86 GHz) and V bands (57 GHz -64 GHz) that would underpin 5G rollouts.

Spectrum in E and V band would inter-connect mobile towers and could help telecom operators lay optical fibre cables, helping them provide last-mile connectivity. Data through E and V band can be transmitted with a speed of around 1,000 MB per second. It is learnt that 5G deployment will also need airwaves in these two bands for offloading data traffic while the proliferation of optic fibre based network for mobile backhaul remains low.

TRAI had recommended that E band spectrum be charged at Rs 10,000 a year per slot of 250 MHz each and that there should be an initial promotional discount of 50 per cent for three years from the date of allocation of the first carrier in this band. For spectrum in V band, the regulator had recommended that it be charged at Rs 1,000 per annum per slot of 50 MHz each. The Department of Telecommunication (DoT) was reportedly planning to allocate spectrum in the bands through auctions instead but is yet to take a final call.

Moreover, a part of the deliberations by TC may also cover the issue of net neutrality recommendations made by the regulator, where it backed principles of a free and open internet and prohibited discriminatory treatment of content and practices such as blocking, degrading, slowing down or granting preferential speeds or treatment to any content. However, it allowed fast lanes for specialised services that DoT must define, and permitted operators to use traffic management practices to maintain the quality of service. It also kept content delivery networks out of the ambit of net neutrality.

Further, TRAIs recommendations allowing airlines to offer voice and data services during flights within Indian airspace are also expected to be taken to the TC, but after two months, as the departments of space and civil aviation will be involved in issuing the final guidelines.

Additionally, the recommendations from the inter-ministerial group (IMG) to improve the financial health of the telecom sector, which was earlier approved by the TC, would be taken to

the Cabinet in the next couple of weeks. The IMG suggested giving a one-time option to carriers to make annual payments for spectrum bought in auctions over 16 years rather than 12 years at present. It had also suggested a reduction in interest rate on penalties.

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