

TRAI SET TO REJECT POSSIBILITY OF 5G ROLLOUT DISRUPTING AIRLINE OPERATIONS

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Trai says there is no cause for concern because of the gap between the two bands

NEW DELHI : The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) is expected to take up the issue of 5G roll-out in India interfering with airline operations in its ongoing consultations on 5G spectrum pricing, said two people in the know, seeking anonymity.

The regulator is expected to clarify that 5G roll-out is not likely to cause any disruption for airline operations, the people said, after international flight operations to the US were disrupted since C-band frequencies were put into service for 5G rollout in the US.

"There is no issue because the band identified for 5G rollout—3.3GHz to 3.6GHz—is much lower than the band used by airline altimeters that starts from 4.2Ghz. So, there is adequate buffer between the two bands," said one of the two people.

"The regulator is aware of the issue, but there is no cause for concern because of the gap between the two bands, clarification to the effect can be provided as well," the second person said. At present, Trai is holding consultations with stakeholders on price recommendations for 5G spectrum, which is set to come up for auctions. Stakeholders have time till 24 January to send in their comments, after which the regulator will hold an open-house discussion before coming out with its recommendations. The recommendations could include the clarification, one of the people said.

On Wednesday, Air India, along with many international airlines cancelled some flights to the US following the roll out of 5G services by leading carriers AT&T and Verizon.

Earlier this week, airlines wrote to the US aviation regulator warning of "major disruptions" including possible grounding of flights, caused by the 5G roll out scheduled to begin from 19 January, as it may disrupt an aircraft's altimeter used for automated landings.

While US carriers have delayed their 5G rollout close to airports for the time being, the issue has been flagged by the Federation of Indian Pilots in a communication to the government in early January.

Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), representing Indian telecom service providers, had said at that time that concerns over interference were unfounded.

"We understand the concerns raised by Federation of Indian Pilots, and the matter has been highlighted in the past as well wherein the authorities have found the issue of spectrum interference uncorroborated," S.P. Kochhar, director general, COAI, had said. "There is a gap of 530 MHz (between 3,670 MHz and 4200 MHz) in the transmission of frequencies. Thus, making it safe for 5G and aviation to coexist," he added.

Global airlines including Air India, Japan Airlines, Emirates and ANA, have either cancelled or revised flights to the US. A senior Air India official said the airline will suffer revenue losses as US is a key international market for it. "We are hopeful that the issue will be sorted in the coming weeks as the FAA marks more airports safe for Boeing 777 operations," he added.

Air India has a fleet of 117 aircraft, including 14 Boeing 777 and 22 Boeing 787.

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