

## Telecom Commission approves net neutrality, new telecom policy

Illustration: Sreejith R. Kumar | Photo Credit: [The Hindu](#)

In a move that will ensure open and free Internet in India, the government has approved the principle of net neutrality. This means that 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.

The Telecom Commission (TC) — which is the highest decision-making body in the Department of Telecom, on Wednesday approved the recommendation made by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) on the subject eight months ago. “The TC today [Wednesday] approved net neutrality as recommended by TRAI,” Telecom Secretary Aruna Sundararajan said after the meeting.

She, however, added that certain emerging and critical services will be kept out of the purview of these norms.

A separate committee has been set up under the Department of Telecom (DoT) to examine what these critical services will be. These may include autonomous vehicles, digital healthcare services or disaster management.

The regulator, in November 2017, batted in favour of net neutrality – which has been one of the most hotly debated topics in India for over 4 years now.

The regulator had said, “Internet access services should be governed by a principle that restricts any form of discrimination or interference in the treatment of content, including practices like blocking, degrading, slowing down or granting preferential speeds or treatment to any content.”

This principle, it had added, will apply to any discriminatory treatment based on the sender or receiver, the network protocols, or the user equipment, but not to specialised services or other exclusions. It had also said that these will not apply to “reasonable traffic management practices” by the service provider.

India’s decision to uphold Net neutrality assumes greater significance given that in the U.S., the rules on Net neutrality were repealed. The decision, which came into effect in June, paves the way for service providers to block or slow down access to particular content for users.

To implement Net neutrality, the regulator had recommended that the terms of licence agreements that govern the provision of Internet services in India be amended “to incorporate the principles of non-discriminatory treatment of content along with the appropriate exclusions and exceptions.”

It has further recommended establishing a multi-stakeholder not-for-profit body for the monitoring and enforcement of these principles.

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