

TRAI PROVISIONS LIKELY TO BE REMOVED FROM BILL

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The source added that one of the things that the government was now considering was removing almost all TRAI-related amendments proposed in the draft telecom policy and bringing in a separate Bill with the objective of strengthening the TRAI. However, the new Bill would come a couple of years down the line, after implementation of the telecom Bill.

The DoT is currently under the process of discussion with all stakeholders, including industry bodies, on the draft Bill. The government has also invited written comments from industry on the Bill, the deadline for which was extended till October 30. After these discussions and receiving of the inputs, a final draft will be introduced.

The source added that the Centre wanted to strengthen the TRAI to bring it on a par with bodies such as the U.S.' regulator Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the U.K.'s Ofcom, with highly technical-oriented people and powers to impose penalties, among other things.

Significant changes

The government had released the draft of The Indian Telecommunication Act, 2022 in September this year, wherein it proposes significant changes, including provisions for waiving dues for financially stressed operators, bringing over-the-top (OTT) platforms within the ambit of telecom services that require a licence to operate, and provisions for message interception in case of public emergency.

Among the other concerns, experts had pointed out that the Bill undermines the regulator, by proposing to "take away the TRAI's statutory independence, and seeks to make it subservient to the government". For example, the Bill proposed to remove provisions for referencing and back referencing recommendations between the DoT and the TRAI. The Bill also proposed to amend clauses which gave the regulator power to notify tariffs at which telecom services are to be offered.

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