

Defence spectrum might not be vacated before 3G auction

In what could be a hurdle for the upcoming third generation (3G) radio waves auction, the defence ministry may not be able to vacate the spectrum it holds before the auction date.

'Discussions are going on regarding vacating of defence spectrum in the 1,920-1,980 MHz bandwidth. This issue is not likely to be resolved before the proposed auction date of January 15, 2009,' a Department of Telecom (DoT) official told IANS.

The government needs to release additional spectrum for CDMA services by freeing defence bandwidth - 1,900-1,910 coupled with 1980-1990 MHz) - at the earliest.

CDMA operators have been requesting the release of at least 1,900 MHz for their services for some time now. The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) had also recommended this in 2006.

If the defence spectrum is not vacated, auctioning it would be merely on paper and the rollout would not be possible.

'Thus, it would not be prudent to auction all the available spectrum in the 1920-1980 MHz right away,' the official said.

He said if additional spectrum remains available, then it could be subsequently allocated on terms in consultation with Trai.

DoT and the defence ministry have been in discussions for vacating unused spectrum by the armed forces so that telecom operators could utilise this for offering smooth wireless phone services.

Meanwhile, the meeting of the group of ministers (GoM) on spectrum vacation, earlier scheduled for November and later early December, has been deferred.

National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan was given the mandate by the GoM, headed by External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, to look into the details of getting the spectrum vacated from the defence forces.

The GoM was constituted in 2007 to explore the issue of vacation of defence spectrum.

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