

Northeast will continue pre-paid mobile connections

Pre-paid mobile telephone services will continue in northeast India though the union home ministry has banned it in Jammu and Kashmir over 'serious security concerns', officials said here Monday. Like Kashmir, many areas of the northeast are also beset with insurgencies.

'The union home ministry has asked Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) and the state governments of the northeastern states to send reports on the use or misuse of pre-paid mobile services by the militants or any unauthorised elements,' said BSNL general manager (operations) Deb Kumar Chakraborty.

'We do not have specific reports that pre-paid cell phone connections are being misused by any elements in the region. However, we are maintaining a close watch on this,' he told IANS.

The central government in February this year had renewed pre-paid mobile licences of cell phone service providers for one more year in the militancy hit northeastern states.

The union home ministry has recently decided that no prepaid mobile connection would be issued and existing prepaid SIM cards would not be renewed in Jammu and Kashmir with effect from Nov 1. The decision was taken in view of the reports that proper verification was not done while providing such prepaid mobile connections by the service providers and vendors.

State-owned telecom operator BSNL will strengthen its infrastructure and set up more mobile phone towers along the bordering areas of the northeast region to improve its network.

BSNL chief general manager Vinod Kumar told newsmen in Shillong: 'Earlier there was a restriction by the union home ministry to set up towers within 10 km of the international border. Now the restriction has been reduced to only 500 metres.'

In the border areas, some people use the services of Bangla Grameen Mobile Company Ltd because of the poor service of BSNL.

However, of late, some of the trading hubs and check-posts along India-Bangladesh border areas of Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura have been brought under BSNL's network.

BSNL has recently launched 3G standards services defined by the International Telecommunication Union in Guwahati (Assam), Gangtok (Sikkim), Agartala (Tripura) and Shillong (Meghalaya).

Besides BSNL, there are several private cell phone service providers operating in the northeastern region, which shares borders with China, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Bhutan.

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