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## The Issue of Call Dropping

### Why in news?

The government has proposed to evaluate the severity of call dropping problem and may take the decision to cancel licenses of telecom companies.

### How is call dropping regulated in India?

- As per Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), "call drop represents the service provider's inability to maintain a call once it has been correctly established".
- It means the call is dropped or interrupted prior to its normal completion by the user, the cause of the early termination being within the service provider's network.
- The TRAI has been monitoring the performance of Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) through quarterly performance monitoring reports submitted by them.

### What are the parameters for assessing TSP performance?

- TRAI has issued "The Standards of Quality of Service of Basic Telephone Service (Wireline) and Cellular Mobile Telephone Service (Fifth Amendment) Regulations, 2017".
- These regulations have prescribed two stringent parameters for assessing call drop in mobile network.
  - **Spatial Distribution measure**- It prescribe that at least 90% of cellphones in the network should perform better than the benchmark figure of  $\leq 2\%$  on at least 90% of days.
  - **Temporal Distribution measure**- It prescribe that at least 97% of cellphones in the network should perform better than the benchmark figure of  $\leq 3\%$  on at least 90% of days.

### What if the TSP does not comply with the benchmark figures?

- **Challenges in meeting the benchmark**
  - New site restrictions
  - Electromagnetic field (EMF) issues
  - Fibre cut
  - Theft cases
  - Boundary and fringe cells
  - GSM spectrum non-availability
  - Interference

- High mountainous terrains and remote areas
- For Radio Link Technologies (RLT), there may be cases wherein the drop may be for a short period of time such as the user taking a lift or passing through a tunnel.
- Some service providers resort to masking technology that prevents a call from disconnecting despite there being poor or no signal.
- The TSP have to explain their stance should if they have not been able to meet the benchmark figures.
- After considering the explanations, TRAI imposes financial disincentives for failing to comply with the same as per the revised graded Financial Disincentives (FD) structure introduced in 2017.
- The disincentives vary according to the deviation from the specified benchmark.

## What policy initiatives were taken to deal with the call drop problem?

- **Department of Telecommunications (DoT)'s policy initiatives**
  - Permitting trading
  - Sharing
  - Liberalisation of spectrum
  - Permitting passive and active infrastructure sharing
  - Making government land/buildings available for installations of towers
- **Feedback-** The telecom regulator has an Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) for obtaining direct feedback from subscribers on call drops.
- The feedback is shared with the TSPs for taking corrective actions in a time bound manner.

### References

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/explained-trais-mechanism-for-preventing-call-drops/article65302294.ece?homepage=true>
2. <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/call-drop-problems-govt-may-cancel-licenses-of-telecom-companies-11649230912626.html>
3. <https://www.trai.gov.in/about-us/history>

## Quick facts

### The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)

- TRAI was established in 1997 by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act, 1997
- Objectives
  - to regulate telecom services, including fixation/revision of tariffs for telecom services
  - to create and nurture conditions for growth of telecommunications in the country
  - to provide a fair and transparent policy environment which promotes a level playing field and facilitates fair competition
- **Headquarters-** New Delhi
- **Composition-** The TRAI consists of a Chairperson, two full time members and two part time members.

- The recommendations of the TRAI are not binding upon the Central Government.
- **TDSAT**- The Telecommunications Dispute Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) was set up to adjudicate any dispute
  - between a licensor and a licensee,
  - between two or more service providers,
  - between a service provider and a group of consumers,
  - to hear and dispose of appeals against any direction, decision or order of TRAI
- The TDSAT consists of a Chairperson and two members, appointed by the Central Government.



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