Net Neutrality Rules in India

Why in news?

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Telecom commission of India has approved the net neutrality rules under new telecom policy.

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What is move on Net neutrality?

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- The Telecom Commission is the highest decision-making body in the Department of Telecommunications.
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- Recently the commission has approved the net neutrality rules implying internet will remain open to everybody in the country.
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- Apart from net neutrality rules, the commission has also approved the new telecom policy, National Digital Communications Policy (NDCP) 2018.
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- It is aimed at promoting investments, ease of doing business, and emerging technologies like 5G.
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- This decision, which comes within a month of the US nullifying its own net neutrality rules, reiterates India's firm commitment to a non-discriminatory net regime.
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What is the significance of the recent move?

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- The move on net neutrality is in sync with the recommendations of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai).
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- It is meant to ensure no service provider can restrict or discriminate in the

treatment of content by blocking, slowing down or granting preferential speeds while providing internet access.
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- A net-neutral regime allows smaller businesses and individuals to create and disseminate content without fear that their offerings will be swamped by larger competitors, or throttled by ISPs.
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- It will remain an open platform and internet service providers (ISPs) will be prohibited from practices such as blocking content, degrading speeds, slowing specific content, or granting differential speeds or treatment.
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- In that sense, net neutrality helps to promote innovation across the entire digital ecosystem.
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What are the concerns with the move?

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- Given India's hyper-competitive market, where telecom service providers have been struggling to generate enough revenues to service debts, tight net neutrality could be considered a restrictive approach.
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- For example, under net neutrality, telecom service providers cannot offer “zero-rating” services where they charge surfers less to access specific websites or content run by partners.
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- It does certainly restrict the freedom of telecom service providers to offer favourable terms to specific content providers, and does cut down the potential for creating new revenue streams.
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- In technical terms new rules require both monitoring of compliance as well as a willingness to accept consumer complaints and penalise operators who violate the rules.
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What measures needs to be taken?

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- Key element about the net neutrality regime is that certain critical services

may be exempt from it.
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- It is up to the government now to decide on services that deserve exceptional treatment by regulators.
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- For example, emergency remote diagnostic and telemedical services may need to be fast-tracked.
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- The same may also be necessary for disaster management or during crowd management situations such as pilgrimages.
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- Critical high-tech services like the management of smart power grids could also require priority, and there may be new applications such as autonomous car communications or drone operations, which might merit priority.
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- On the whole, this policy should boost innovation by helping to maintain a level-playing field across the digital landscape.
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- That will enable everyone from small businesses to artists to create and offer content without fear of being stifled.
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Source: Business Standard

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