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 ≤ 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 ≤ 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 art 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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