TRAI in Support of Net Neutrality

Click here to know about Net Neutrality.

\n\n

Why in news?

\n\n

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has recently rolled out a series of recommendations in strong support of Net neutrality.

\n\n

What are the major recommendations?

\n\n

\n
- **Discrimination** - Service providers are restricted from entering into any arrangement that has the effect of discriminatory treatment in Internet access.
\n
- The discrimination should not be based on the content, sender or receiver, protocols being used, or user equipment being deployed.
\n
- Any “discriminatory treatment” including blocking, degrading, slowing down or granting preferential speeds is restricted.
\n
- **Content** - Non-discriminatory treatment applies specifically to ‘Internet Access Services’ which are generally available to the public.
\n
- The content mentioned includes applications, services and any other data, including its end-point information.
\n
- **Monitoring** - TRAI has recommended the establishment of a collaborative mechanism in the form of a multi-stakeholder body.
\n
- This would be responsible for developing technical standards for monitoring violations and enforcement of the principles.
\n

\n\n

What is the significance?

\n\n

\n
- Internet has become a basic infrastructure and an egalitarian platform that advances the free speech rights of citizens.
\n
- The recommendations have thus upheld the democratic principles of the country by granting the freedom and choice of access for the end users.
\n
- TRAI has also taken the leadership position globally in ensuring that access to internet remains non-discriminatory.
\n
- This is especially given that many other telecom regulators including that of the US have faltered in ensuring equality in cyberspace.
\n

\n\n

What are the shortfalls and solutions?

\n\n

\n
- **Special Services** - A communications network connecting hospitals may rightly be classified as a specialised service.
\n
- The operators may have to ensure a higher grade of service for these kinds of areas compared to the mass internet.
\n
- TRAI has excluded specialised services from the purview of net neutrality but without specifying what falls under this category.
\n
- This could be a cause of concern given that the operators can exploit policy loopholes.
\n
- E.g. a telecom operator could enter into private deals with a healthcare mobile application provider to get unfair access to users.
\n
- TRAI should have set up a monitoring platform to ensure that telecom companies make adequate disclosures about such specialised services.
\n
- **Traffic management** - TRAI has also allowed telecom companies to carry out reasonable traffic management practices, for delivering internet traffic.

\n
- Traffic management practices such as those used for protecting network security are legitimate, but it can also lead to discriminatory practices.
\n
- TRAI could have specified what type of traffic management is allowed automatically, and which ones need approval.
\n
- **Enforcement** - TRAI has failed to put in place a neutral enforcement body.
\n
- The multi-stakeholder body led by industry, as proposed by TRAI, may not be enough to ensure implementation of net neutrality, exceptions and transparency measures.
\n
- This is because the industry-led bodies have seldom protected the rights of consumers in the past.
\n
- **Besides,** the regulations are criticised to be unnecessarily bureaucratic and not conducive for the ease of doing business.
\n
- The Department of Telecom, while accepting the regulator's overall recommendations, should also iron out these concerns.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: BusinessLine

\n

