

According to the Tower and Infrastructure Providers Association (TAIPA), the surprise BBMP fibre cut drive is paradoxical with the provisions of the National Digital Communications Policy (NDCP) 2018 and numerous court judgments emphasising on no-coercive actions without any prior notice and ensuring physical safety and security of telecom infrastructure.

The suo-motto surprise cutting of fibre across areas like Sarjapur Road, Whitefield, Marathahalli, Bellandur, Sarjapur etc. without any prior intimation to telecom industry has adversely impacted the overall internet connectivity in the city, thereby impacting the critical services like digital financial transactions, transportation, healthcare and other emergency services. BBMP will be held responsible in case of any untoward incident happening in the ICT city of Bangalore.

The broader role and responsibility of any municipal corporation is to benefit public at large with the development of infrastructure and other utilities whereas in BBMP's case the corporation itself is damaging the most critical infrastructure facility i.e. telecom infrastructure.

Talking about BBMP's drive, Tilak Raj Dua, Director General, TAIPA said, "It is distressing to see that BBMP is cutting off the nose to spite the face by damaging the telecom infrastructure in its own vicinity. The overall action taken by the corporation seems to be aimed upon revenue maximisations only by treating critical telecom industry as a cash cow without realising its far reaching impact. The telecom industry makes rigorous efforts in procuring permissions, planning and rolling out infrastructure on ground while such an incidence takes the whole network connectivity for a toss eventually depriving public at large and incurring huge losses to the industry.'

India is at the cusp of witnessing the technological paradigm shift with the newer technologies such as 5G, machine-to-machine (M2M) communications, artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) etc. In order to facilitate and operationalise these technologies, fiberisation is fundamental and rollout needs to grow at least 8-10 times from current capacities i.e. around 1,500,000 kms.

"In the recent past, the industry has already done series of meeting and representations with

BBMP to resolve the issue however the industry always walked out empty handed. The Right of Way rules, 2016 have clear guidelines for the removal and alteration of telecom infrastructure that are not being followed by the authority. Over and above, at present, there is no comprehensive policy in Bengaluru that is aligned with Right of Way rules, 2016 issued by Indian government aimed at ensuring smooth provisioning of telecom infrastructure,” added Dua.

The Right of Way rules, 2016 under chapter 4 mentions that for the removal and alteration of telecom infrastructure, the relevant authority shall issue a notice to the licensees/IP-1s then the licensee/IP-1 shall, forthwith and within a period of thirty days, proceed to submit, to the appropriate authority, a detailed plan for removal or alteration of such telegraph infrastructure whereas nothing as such has been followed by the authority. Further, it mentions that the appropriate authority shall, having regard to emergent and expedient circumstances requiring the removal or alteration of such telegraph infrastructure, give a reasonable time of not less than ninety days to the licensee for removal or alteration of such telegraph infrastructure.

Currently, the Karnataka states have around 34,700 mobile towers mounted with 1,47,200 base transceiver stations (BTSs) serving around 65 million subscribers. In the near future, Karnataka state needs to double the number of towers and BTS count in order to connect the unconnected, to ensure seamless network connectivity and rollout future technologies such as 5G, internet of things, VR and AI etc.

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