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Telcos to monitor call drops, Trai may not have any external monitoring system

By Surabhi Agarwal, ET Bureau | Mar 08, 2016, 04.00 AM IST

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NEW DELHI: Even as the government and the judiciary have backed Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's (Trai) decision to get telecom service providers to compensate users for call drops, the sector watchdog may not have an external monitoring mechanism.

According to the government, there are over 180 reasons, or "heads", why call drops happen — including self-termination, battery drainouts, exhaustion of talk-time balance, network congestion, etc. "Telcos have to just automatically compensate



According to the government, there are over 180 reasons, or "heads", why call drops happen — including self-termination, battery drainouts.

users if the reason for the call drop is under the relevant head," said a senior government official close to the development, requesting anonymity.

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Tough Call

THERE ARE OVER 180 REASONS WHY CALL DROPS HAPPEN

Heads include self-termination, exhausted battery, low balance, network congestion

Since call drop info lies with telco, evidence may be doctored, argue experts

Trai can ask for logs to be inspected in case of complaints from users



Experts argue that despite the noble intentions of the government, monitoring of the order may prove to be a challenge as the onus will be on telcos to fairly compute the number of calls dropped and compensate users accordingly.

"The potentiality of evidence being doctored or manipulated can't be ruled out," said Supreme Court lawyer Pavan

Duggal. "A transparent mechanism for monitoring call drops and the payment made has not been worked out so far, this can't be illusionary remedy, it has to be an effective remedy," he said.

Operators also contest the fact that they keep logs of calls dropped under various fields. Rajan Mathews, Director General of Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) said that nowhere in the world operators keep a track of whether the call dropped due to non-coverage, battery issue, switching on the airplane mode, entering into an elevator etc. "Operators will now have to configure their software to track these new codes which will require additional expenditure that will not be trivial," added Mathews.

If telcos comply with Trai's regulation, their collective monthly payouts as compensation for call drops is expected to be anywhere between Rs 830-4,500 crore based on consumer usage patterns, according to industry estimates. This, however, is much higher than the Rs 800 crore per year industry payout estimated by Trai.

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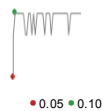
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The government official quoted above countered that monitoring should not be an issue since Trai can ask for the logs to be inspected in case of complaints from users about not being compensated. "Trai has all the right to see that regulation is followed," the person added.

The regulator had mandated compensation for consumers at Rs 1 for every call dropped, capped at Rs 3 a day from January 1, 2016. There is another catch. Even with the proposed mechanism, which has been contested by telcos, only 50% of the call drops will be compensated for. "The compensation will be made only when there is deficiency in the originating service provider network and for no other reason," said the official.

For instance, if a user on telecom service A calls another user on telecom service B and the call drops because of a problem in B's network, no compensation will be given. "This has been done to make sure that the compensation mechanism is simple and there is no complexity involved," added the person.

If Trai had decided to reimburse calls which dropped due to fault of both originating and terminating operators, then it would have required a money transaction between the two operators who would then have forwarded it to their respective consumers making the process lengthy and cumbersome.

"No one wants to get into these complex transactions. The idea is just to make sure that telcos improve their services," said the official.

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