

Governance: National Digital Communications Policy.

GS Paper 2: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation; important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability.



In news: The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) excelled in coming out with a draft version of the top-class, path-breaking National Digital Communications Policy (NDCP).

After review and approval by the Telecom Commission and lastly by the Union Cabinet, the finalised policy is now in public domain, and it has won universal acclaim. However, not very well known are the significant aspects of fine-tuning that happened in evolving from the draft state to the final. These changes or revisions are extremely meaningful and important for the sector and for Digital India.

The key policy suggestions

✚ Revenue maximisation is not the priority

Successive governments faltered in going for revenue maximisation to bridge the fiscal deficit, at the cost of the real telecom needs of the economy and the common man. This possibly happened due to certain ambiguities in those policies as articulated. This has been addressed in the finalised NDCP.

✚ Importance for policy consistency

Another criticism from players, in the past, has been the incidence of frequent policy flip-flops, which make well-laid business plans go awry. In the finalisation of the policy, this has been recognised and addressed by clearly adding the word “consistent”.

✚ Importance of digital communications infrastructure

It has been specifically added that “it would be critical to focus on Digital Communications Infrastructure development initiatives related to fibre deployment

and Right of Way clearances, for both overground and underground infrastructure that will form the bedrock of next generation technologies.”

Change in name for policy and commission

Keeping in view the changes and advancements in the digital communications ecosystem, the National Telecom Policy will hereinafter be referred to as ‘National Digital Communications Policy’. To ensure effective implementation and monitoring of the Policy, it is proposed to re-designate the Telecom Commission as the Digital Communications Commission to ensure that the high aspirations are achieved within stipulated time.

The three missions envisaged in NDCP

Connect India	Creating Robust Digital Communications Infrastructure
Propel India	Enabling Next Generation Technologies and Services through Investments, Innovation and IPR generation
Secure India	Ensuring Sovereignty, Safety and Security of Digital Communications

New provisions

- Incentivising green energy:** While the draft had already strategized the “promoting and deployment of solar and green energy,” the final goes further, and asks for “incentivising.” This is a critical requirement.
- Spectrum:** The word “auctioning” has been deleted in the context of spectrum assignment or allocation. Instead, we now have introduction of “ensure transparency in allocation” and optimise availability and utilisation by “developing a transparent, normative and fair policy for spectrum assignments and allocation.” This seems to imply that auctions need not be followed for spectrum allocation and that any reasonable, fair and transparent method of allocation might be followed.
- Universal Service:** Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) has only been for rural citizens who are not connected. The shortcoming in this approach is that there are also large sections of economically and socially weaker communities that are unconnected and equally deserve universal service. This aspect has been addressed in the final policy in the section dealing with the review of the scope and modalities of USOF.

Connect India 2022 goals

- Provide Universal broadband connectivity at 50Mbps to every citizen.
- Provide 1 Gbps connectivity to all Gram Panchayats of India by 2020 and 10 Gbps by 2022.
- Enable 100 Mbps broadband on demand to all key development institutions; including all educational institution.
- Enable fixed line broadband access to 50% of households.
- Achieve 'unique mobile subscriber density' of 55 by 2020 and 65 by 2022.
- Enable deployment of public Wi-Fi Hotspots; to reach 5 million by 2020 and 10 million by 2022.
- Ensure connectivity to all uncovered areas

Propel India 2022 goals

- Attract investments of USD 100 Billion in the Digital Communications Sector.
- Increase India's contribution to Global Value Chains.
- Creation of innovation led Start-ups in Digital Communications sector
- Creation of Globally recognized IPRs in India
- Development of Standard Essential Patents (SEPs) in the field of digital communication technologies.
- Train/ Re-skill 1 Million manpower for building 'New Age Skills'
- Expand IoT ecosystem to 5 Billion connected devices
- Accelerate transition to Industry 4.0

Secure India 2022 goals

- Establish a comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals and facilitates India's effective participation in the global digital economy.
- Ensure that net neutrality principles are upheld and aligned with service requirements, bandwidth availability and network capabilities including next generation access technologies.
- Develop and deploy robust digital communication network security frameworks.
- Enforce accountability through appropriate institutional mechanisms to assure citizens of safe and secure digital communications infrastructure and services.

Questions

1. Discuss the impact National Digital Communications Policy would have on the telecommunications sector and Digital India.
2. Enumerate the shortcomings of National Digital Communications Policy (NDCP).



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