

Bengaluru City may plunge into digital darkness due to indiscriminate cutting of fiber cables by authorities

Consumers to be impacted due to network outages. Telecom and Internet service providers demand relief from local government

Bengaluru, 26th April, 2019: India's IT capital city, Bengaluru is staring at potential blackout of its digital services across-the-board as BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike) has resorted to large-scale cutting of Optical Fibre Cable (OFC) of telecom and internet service providers. This random cutting of OFC across areas like Sarjapur Road, Whitefield, Marathahalli, Bellandur, Sarjapur etc. without any prior intimation of telecom and internet service providers is leading to huge outages and inconvenience to the citizens in densely populated areas across the city. Such coercive actions will have huge impact on the connectivity for a State like Karnataka which is popularly known as the IT Capital of India and needs uninterrupted and seamless telecom services.

The telecom industry has made immense investments in setting-up infrastructure in the Karnataka circle to provide fast connectivity to the citizens, as well as to the IT industry. Over 1,47,200 Base Transceiver Stations (BTSS) on approximately 34,700 towers have been installed in Karnataka state to support telephone, mobile and internet communications. This alone equals INR 14,500 crores in network investments. The sector also generates approx. INR 10,000 crores per annum in revenue in Karnataka alone, from which it contributes over approx. INR 1,700 crores to the State exchequer by way of levies and taxes. Such coercive actions from BBMP are expected to bring the entire city to a virtual halt and cause immense setback to its robust digital economy, while bringing no benefit to the BBMP government.

BBMP is treating all over-the-ground cables as unauthorized, though the industry had obtained all necessary permissions and had originally laid them underground. However, the service providers were constrained to lay them overhead with the permission of BBMP as and when the same were unintentionally cut/removed during various civil works carried out by BBMP, BESCO, BWSSB etc. The disconnection of the cable by BBMP is a huge blow to the Digital Bengaluru plan, which has the potential to cripple essential services including Point of sale purchase applications at retail outlets and various Government services in Bengaluru.

Speaking on the crisis that would bring the city to a virtual halt, **Rajan S Mathews, Director General, COAI (Cellular Operators Association of India)**, stated, "We are deeply disappointed with the unwarranted action by the BBMP to remove the OFC cables, which has led to network outages and caused inconvenience to customers, many of whom are without connectivity. This impulsive action will also impact overall internet connectivity and businesses, especially IT firms in the city. We would once again like to highlight that all our members are fully compliant with the rules and regulations of the concerned authorities. While the industry has been trying to discuss and resolve the issue, BBMP has chosen to remove this key last mile connectivity infrastructure rather than work with telecom companies to find an amicable solution. We once again appeal to the Government of

Karnataka and to the BBMP to immediately allow the restoration of the infrastructure and develop a future ready framework to enable deliver world-class digital connectivity to citizens in the IT capital of India. We once again reiterate that we are open to discussing the issue in a threadbare manner for the larger benefit of Bengaluru's netizens and wide range of essential digital services."

In a city that takes pride in its digital superhighways, it will also result in a complete communication black-out threatening emergency situations if calls can't be connected and data connectivity is lost. This action will not only jeopardise the operations of companies/industries at India's Silicon Valley, but will also have a huge impact on consumers and citizens.

BBMP must stop this retrograde and regressive fibre cutting drive immediately, as it is damaging operations of businesses and individual customers. At present, there is no comprehensive policy in Bengaluru which can ensure smooth provisioning of telecom infrastructure. Hence, Karnataka Government should formulate a comprehensive State RoW policy that is aligned with Right of Way rules dated November 2016 issued by the Government of India to facilitate smooth deployment of telecom infrastructure across the city.

The Right of Way rules, 2016 issued by the Central Government for provisioning of the underground/over the ground telecom infrastructure has enabling features such as no restriction on location of telecom towers, single window clearance mechanism, defined time-period for approvals, appointment of Nodal officers, nominal administrative fees and deemed approval etc. extensively supporting the Digital India mission.

In order to streamline the issue, the telecom industry is ready to help and Municipal body to provide and discuss the best practices being followed in other states regarding RoW rules, 2016.

For more details please contact:

Vikas Kumar: 9811054648/7290055909 vkumar@coai.in