

New policy rings in free roaming

Seeking to eliminate the ambiguities of the past, the draft National Telecom Policy 2011 will remove national roaming charges, make broadband available on demand, bring in a 'one-nation, one-licence' policy and allow mobile numbers to be ported to any part of the country. Under the new draft policy unveiled by Communications Minister Kapil Sibal, users will be allowed to port their mobile numbers, keeping the same number, even while switching service areas. It proposes to accord the telecom industry the status of an infrastructure sector, helping it get easy credit flow for funding rollout plans or expansion. With the policy aiming a 'one-nation, one-licence' regime, the distinction between local and STD calls will vanish. Telecom operators would not require separate licenses for operations in various parts of the country.

CBI names Marans in FIR; searches their premises

The Central Bureau of Investigation has conducted simultaneous searches on the premises of the former Union Minister, Dayanidhi Maran, and his elder brother and Sun Network managing director, Kalanithi Maran, in connection with a case arising out of the Aircel-Maxis deal. Special teams conducted the searches in New Delhi, Chennai and Hyderabad. Earlier, the CBI registered a case against the Maran brothers as well as against Ralph Marshall and T. Ananda Krishnan of Maxis Communications, Malaysia. The agency has also named three private companies, including SUN Direct TV and Maxis Communications, in the First Information Report (FIR). The CBI had been conducting a preliminary enquiry into the Aircel-Maxis deal in the past few months. The agency also named M/s Astro All Asia Networks, U.K., and other unknown officials and persons among the accused.

Kasab's death sentence suspended

The Supreme Court has stayed execution of the death sentence awarded to Pakistani terrorist Ajmal Kasab, the lone surviving gunman in the November 2008 Mumbai terror attack. A Bench of Justice Aftab Alam and Justice C. K. Prasad, after hearing senior counsel Gopal Subramaniam for Maharashtra and senior counsel Raju Ramachandran, *amicus curiae* appointed to assist Kasab, directed completion of pleading by November 30 and ordered that the appeal be listed for final hearing on January 31, 2012. Kasab was sentenced to death by a special anti-terror court on May 6, 2010 and this was confirmed by the Bombay High Court on February 21 this year.

Vinod Rai, former CAG official to tell PAC their loss calculations

The controversy over the Comptroller and Auditor-General's projection of a presumptive loss of Rs. 1.76 lakh crore in the 2G spectrum and licence allotment in 2008 refuses to die down. Responding to Congress member Sanjay Nirupam's plea, Public Accounts Committee Chairman Murli Manohar Joshi has agreed to call both CAG chief Vinod Rai, and R.P. Singh, former Director-General of Audit (Post and Telecommunications) in the Auditor's Office, to appear before the panel and explain how they had calculated their differing loss to the exchequer. In his internal communication, Mr. Singh, who retired on August 31, pegged the loss at Rs. 2,645 crore. The discrepancy dominated the committee proceedings. The CAG chief, who was present, told Dr. Joshi that he would present his case as and when the PAC took up the matter.

Dipak Misra, Chelameswar sworn in Supreme Court judges

Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court Dipak Mishra and Chief Justice of the Kerala High Court Jasti Chelameswar were sworn in as judges of the Supreme Court. Chief Justice of India S.H. Kapadia administered them the oath of office at a brief function held in his court hall. With the swearing-in of these judges, the total strength of the Supreme Court has gone up to 28 as against the sanctioned strength of 31. However, Justice R.V. Raveendran is due to retire on October 14, when the strength will come down to 27. Justice Mishra hails from Orissa. He will have tenure of about seven years in the Supreme Court and will have an opportunity to become the Chief Justice of India. Justice Chelameswar represents Andhra Pradesh. He too will have tenure of about seven years.

Countdown begins for PSLV-C18 launch

The countdown for the lift-off of India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV- C18) has began at Sriharikota. The rocket is scheduled to be launched on Oct 12 and it will put in orbit four satellites. They are the Megha-Tropiques satellite, SRMSat, Jugnu and VesselSat. S. Satish, spokesman for the Indian Space Research Organisation, said the Launch Authorisation Board, which met at Sriharikota on October 9, cleared the launch of the four-stage PSLV- C18 and "various activities during the 50-hour countdown are progressing smoothly." Hundreds of mandatory checks on the launch vehicle and the satellite will take place. Batteries will be charged. The readiness of ground systems including communication networks and the radars for tracking the satellites will be checked.

Bench divided on Lokayukta appointment

The legal battle over Governor Kamala Beniwal's appointment of the Lokayukta without consulting the government remained inconclusive, with a Division Bench of the Gujarat High Court delivering a split verdict. While Justice Akil Kureshi held the appointment of Justice R.A. Mehta, a retired judge of the High Court, "constitutional and valid" and rejected the government's petition against his appointment, Justice Sonia Gokani, in her inconclusive order, said she "differed" with the conclusion drawn by her fellow judge, though she agreed with him on most other points. Pointing out that the post was lying vacant for the past eight years, Justice Kureshi said that because of the "deadlock" between the Chief Justice and the Chief Minister over the nomination of Justice Mehta, the opinion of the Chief Justice should be considered supreme. After the last Lokayukta left the post in 2003, the government did not begin the consultation process till 2006; even when it began, there was no decision on the name, and no appointment was made till 2011.

Indira Gandhi award for Mohan Dharia

Environmentalist, lawyer and former Union Minister, Mohan Dharia, has been selected as the winner of the 26th Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration. The 86-year-old Padma Vibhushan awardee, which currently runs the Vanrai NGO in Pune, was selected for the 2010 award, which carries a citation and cash prize of Rs. 5 lakh. It will be presented by award committee chair and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi on October 31, the anniversary of Indira Gandhi's death.

SRM University's satellite to take to the skies

As the PSLV-C18 carrying Megha-Tropiques, an Indo-French venture to study the atmosphere in the tropical regions, blasts off from Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota on October 12, students will be holding their breath at the ground station at SRM University in the city outskirts. Along with Megha-Tropiques, SRMSAT, a nano-satellite, to monitor the green house gases, carbon-dioxide and water vapour in the tropics using a grating spectrometer will be launched. "Fifty students were involved in design and development of SRMSAT, one of the first nano-satellites to be launched by a private university in the country," said P. Sathyanarayanan, president, SRM University.

Chauhan launches 'Beti Bachao Abhiyan'

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan has launched a "*Beti Bachao Abhiyan*" after offering prayers at the Pitambara Peeth. He told reporters that he will tour all districts after Diwali to create public awareness about the girl child. He said the campaign was being launched from Datia district has a skewed sex ratio.

Two Americans share Economics Nobel

American economists Thomas Sargent and Christopher Sims, both 68, were awarded the Nobel Prize for their path-breaking work on developing tools that policymakers are probably using frenetically today in their bid to extricate the economy from the persistent global economic downturn. Recognising the two economists' "empirical research on cause and effect in the macroeconomy," the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said that it decided to award the so-called Economics Nobel to Professors Sargent and Sims for their seminal research during the 1970s and 1980s that resulted in "essential tools in macroeconomic analysis." Though Professor Sargent, from New York University, and Professor Sims, from Princeton University, carried out their research independently, their contributions were complementary in several ways, the Academy said, in presenting them with the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel for 2011.

Indian help to schools in Sri Lanka

About 42,000 students in Sri Lanka's Northern Province will have better facilities in their schools soon, after the Indian government took up a project to repair 79 damaged ones in the three districts of Kilinochchi, Mullaittivu and Vavuniya. Following local open tendering, the Indian High Commission has awarded the contract to a Sri Lankan construction company. The signing of the contract agreement was held, in the presence of Economic Development Minister Basil Rajapaksa and High Commissioner Ashok K. Kantha. The cost of repairs is in the range of Sri Lankan Rupee (LKR) 0.50 million to 7.0 million depending on the size and number of buildings. The total cost of the project is LKR 187 million. It is expected to be completed in nine months from the award of contract. The project has been conceived and finalised in partnership with the Presidential Task Force for Resettlement, Development and Security, the Ministry of Economic Development and the Ministry of Education, in the Northern Province, said an Indian Mission release.

China plans new economic zones near western border

China has unveiled new plans to speed up the construction of two economic development zones in far-western Xinjiang, pledging greater investment, fiscal subsidies and measures to accelerate connecting the border region to Pakistan through railway lines and air routes. The State Council, or Chinese cabinet, outlined the measures in a policy document released, which, for the first time, detailed Beijing's already announced ambitious plans to set up two economic development zones in the frontier cities of Kashgar and Korgas, respectively located near China's borders with disputed Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Kazakhstan.

GE, Greenko to form venture

GE Energy Financial Services and Greenko Group plc has announced having joined hands to form a joint venture to develop and invest in new upcoming wind energy projects across India. While GE will invest \$50 million to support the development of 500 MW of wind power projects out of Greenko's planned development of one gigawatt of wind projects in India, Greenko has committed \$65 million for the new joint venture that has been created under the brand name of Greenko, known as Greenko Wind Project Private Limited. Greenko is currently developing a pipeline of wind projects in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Rajasthan. The first project of 65 MW at Ratnagiri wind farm in Maharashtra is planned for completion in December and will use GE's 1.6 MW turbines. The wind turbines, specifically designed for low and medium wind speeds, will be assembled at GE's facility in Pune. Once operational, a 500 MW wind portfolio could generate enough renewable electricity to power 8.75 lakh average Indian households and displace 7 lakh tones a year of greenhouse gas emissions, the equivalent of taking 1.37 lakh average U.S. cars off the road.

Mirc launches Android-powered TV

Mirc Electronics, the brand owners of Onida, has come out with a 3D internet-enabled and Android-powered TV. Christened Onida iTube, it allows the user access to a large number of applications available in the Android market. Sanjeev K. Jain, Vice-President, Sales & Service, said this smart LED TV had an internal memory of 70 MB to store nearly 100 applications in personal apps library. It would support up to one TB (trillion bytes) of external memory. Other features include Wifi, Ethernet, Movie USBx3, Full HD, 2D to 3D conversion and comfortable 3D glasses that comes along with it.

MRF turnover crosses Rs.10,000-cr mark

MRF has announced that it has crossed the Rs.10,000-crore turnover mark, becoming the first in the Indian tyre industry to do so in any financial year. According to a release from the company, MRF has registered a growth of over 30 per cent over the previous year. K.M Mammen, Chairman and Managing Director, said though MRF had breached the Rs.10,000-crore sales number, it had been through a challenging time. Company officials said that MRF had been taking proactive initiatives and expanded capacities. Its Tiruchi plant would go commercial in the first quarter of next year.

Apple says iPhone 4S sales over 1 m in first day

Apple said the pre-orders of the new model of its hit iPhone 4 topped one million units in the first 24 hours. Worldwide advance orders for the iPhone 4S, said to be much faster than its predecessor and with improved video and photo capabilities, set a record for an Apple product, the company said. "The first day pre-orders for iPhone 4S have been the most for any new product that Apple has ever launched," said Philip Schiller, Apple Senior Vice-President, in a statement. The smart phone, which will sell for between \$199 and \$399, depending on memory capacity, will be available in Apple stores in the U.S. from October 14. It will be available in 22 other countries, including much of Europe, by the end of October. The 4S was launched on October 4, one day before visionary Apple co-founder and long time Steve Jobs died following a long battle with cancer. His health failing, Jobs had stepped down as chief executive in August and was replaced by Tim Cook, who presided over the launch of the new iPhone.

Reliance Capital completes 26 % stake sale to Nippon Life

Anil Ambani-owned Reliance Capital has announced that it has completed the sale of a 26 per cent stake in its life insurance venture Reliance Life to Japan's Nippon Life for over Rs.3,000 crore. The entire transaction proceeds of Rs.3,062 crore (\$680 million) from the Japanese financial services major have been duly received by the company, Reliance Capital said in a statement. The transaction, which was announced in March, pegs the total valuation of Reliance Life Insurance at about Rs.11,500 crore (\$2.6 billion). Following the deal, Reliance Capital will hold a 74 per cent stake in Reliance Life. The deal had already received all regulatory approvals required for its completion. Reliance Capital, the financial services arm of Anil Ambani-led Reliance Group, has interests in telecom, power, entertainment and infrastructure businesses. Reliance Capital CEO, Sam Ghosh, said that Nippon was coming on board as a valued strategic partner in Reliance Life Insurance.

Genpact acquires High Performance Partners of U.S.

BPO major Genpact has said it had acquired High Performance Partners (HPP), a U.S.-based company developing software platforms for the mortgage industry, for an undisclosed amount.

Delhi to host Asian championships in 2013

Delhi will host the Asian cycling championships in March 2013. The 10-day event will have both road and track competitions in men, women and junior categories. "Approximately 700 cyclists from around 40 countries of Asia are expected to take part in the event," said Parminder Singh Dhindsa, the President of a Cycling Federation of India (CFI) faction.

Indian GP should be a great event

Karun Chandhok, one of the only two Formula One drivers from India, believes that the success of the inaugural Airtel Grand Prix of India, scheduled to be held on October 30, will depend on three crucial factors. Chandhok, of Team Lotus, hoped the race would be an experience to remember for motor sport fans across the country. The 27-year-old driver, who recently visited the Buddh International Circuit (BIC) in Greater Noida, the venue of the Indian Grand Prix, had words of praise for the track.

India to play against Malaysia

The All India Football Federation confirmed that the Indian team will play two 'international friendlies' against the Malaysian national side on November 13 and 16. The first match will be held at the Indira Gandhi Stadium in Sarusajai, Guwahati on Nov. 13 while the second will be held three days later at the Salt Lake Stadium. This will be the first international friendly between India, which is currently ranked 163 in the world, and Malaysia (ranked 147). The two have previously met 20 times in different tournaments with Malaysia winning on eight occasions, a count more than India's wins. The remaining five matches ended as draws.