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TIC

- La Cour suprême indienne transmet une notification à Whatsapp relatif aux changements de sa politique de gestion des données.
- Après de nombreuses délibérations et débats, de nouvelles directives pour réglementer le contenu OTT seront bientôt rendues publiques.
- L'affaire Amazon-Reliance-Future Group met à l'épreuve la confiance des investisseurs en Inde – le non-respect par l'Inde des décisions d'arbitrage étrangères inquiète.
- L'application de vaccination CoWIN a été intégrée à Arogya SETU. Les utilisateurs authentifiés peuvent y télécharger leur certificat de vaccination.
- Malgré l'interdiction des applications chinoises, deux sociétés chinoises de reconnaissance faciale continuent de dominer le marché indien. L'une d'entre elles détient 35 % de parts de marché. (Article long)

Télécommunications

- L'ISRO et MapmyIndia prévoient de développer un portail cartographique et des services géospatiaux entièrement indigènes pour concurrencer GoogleMaps.
- Sunil Bharti Mittal, Président d'Airtel, envisage de scinder ses activités numériques de son activité de télécommunications.

[IT & ITeS](#)

Supreme Court issues notices to Facebook, WhatsApp over privacy policy issue

The petition had called for WhatsApp to be disallowed for allegedly lowering privacy standards for Indian users.

By Anumeha Chaturvedi, ET Bureau | Last Updated: Feb 15, 2021, 03:06 PM IST

The Supreme Court on Monday issued notices to Facebook and WhatsApp in a matter concerning the latter's new privacy policy.

Referring to the social media giant and the messaging behemoth, the top court also said they may be \$ 2-3 trillion companies, but people value their privacy and that it is the court's duty to protect their privacy.

The government, which has sought clarifications from WhatsApp and has asked for changes to be withdrawn told the court that the companies can't share data of users which must be protected.

WhatsApp and Facebook refuted allegations of data sharing.

"We have been asked to file a reply. We have communicated to the court that the same policy would be applicable everywhere except the European Union which is governed by a special law. In the US, Australia, Brazil..It's the same policy," said senior lawyer Kapil Sibal, who appeared for WhatsApp.

The matter was concerning an application filed by two college students, Karmanya Singh Sareen and Shreya Sethi in their pending case before the Constitution bench where WhatsApp's 2016 user policy was challenged.

The application is seeking urgent directions from the court to stay the operation of the new privacy policy.

As per the application, there is no clarity on when the data protection legislation will be passed and brought into effect in India, and it is imperative that the honourable court prohibits the operation of the new privacy policy in order to protect the rights of crores of Indian citizens.

Centre plans new guidelines to regulate OTT content

Senior parliamentarian from SP, Ram Gopal Yadav opposed direct recruitment for the post of joint secretary in Government of India, saying the IAS and IRS fraternity was unhappy.

ET Government | Feb 10, 2021

With a raging controversy over the unregulated content on OTT platforms creating disharmony in the society, the Union government is set to introduce a new set of guidelines for regulation of OTT (over the top) platforms that will address issues such as sensitive content, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar told Rajya Sabha.

The issue of OTT content regulation along with the direct recruitment for the post of joint secretary in Government of India was raised during the Zero Hour. While senior parliamentarian from SP, Ram Gopal Yadav opposed direct recruitment for the post of joint secretary in Government of India, saying the IAS and IRS fraternity was unhappy with these lateral entries, the I&B minister said a lot of suggestions and complaints on the regulation of OTTs have been received.

"Guidelines and directions are almost ready. It will be soon implemented," he said in his brief submission.

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According to Yadav, there was no reservation for SC, ST and OBC in the appointments of joint secretary in Government of India and sought that the Department of Personnel and Training be told to stop such recruitments.

Earlier, raising the issue through a Zero Hour mention, Mahesh Poddar of the BJP said the content and language on OTT platforms was discriminatory and offensive. Objectional content on OTT platforms includes sexual discrimination and abusive language, he said adding that the government should, without delay, implement the Internet regulations.

There are at least 40 OTT platforms, including global ones such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and HotStar (Disney Plus), and hundreds of news content websites. "It is an important issue. We get a lot of suggestions and complaints. Guidelines and directions are almost ready. It will be soon implemented," Javadekar said.

Jeff Bezos-Mukesh Ambani spat is testing India's allure for foreign investors

The rulings come after two big arbitration awards against India. In September, international arbitrators said India acted unfairly in a \$3 bn tax dispute with Vodafone and in another ruling ordered India to return \$1.2 bn to Cairn for a similar failure. India has challenged the Vodafone ruling in Singapore, the govt informed Parliament on Monday.

By Upmanyu Trivedi, Bloomberg Last Updated: Feb 10, 2021, 09:42 AM IST

The tussle between two of the world's richest men — Jeff Bezos and Mukesh Ambani — to dominate India's estimated \$1 trillion retail market is testing foreign investor patience with flip-flopping court rulings.

This week saw new developments in Amazon.com Inc.'s legal battle to block Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd. from acquiring Future Retail Ltd.'s assets, in what would be the country's largest retail-sector deal. Last week, a single judge at a high court in New Delhi restrained Future Group firms from selling their assets. On Monday, a set of judges at the court overruled that decision. Amazon can appeal the latest ruling in the country's Supreme Court.

The keenly watched case may set an important legal precedent for investors on whether emergency decisions by foreign arbitrators are valid in India. Amazon had petitioned Indian courts with an order from an emergency arbitration court in Singapore that barred Future Retail from making a deal with Reliance.

It could also help overseas investors judge the validity of agreements in India, which the World Bank has ranked among the bottom 15% of countries in terms of enforcing contracts, worse than Venezuela, Syria and Senegal.

"Not giving effect to a foreign arbitration award undermines India's already floundering reputation as a good place to invest and do business in," said Bharat Chugh, a former civil judge in Delhi and now a lawyer practicing in India's top court. Speedy enforcement of contracts and foreign arbitration rulings are important for overseas investors when assessing the attractiveness of an investment destination, he said.

Spokespeople at Reliance Industries, Amazon's local unit and Future Group weren't able to comment immediately on the latest ruling. Future Retail's lawyers have argued in court that the deal is their only chance to avoid bankruptcy and save jobs.

The rulings in Amazon's case come after two big foreign arbitration awards against India. In September, an international arbitration tribunal said India acted unfairly in a \$3 billion tax dispute with Vodafone Group Plc and in another ruling ordered India to return \$1.2 billion to Cairn Energy Plc for a similar failure. India has challenged the Vodafone ruling in Singapore, India's federal government informed Parliament on Monday.

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It's common for companies investing in India to opt for foreign arbitrations as the judicial process in the country can take years. After an overseas arbitrator makes a decision, companies can seek its enforcement via an Indian court if the opposing side doesn't comply.

Singapore Order

In the Amazon-Future Retail case, in October a Singapore emergency arbitration tribunal ordered the Future Group to halt the sale to Reliance. Amazon cited a partnership agreement with a Future Group firm for a customer loyalty promotion that restricted the group from selling assets to Mukesh Ambani's company and allowed arbitration in Singapore to settle disputes.

Future Retail has argued in court that the pact with another group firm doesn't bind it and the Singapore's emergency arbitration order wasn't enforceable in India. That prompted Amazon to petition the Delhi High Court to ensure compliance.

Last week, a high court judge halted the deal and said he was of the initial view that the order from the emergency arbitration court in Singapore is valid and can be enforced in India. On an appeal by Future, a two-judge panel allowed the deal, saying Future Retail wasn't a party to the agreement between Amazon and Future Coupons Pvt. A detailed hearing of the case will be held from Feb. 26, the judges said on Monday.

"Last week's order would have been some solace to foreign investors worried about the arbitration enforcement regime in India, but the order passed on Monday against Amazon would raise fresh concerns," said Samudra Sarangi, a partner at law firm Panag & Babu. "An appeal before the Supreme Court may be inevitable."

CoWIN Dashboard Added To Aarogya Setu, Vaccine Registrations 'Coming Soon'

By Aditya Chunduru | Medianama | Published 8th February 2021

Vaccination certificates will be generated on the CoWIN platform, and Aarogya Setu will only allow users to download them, Abhishek Singh, CEO of MyGov confirmed to MediaNama via email. We had asked Singh how the integration of CoWIN into Aarogya Setu would work, and where the vaccine certificates will be stored:

"Vaccination certificates will be generated by COWIN platform and Aarogya Setu will only enable authenticated users to download their own vaccination certificates. Aarogya Setu will not store any certificates" — Abhishek Singh, CEO, MyGov (emphasis added)

Singh also confirmed that people will get to choose between Aarogya Setu and CoWIN to register for vaccine doses. Hence, the integration of both apps will have no effect on the opening up of CoWIN to the general public for registrations.

"CoWIN registrations for general public will be as per the schedule to be decided by Ministry of Health & Family Welfare. As per the policy, health workers and front line workers are getting the vaccines first," he said.

Earlier, the Indian government had integrated the CoWIN vaccination system with Aarogya Setu, the contact tracing app launched at the start of the pandemic. Beneficiaries of the vaccine can download their "Vaccination Certificates" on the Aarogya Setu app. According to a tweet from the app's official handle, Aarogya Setu will soon allow beneficiaries to register for the vaccine.

The CoWIN system, built around the eponymous app, is the backbone of the countrywide vaccination drive. Short for "COVID Vaccine Intelligence Network", the app will use an Aadhaar-based system to authenticate beneficiaries. While the government has said that Aadhaar is not mandatory, the government yet doesn't seem to have a plan for vaccinating the general public without using the identification document. RS Sharma, chair of the Empowered Group on COVID-19 had said that the number of people without Aadhaar is very small, and that "we will cross that bridge when we come to it".

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The CoWIN app, according to information provided by the government so far, is supposed to have a system for the automated generation of vaccination certificates: post a dose, a QR-code digital certificate would get generated and stored on DigiLocker, the government-built cloud storage service.

Two apps to support registrations? Currently, CoWIN is not open to the general public, and is only being used by officials working on the immunisation effort. However, officials have said that the app will be made open to the general public in a month's time, when people over 50 will be able to register themselves on it. Presumably, other demographics would be allowed to register the same way as the months progress.

Meanwhile, Aarogya Setu (originally built for the singular purpose of contact sharing) is also set to start supporting vaccination registrations. The registrations will likely happen through the CoWIN "dashboard" on the Aarogya Setu app, where users will be lead to CoWIN functionality, however, there has been no official statement yet.

The 'panopticon' problem: India's video surveillance grid is still powered by Chinese firms

Two Chinese firms, Dahua and Hikvision, are reaping rich dividends. They have enjoyed a stratospheric growth in the global surveillance-camera market. India is one of their top customers. The two countries, India and China, are at odds over matters of national interest. And this is India's digital 'panopticon' problem.

By Kanika Saxena | ETPrime | 5th February 2021

Jeremy Bentham, an English philosopher and social theorist of the 18th century, designed a system of control called 'Panopticon'. It was a circular prison cell with a guard at the centre, keeping an eye on every prisoner. The prisoners, though aware of being surveilled, could never tell who was being watched. Each of them, out of fear and the assumption that he was the one being watched, behaved in a civil manner.

Sounds familiar? We too, are living in a panopticon, albeit a digital one.

Every action, every movement, every word we speak, or communication through gestures, is being surveilled — through CCTV networks, of course. We are aware of it, and cannot ignore that we are being watched. But our guard, the government, is watching us through a Chinese lens.

Then why are countries opting for Chinese hardware and systems?

Samuel Woodhams, digital rights lead at Top10VPN and also the co-author of a report that highlights that both the firms offer their technology at cheaper rates and authorities can expand their video-surveillance networks without incurring a huge cost, says "Authorities around the world have been shown to purchase technology from Hikvision and Dahua, despite repeated allegations that the two companies have enabled human rights abuses in Xinjiang".

While these companies are selling their products and technology at a low cost in other countries, in China, they are players of a different league altogether.

Both Dahua and Hikvision have won over USD1 billion worth of Chinese government-backed surveillance projects in the country's Xinjiang province since 2016.

Top10VPN's report further states that both the firms have faced accusations that their technology is being used to automatically detect Uyghurs.

The companies have also come under the scanner for posing a risk to citizens' digital security and privacy. Further, there are speculations about their data-sharing practice with the Chinese government, though the firms have turned down such allegations time and again.

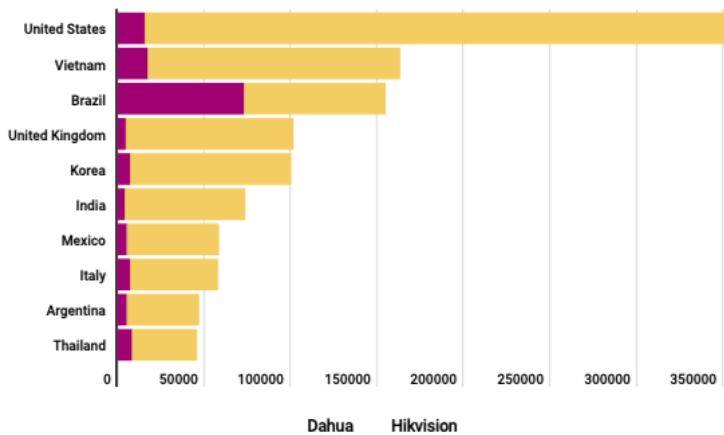
In August 2019, the US government prohibited the use and procurement of Dahua, Hikvision and **Huawei** products due to their alleged involvement in the persecution of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

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However, doubting the US sanction, the two companies exhibited their technology at a US trade show in March 2020. This raised concerns around the effectiveness of the US ban and how it applies to US subsidiaries of Chinese companies.

Something similar is at work in India.

Top countries with the most Dahua and Hikvision cameras



Source: Top10 VPN report, 'Hikvision and Dahua Surveillance Cameras: Global Locations Report'

ETPrime

India's steps: too quick and too late

Following a brutal face-off at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between Indian and Chinese troops, the Indian government was quick to retaliate and imposed a ban on 59 Chinese apps as a safeguard to protect the sovereignty and integrity of India.

But in effect, personal sensitive data of thousands of Indians are in the hands of Chinese video-surveillance suppliers.

How will the government pull the plug from Hikvision's widespread presence in the country?

Hikvision started its Indian journey back in 2005 and it today projects itself as a 'Make in India' partner with various tech-solutions

companies integrating Hikvision hardware in their security systems. It alone controls 35% of market share in India.

According to Top10VPN's report, India has 69,152 Hikvision and 4,532 Dahua- powered video-surveillance cameras. Among the most surveilled cities in the world, Mumbai ranks 15th, with the largest network of cameras provided by these two firms in the country, accounting for a total of 9,500 cameras.

However, the two firms have time and again come under scrutiny over concerns around data privacy and for enjoying special favours from the government.

Last July, the Indian Railways scrapped a tender for thermal cameras for Covid- 19 surveillance after Indian firms alleged that the tender favoured Hikvision. In August, mirroring the US ban on Chinese surveillance giants, the Indian government restricted Chinese manufacturers — Dahua and Hikvision — from bidding on government projects.

While it attempts to halt their future projects with the government, what about the projects they are already a part of?

It seems that the task won't be easy.

A tender commissioned by Kolkata Police last September for restoration of damaged CCTV cameras put forth a special requirement for the bidder: the solution 'must be compatible with Hikvision/Dahua/CP-Plus or any other branded analog DVR' (digital video recorder) or 'must be compatible with Dahua NVR' (network video recorder).

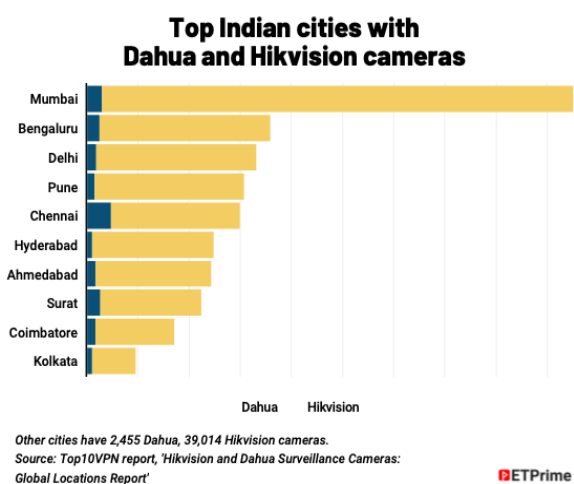
However, back in 2018, the Aam Aadmi Party was criticised for awarding Hikvision's subsidiary, Prama Hikvision India Pvt. Ltd, a contract to install 1.5 lakh CCTV cameras in the national capital. Responding to the allegations of corruption and compromise of national security, AAP said that the Chinese company provided the same to the central government.

It was further alleged by the AAP spokesperson Saurabh Bharadwaj that **Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, the Ministry of Defence, the Defence Research and Development Organisation, and the Special Protection Group (responsible for the Prime Minister's security)** had all procured cameras from the same company. The agencies neither denied nor clarified the allegations.

The same year, Prama Hikvision signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Andhra Pradesh government, pledging to invest INR500 crore in a manufacturing facility for electronic security and surveillance products in the state.

In what follows, as part of its "secure campuses" program in partnership with the government of Rajasthan, Prama Hikvision committed to give 500 CCTV and 75 NVRs to 75 educational institutions across Rajasthan. Hikvision and Dahua did not respond to email requests seeking comment till the time of publication of this story.

Will India extend its ban on the Indian subsidiaries of the Chinese surveillance camera giants?



Intent and accountability

"Among various known ways of identifying people, facial recognition is the only mechanism that can be easily used for identification of a person without his/her consent," says Kunal Kislay, co-founder and chief executive officer, Integration Wizards Solution, a Bengaluru-based AI startup. This technology, capable of mapping an individual's whereabouts, can pose a serious safety threat if the information is compromised, Kislay warns, adding that the facial-feature data can be used to identify details like age, gender, ethnicity, emotions, thereby making it easier to selectively target regions, groups.

We have seen examples of how **CCTV footage**

and facial-recognition software were used for profiling and identification of protestors involved in unlawful activities to carry out criminal investigations by the law enforcement agencies. Something that is being done during the farmers' protests in the national capital region as well.

Commenting on the use of facial-recognition software during Indian protests, Woodhams remarks, "There is insufficient regulation to ensure these tools are not used to silence dissent. Without greater transparency, meaningful regulation and mechanisms for redress, there are genuine concerns that India's surveillance system will be used to clamp down on citizens' fundamental rights."

Our law does have provisions to safeguard the rights of an individual and hold corporations accountable in case of breach or misuse of data.

However, Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures and Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Rules, 2011, which cover the collection, disclosure and sharing of sensitive information such as facial-recognition data, is applicable only to corporate bodies — not to individuals or the government.

At present, law enforcement agencies' use of facial recognition remains largely unregulated and would leave citizens with no recourse in a case where their data has been collected without their consent.

"In the absence of detailed or specific legislation pertaining to facial-recognition technology, the use of such technology by the government has been left out of the purview of the law and raises serious concerns pertaining to surveillance," says Kazim Rizvi, founder, The Dialogue.

He opines that a Data Protection Bill and a detailed legislation that lays down parameters for surveillance by the government and the law enforcement agencies would help uphold the right to privacy of citizens and the misuse of their data.

Surveillance: black, white, or grey?

Surveillance may be done appropriately, for people, not just of people, in many areas of life, says Lyon, noting that the problem today is that surveillance is often done inappropriately, for several reasons. He says that computer scientists often work without connecting what they build with their real-life consequences and unregulated surveillance is a huge source of power in both the governmental and commercial sphere.

Gary T Marx, professor emeritus, sociology, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who has spent more than four decades working on surveillance issues, argues and illustrates how surveillance is neither good nor bad.

In his works, he argues that surveillance must be judged in accordance to the means, the context and the conditions of data collected. It should also be viewed in conjunction with the purpose or objective behind the surveillance. These do not always fit seamlessly together. Indeed, as an aspect of modern democratic society it offers us, "a farrago in a cauldron of conundrums, too often accompanied by myths shielding harsher realities. These include multiple techno-fallacies of the information age".

Governments can exercise undue power to manipulate public discourse through its surveillance capabilities. How does that happen?

Through what is collected and not collected, Marx remarks, and through what is publicly revealed or kept secret, as well as through uncritical reliance on tools whose accuracy and validity have not been shown. The tools are most often disproportionately available to the more powerful, whether this involves leaders, class, caste or gender.

He goes on to state, "Do we know as much about them (the more powerful) as they do about us? Furthermore, what gets revealed? What is told and what is withheld? Who has the power and the means to develop and apply the tools?"

Surveillance often embodies a fundamental power in- balance — the ability to compel disclosure or to prohibit it and equivalent powers to reveal or conceal what is found."

Recently, **Uttarakhand Police** stated that it will not verify the passports of those who post 'anti-national' content on social media. To do this, the police would scrutinise a person's social-media behaviour and scan through their social-media accounts.

This is being done to curb the number of anti-national posts on social media in the state.

"The social media monitoring team," Ashok Kumar, state director general of police, speaking at the concluding day of state police officers' conference in Dehradun, was quoted as saying, that the force "has been keeping a strict vigil to track down such posts as it is a clear threat to law and order."

In his book, *The Culture of Surveillance: Watching as a Way of Life*, Lyon observes that people regardless of being aware or unaware about being monitored, submit themselves to surveillance, with a notion that they have nothing to conceal. He argues how the culture of surveillance may naturalise surveillance of unwelcome kinds.

"The consequences of such normalisation of surveillance are potentially dire," he comments.

The bottom line

In 2019, TechSci Research had estimated that India's facial-recognition market will grow six-fold by 2024 to USD4.3 billion, nearly on par with China.

The National Crime Records Bureau's nationwide facial-recognition grid is under development while various state law enforcement agencies have already procured their facial-recognition systems provided by private players. In a country with no data protection laws in place, it rings alarm bells.

However, despite the gaps and faults in the Indian system, the dragon will remain to be an unwelcome guest due to concerns around misuse of confidential and sensitive information related to citizens and national security.

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The government must realise the Chinese threat while it still has got time. Further, in order to boost the Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India initiative, the government should do more to encourage Indian firms over foreign players, providing tech solutions.

The panopticon, too, should be 'Made in India'.

ISRO, MapmyIndia partner up to compete with Google Maps

MapmyIndia said there are multiple benefits of an Indian solution for maps and geospatial services. ISRO is more responsive to the satellite imagery needs of Indians, especially during times of crises and disaster

Edited By Danny Cyril D Cruze | Livemint | 12 February 2021

The ISRO (Indian Space Research Organisation) and MapmyIndia, announced an initiative to partner together to offer **a fully indigenous, mapping portal and geospatial services**. The new collaboration will use MapmyIndia's digital maps and technologies with ISRO's catalogue of satellite imagery and earth observation data.

In an official statement, MapmyIndia said there are multiple benefits of an Indian solution for maps and geospatial services. The company claims that it ensures that the maps reflect the true sovereignty of the country, depicting India's borders as per Government of India.

MapmyIndia's maps cover 7.5 lakh Indian villages, 7500+ cities at street and building-level, connected by 63 lakh kilometers of road network pan India and within cities. The company claims that this is the most exhaustive digital map database of the country, created entirely indigenously over the last 25 years.

ISRO has an extensive catalogue of satellite imagery and earth observation for all of India, that it generates and publishes through its constellation of satellites. According to the statement, ISRO is more responsive to the satellite imagery needs of Indians, especially during times of crises and disaster.

MapmyIndia claims that it does not have an advertising business model to provide better protection for the user's privacy. **The business model is based on delivering digital map data products, navigation solutions, mapping APIs, automotive technology platforms, geospatial analytics and GIS solutions, IoT and telematics products, big data and AI solutions, enterprise software (SaaS) / platforms (PaaS), and full-stack digital automotive, business and government technology solutions to enterprises and app developers, and GPS gadgets and apps for consumers.**

MapmyIndia's maps, apps and services will now integrate with ISRO's catalogue of satellite imagery and earth observation data. Users will be able to see mapping data along with information about weather, pollution, agricultural output, land-use changes, flood and landslide disasters etc.

Sunil Bharti Mittal looks to make digital unit a parallel company to Airtel

Bharti Airtel itself has pivoted into a technology company, he said, and has emerged stronger from a bloody tariff battle since the entry of Reliance Jio in September 2016, with a roughly 35% revenue market share, its highest ever.

By Anindita Singh and Romit Guha | ET Bureau | Prime | 15 February 2021

Bharti **Airtel**, which has housed all its **digital assets** under Airtel Digital unit, is discussing making it a parallel entity to the telco, opening up the option of monetising a separate asset in the future, said chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal. The new structure could remove telecom regulatory overhang over Airtel Digital, which could even be listed in two-three years.

In an interview to ET, Mittal said going forward, expansion in financial services — which includes hopes of **becoming a small finance bank**, but not a full-fledged one — would be a big focus area for the telco.

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Bharti Airtel itself has pivoted into a **technology company**, he said, and has emerged stronger from a bloody tariff battle since the entry of **Reliance Jio** in September 2016, with a roughly 35% revenue market share, its highest ever. "Perhaps, some people may have underestimated its (Airtel's) inner strength," he said.

"There is something called **Airtel Digital now**, under which all the digital entities are being housed. Around **119 million active monthly users** are sitting here...**a lot of advertising revenue is going up**," Mittal told ET. "What we are thinking about is a step-up company, which will then be the holding company of Airtel and Digital...Digital could become parallel (to Airtel)...the thinking is to restructure it so that we have similar outcomes (like investments in Jio Platforms)."

He added that the reorganisation will take several months and investments in the **digital business** will be sought after it is scaled up. **From the ₹100 crore revenue currently, Airtel Digital should scale up to ₹1,000 crore.** Jio Platforms, which houses the digital and telecom assets of Reliance Industries, last year received over ₹1.52 lakh crore in investments by giving up nearly 33% stake to 13 investors, including Facebook, Google, Intel and Qualcomm.

But Mittal said that the new structure that Airtel was planning would be different from what RIL had done. The Mukesh Ambani- owned company had established Jio Platforms as its direct unit which, in turn, became the parent of Reliance Jio, India's telecom market leader.

"...you get a piece of what is on top (Jio Platforms) and thus, also a piece of Jio. But here it (Airtel Digital) could be sitting alongside (Airtel)," which would mean potentially two monetisable assets, said Mittal. "You have a listed company and you can bring a listing here too after two-three years."

Headed by Adarsh Nair, Airtel Digital houses the company's **digital properties including Wynk music, Thanks, Xstream, payments, and products such as Airtel IQ, Safe Pay, among others, and employs over 1,500 people,** which is being scaled up rapidly.

"Right now, it's just building up...Lots of people, from Google, Facebook, have come back and are working in this... IQ has been launched, Safe Pay has just been launched with a bank," said Mittal. He said the digital business will be targeted at enterprise customers and its focus will be 'B2B2C'.

The reorganisation will also ensure that digital services – which aren't regulated by telecom licences – don't have the regulatory overhang of the telecom service, said Mittal. Revenue from digital services will be kept separate from Bharti Airtel, and thus will not be part of the calculation of adjusted gross revenue (AGR), on the basis of which licence fees and spectrum usage charges are paid.

Airtel Friday said its board will meet on February 17 to consider restructuring of its businesses.

Speaking on the telecom business, Mittal said as per Airtel's understanding, the telco has paid its AGR dues for the next four years, given its upfront payment of Rs18,000 crore against a demand of some Rs40,000 crore.

He added that Airtel had raised \$12 billion in the last two-and-a-half years and didn't face immediate monetisation needs.

But if needed, **monetisation options included using InvIT (infrastructure investment trust) structures which allow for raising funds while allowing operational control. "There are large assets sitting in towers: 42% in Indus Towers is worth Rs 25,000 crore, also the large amount of fibre could be tens of thousands of crores."** In addition, its business in Bangladesh is worth a billion dollars, Mittal said.

Airtel has approached the Reserve Bank of India for a small bank permit, which would allow it to begin lending to its customers who currently can only deposit with the payments bank. "Right now, we are just connecting other lenders to our customers, I would rather do my own risk book, at least a small one," Mittal said. He added that the payments bank has led to customer stickiness at Airtel and reduced churn, or users leaving its network.