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Regulatory Framework for Ground-Based Broadcasters: TRAI recommendations a New Era in Broadcasting Technology

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PUBLISHED 16 January 2025

In a significant move to modernize India's broadcasting sector, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) has proposed a comprehensive regulatory framework for Ground-Based Broadcasters (GBBs). This initiative aims to use advancements in terrestrial communication technologies, enabling broadcasters to deliver television channels to Distribution Platform Operators (DPOs) through mediums such as cable, fiber, cellular, Wi-Fi, or internet/cloud, alongside traditional satellite-based methods.

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Adapting to Technological Advancements

Historically, broadcasters have relied on satellite technology to transmit television channels to DPOs. However, the evolution of terrestrial communication technologies now offers more versatile and efficient options. Recognizing this potential, MIB has sought recommendations from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) under Section 11(1)(a) of the TRAI Act, 1997, to develop a suitable regulatory framework for GBBs.

Following extensive consultations, including public feedback and an Open House Discussion held on 20 December 2024, TRAI has finalized its recommendations. These aim to establish an enabling environment for GBBs while maintaining alignment with existing guidelines for satellite broadcasters.

Key Features of the Framework

1. **Alignment with Existing Guidelines**: The framework for GBBs will mirror the 2022 satellite broadcasting guidelines, excluding satellite-specific provisions, to ensure consistency and regulatory coherence.
2. **Flexibility in Operations**:
    - GBBs can provide channels to DPOs using any terrestrial communication technology.
    - Broadcasters are allowed to use multiple terrestrial systems simultaneously based on business needs.
    - With appropriate government approval, broadcasters can switch between terrestrial and satellite mediums or use both for broadcasting.
3. **National Coverage**: GBBs will operate at the national level, ensuring uniform service delivery across the country.
4. **Regulating Streaming Services**: The MIB will review Free Ad-Supported Streaming Television (FAST) channels for compliance with current guidelines. If needed, new policy guidelines will be developed in consultation with TRAI to regulate these platforms effectively.
5. **Promoting Ease of Doing Business**: TRAI reiterated its previous recommendations on simplifying business operations in the telecom and broadcasting sectors, extending these measures to GBBs.

The TRAI Recommendations have been placed on the TRAI's website (www.trai.gov.in).

Implications for the Broadcasting Sector

These TRAI recommendations signify a major shift in India's broadcasting ecosystem, allowing broadcasters to use technological advancements for more efficient service delivery. By enabling terrestrial transmission, broadcasters can reduce dependency on satellites and explore innovative distribution methods.

As the regulatory framework takes shape, it is expected to improve operational flexibility for broadcasters and enhance the accessibility and affordability of television services across India.

These recommendations marks a pivotal step towards a future-ready broadcasting sector, ensuring that technological advancements are fully used for the benefit of service providers and consumers alike.

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