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Bharti Airtel, Reliance Telecom, Reliance Communications want partial exit from USOF scheme

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NEW DELHI: Government today said the request of Bharti Airtel and two Anil Ambani firms seeking partial exit from Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) agreement for shared mobile infrastructure in rural areas has not been accepted.

Reliance Communications, Reliance Telecom and Bharti airtel have requested for partial exit from USOF agreement for sharing mobile infrastructure scheme in rural areas, Minister of State for IT and Communications Milind Deora said in a written reply to Lok Sabha.

In 2007, a scheme was launched under the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) to provide subsidy support for setting up and managing 7,871 infrastructure sites (telecom towers) in 500 districts, in specified rural and remote areas.

Reliance Communications wants to exit from 4,537 sites out of total of 4,774, while Reliance Telecom wants to quit from 751 out of total 3641 sites. Bharti airtel had sought permission to exit from 81 sites out of 1,174.

"However, government has not accepted their requests," Deora added.

As per the provisions of the USOF agreement, each tower infrastructure site is to be shared by three different Universal Service Providers (USPs) for provisioning of mobile services. Therefore, despite the non-provisioning of mobile services by one or two USPs, the mobile connectivity to concerned rural area is made available by the remaining USP(s).

Moreover, mobile services are being provided in rural areas by other services providers from non-USOF supported site as well.

The Government has not accepted the request of exit seeking companions as there is no exit provision in the USOF agreement.

Apart from this, government has also constituted a high level committee to consider all aspects with regard to delay in roll-out of mobile service under the USOF scheme and to suggest appropriate action that may be required, taking into consideration the facts and circumstances of the case.

Recently, two ADAG firms were fined a total of Rs 5.49 crore for shutting down rural telephone services during 2010-11, in violation of the USOF agreement.

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