



## National Security Directive

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### Why in News

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Recently, the **Cabinet Committee on Security** has approved the setting up of a **new National Security Directive** on the **telecommunication** sector.

Also, the Union Cabinet has **approved the auction of 2,251.25 megahertz of spectrum** with a **reserve price of Rs. 3.92 lakh crore**.

### Key Points

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- **Background:**

- The Centre asked all **telecom operators to undertake an ‘information security audit’** of their networks.
- The **objective** was to **specifically check for any ‘backdoor’ or ‘trapdoor’ vulnerabilities** in the telecom networks, which can be **exploited to extract information and pass on illegally** to agencies around the world.
  - A backdoor or a trap door is a **bug installed in the telecom hardware that allows companies to listen in or collect data** being shared on the network.
- Chinese vendors Huawei and ZTE have been **under global scrutiny for allegedly installing backdoor vulnerabilities** and **spying** for the Chinese government and have been **banned by several countries**.
  - Almost **30% of Bharti Airtel’s network comprises Chinese telecom equipment** and it is **40% for Vodafone Idea’s network**. **State-run telcos** Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) too **have equipment from Chinese vendors**, including **Huawei** and **ZTE**, in their 3G and older networks.
- **All vendors** including Huawei and ZTE were **allowed to participate in 5G trials** but their **participation became difficult owing to developments like the Galwan Valley Standoff** in Ladakh.
  - The **government barred BSNL and MTNL from using Chinese equipment** for the roll-out of its 4G network.
  - The **Department of Telecommunications** hinted that it would **announce guidelines asking even private telcos to refrain from using Chinese equipment**, however, no such guidelines have been issued till now.

- **National Security Directive:**

- It aims to **classify telecom products and their sources** under the **‘trusted’** and **‘non-trusted’** categories.
- It will make its decision based on **approval of the National Security Committee on Telecom.**

It will be **headed by the deputy National Security Advisor (NSA)** and have members from other departments and ministries, and independent experts as well as two members from the industry.

- The **National Cyber Security Coordinator** is the **designated authority** and will **devise the methodology** to designate trusted products.
- From among the sources declared as trusted sources by the designated authority, those which **meet the criteria of the Department of Telecom’s preferential market access policy** will be certified as **India trusted sources.**

The policy provides **opportunities to local manufacturers of equipment and handsets in the “sensitive” telecom sector to counter dumping of products** by other countries.

- **Telecom Service Providers (TSPs)** are **required to connect new devices which are designated trusted** products.
- However, the directive **will not ask TSPs to mandatorily replace the old and existing equipment** and does not impact the ongoing annual maintenance contracts or upgrades to old equipment either.

- **Significance:**

- Apart from the directive, the government will release at regular intervals new guidelines for **effective monitoring and effective control of the network security** of the TSPs.
- The move could potentially make it **more difficult for Chinese telecom equipment vendors** to supply equipment to Indian telecom players.
- **Mobile applications that either have Chinese origins or have central servers in China** may also find **re-entry in the market extremely difficult.**

Since **June 2020**, the **Centre has banned over 200 Chinese apps**, citing national security concerns.

## **Telecom Spectrum Auction**

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- Spectrum in the **frequency bands of 700MHz, 800MHz, 900MHz, 1,800MHz, 2,100MHz, 2,300MHz and 2,500MHz** would be offered for **20 years.**
- The auction would help **boost spectrum availability with telecom operators enabling improvements in 4G services.**

- By winning the right to use spectrum through the auction, incumbent telecom service providers will be **able to augment their network capacity**, whereas **new players will be able to start services**.

**Spectrum holding per operator in a service area in India is well below the international average** so any further auctioning of spectrum is needed.

- **Spectrum Auction:**

- It is a **transparent process of spectrum assignment to successful bidders**.

Sufficient spectrum availability increases the quality of telecom services for the consumers.

- It is relevant that the telecom sector today is a key infrastructure provider with **strong linkages with economic growth, direct and indirect employment generation** and expansion of **Digital India**.

**Source: IE**