

‘Government reviewing 5G reserve pricing’

IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad also assures spectrum auction this fiscal

S RONENDRA SINGH
New Delhi, October 14

Information Technology Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Monday said that the government was working on a review of the reserve prices for 5G spectrum for the upcoming auctions.

The Minister also assured that the auctions will happen ‘within this financial year’.

“Spectrum auctions will happen within this financial year and we are also working on the pricing of spectrum. We are in the process of reforms for spectrum pricing, so wait for sometime,” he said, urging the telcos to wait for a few days for clarity.

Speaking at the India Mo-

bile Congress (IMC) 2019, Prasad said that the government was aware of the challenges being faced by the industry. His statement came amid widespread concerns over exorbitant pricing of radio waves, including 5G.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) had last year recommended auction of about 8,644 MHz of telecom frequencies, including those for 5G services, at an estimated total base price of ₹4.9 lakh crore, but the financially-stressed industry had argued that the proposed prices are unaffordable and exorbitant. Some industry players pointed out that the average price of 5G band auctioned in



Minister of Information Technology Ravi Shankar Prasad, with Vijay Shakhhar Sharma, founder of Paytm, at the India Mobile Congress, in New Delhi, on Monday. KAMAL NARANG

countries like South Korea, Spain, the UK and Italy works out to ₹84 crore/MHz, whereas TRAI’s recommended price for the same band is five to six times higher at ₹492 crore/MHz.

Reacting to Prasad’s statements on reserve pricing and auctions, RS Sharma, Chairman, TRAI, who also attended the biggest event on telecom

in South Asia, said: “As a part of the process, we have already recommended the 5G base price. Now, it is up to the government to accept or modify it.”

Ensuring Internet security Meanwhile, on WhatsApp and Facebook, Prasad said that India respects encryption but insisted that law enforcement

agencies should be able to identify source of messages wherever they are being circulated to fuel rumours and violence.

Internet must be stable, safe and secure and “we must ensure this,” he said. The issue of traceability has been a flashpoint between the government and WhatsApp. The Facebook-owned company has so far resisted India’s demand for identification of message originators, arguing that doing so would undermine its policy on privacy and end-to-end encryption.

“We respect encryption but where the same message is being relayed repeatedly at the same time, the same area and on the same issue to create chaos and spread false rumours, law enforcement agencies must have access...source of nuisance must be identified to deal with circulation of false rumours in such cases,” added Prasad.

Paytm may garner \$2 b in new financing from backers

BLOOMBERG

October 14

Paytm is close to scoring \$2 billion of new financing from investors including Jack Ma’s Ant Financial and Japan’s Soft-Bank Group Corp to fend off an influx of new rivals, said a person familiar with the matter.

The funding will be split evenly between equity and debt and values the country’s top online financial services firm at \$16 billion, the person said, asking not to be identified talking about a private deal. The talks are in their final stages but the terms could still change, the person added.

If a deal is finalised, Paytm could outstrip fellow high-profile Asian start-ups such as Grab and Gojek in valuation. Paytm founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma is raising capital to protect the start-up’s share of a potentially \$1 trillion Indian

payments market from new entrants including Facebook Inc, Alphabet Inc’s Google and Walmart Inc-owned Flipkart’s PhonePe. Over the past year, a string of new apps have made payments increasingly easy, bringing discounts and cash bonuses to young, smartphone-savvy users.

Credit Suisse Group AG now estimates that the Indian digital payments market will touch \$1 trillion by 2023 from about \$200 billion currently. Its a market with huge potential: Cash still accounts for 70 per cent of all Indian transactions by value, according to Credit Suisse, and neighboring China is far more advanced with a mobile payments market worth more than \$5 trillion.

It is not clear how much SoftBank would contribute, but the Japanese company is going through a rocky stretch.

Mall biz to break even in a year: Sharma

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, October 14

Paytm founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma on Monday said that he expects Paytm Mall — the company’s e-commerce unit — to break even in a year’s time.

Sharma added that Paytm will consider getting listed on stock exchanges only after 2021 when the financial services company starts generating cash. “Paytm Mall business is close to break-even, \$3-million EBITDA loss a month and \$1.2-1.3 billion run rate. We do 2,75,000-3,00,000 orders a day. In festive season, this peaks to half a million orders a day,” Sharma told *PTI* on the sidelines of the India Mobile Congress 2019.

Asked if more funds would be pumped into Paytm Mall, Sharma said: “We have \$260 million in the bank, so I would say that we can give more growth capital to it.”

‘German security rulebook to keep 5G door open to Huawei’

REUTERS

Frankfurt, October 14

A new German security rulebook will not exclude Chinese telecoms equipment maker Huawei Technologies from supplying gear for the country’s 5G mobile networks, a senior government source said on Monday.

The ‘security catalogue’, due to be published this week, will confirm Germany’s decision to keep a level playing field for suppliers to next-generation telecoms networks, despite calls by the United States to ban Huawei.

Operators had warned that banning Huawei could add years of delays and billions of dollars in costs to rolling out 5G networks in Germany that could power super-fast home broadband, connected



Operators warn that banning Huawei could add billions of dollars to 5G rollout cost in Germany

factories or, one day, self-driving cars. “Germany’s approach did not and does not foresee any clause that would exclude any one company,” a senior government official told *Reuters*, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The federal network regulator and cybersecurity

watchdog have been working to finalise the rulebook after setting basic criteria in March on technical standards and governance at suppliers.

Network operators, all of them Huawei clients, have opposed Washington’s calls to ban Huawei on concerns that its kit may contain ‘back doors’ open to cyber spies and that under Chinese law it must collaborate in state espionage efforts.

The company denies the allegations.

The EU last week warned of the risk of increased cyber attacks to next generation 5G mobile networks by State-backed entities, but a report compiled by member states stopped short of naming China as a threat.

BSNL employees’ union calls for hunger strike on Friday

RAJESH KURUP

Mumbai, October 14

Strengthening their agitation further, the All Unions and Associations of BSNL (AUAB) has called for a one-day hunger strike on Friday to protest against non-payment of September salary and seeking timely payment of salary every month. The unions of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd will also hold lunch-hour demonstrations across all circles on the same day.

The unions are also seeking BSNL’s revival by immediate allocation of 4G spectrum, extension of financial assistance or soft loan and approval for the public sector unit’s land monetisation policy. Further, the payment of contract and casual workers wages, electricity bills and rentals are among other demands, sources close to the development told *BusinessLine*.



The unions’ demands include revival of BSNL by immediate allocation of 4G spectrum, extension of financial assistance or soft loan, and approval for the PSU’s land monetisation policy

“The decision to go for a one-day hunger strike was taken after AUAB’s meeting today. Non-payment of contract and casual workers wages for the past 8 months, non-payment of electricity bills, misleading reports in media stating that BSNL would be closed down, among others were the agenda of the meeting,” said one of the sources, who is close to the de-

velopment. The meeting was attended by representatives from the Sanchar Nigam Executives’ Association (SNEA), the BSNL Employees Union (BSNLEU), the National Federation of Telecom Employees (NFTE), the All India Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd Executives’ Association (AIBSNLEA), the National Union of BSNL Workers and the SC/ST Employees Welfare Asso-

Pune team wins IBM award for flood-prevention solution

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New York, October 14

A team of Indian software professionals was awarded a prize money of \$5,000 by IBM for providing a potential solution to prevent pervasive flooding that plagues the Indian sub-continent, and help save lives and property, the technology giant announced.

Purva Suchak took the top prize in the IBM and David Clark Cause foundation Call for Code 2019 for Asia Pacific region announced on Saturday here.

The team consists of software professionals from Pune-based Cognizant — Siddamma Tigadi, Ganesh Kadam, Sanageetha Nair, and Shreyas Kulkarni. By continuously checking reservoirs, dams and bodies of water, Project Purva-Suchak can collate data with weather forecast information, according to a statement.

This allows them to generate effective flood prediction data that can be stored on blockchain and accessed by

those who need the data most — including government agencies and disaster management teams, the statement said.

Up to date and accessible data can prevent flooding and huge losses of life and property, it said. “When we started on the journey of IBM Call for Code, we first tried to identify the natural disasters that have a huge impact on the Indian sub-continent,” Tigadi, team leader of Purva Suchak project, told *PTI*.

“So flooding was one of the issues we realised was not just an issue which lacked effective flood management but also needed a prediction and mitigation approach,” said Tigadi.

The winner of the Call for Code 2019 Global Challenge is Spain-based Prometeo, a system that uses artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things to guard the safety of firefighters as they battle blazes. Prometeo was awarded \$2,00,000 for the project.

Course correction: Edtech start-ups turn to consolidation as investors’ interest begins to wane

SANGEETHA CHENGAPPA

Bengaluru, October 14

Edtech start-ups space is expected to see some major consolidation over the next six months as investor interest wanes in start-ups that have failed to scale their businesses.

The first signs of consolidation showed up last May when iNurture Education Solutions which provides industry-related skills courses announced the acquisition of a similar skill-based Edtech platform, KRACKIN.

It was followed by the acquisition of job-skilling platform Acadview Software Private Ltd last October by UpGrad, an on-line education start-up that is promoted by entrepreneur Ronnie Screwala. Recently, in June, Manipal Education & Medical Group (MEMG) acquired Jigsaw Academy, an on-line analytics and big data training start-up for students and professionals.

Over the last 6-12 months, bigger start-ups in the profes-



Start-ups displayed an interest to merge, sell out or be acquired by larger start-ups. ISTOCK.COM/JPPOBA

sional learning space like Great Learning and TalentSprint have been receiving a lot of inbound interest from a clutch of smaller start-ups in the same space, who wish to either merge, sell out or be acquired by the larger start-ups.

“When we started Great Learning in 2012, Jigsaw was the most prominent player in Analytics. At first we partnered with Jigsaw, because we did not have any of our own analytics con-

tent. Over 12 months, we built our own content, assessments and expertise and became independent,” said Hari Krishnan Nair, co-founder and Director, Great Learning.

He added, “We were profitable from the first year, booked revenue of ₹135 crore in FY19 and will end FY20 with ₹400 crore in revenue.”

Nair added, “In the last 12 months, we have seen increasing interest by smaller companies, approach us to be acquired or acquired. Over the next few months, you will witness further consolidation with 3-4 large players holding 60 per cent market share emerging in the professional learning space.”

The MD and CEO of TalentSprint, Santanu Paul was approached by 2-3 start-ups looking to merge with the company. “We are clocking 50 per cent y-o-y growth and will close FY20 at the same growth rate. We play in an over fragmented market where some

start-ups have been unable to grow because of uncertainty about online education programmes working or not and academic institutions opening up deep-tech education programmes for working professionals. You will see the emergence of 3-4 large players and many smaller players in this space,” said Paul.

Asked about consolidation in the professional skilling space, serial entrepreneur and partner GrowthStoryin, K Ganesh, said: “There is a dire need for professional learning companies to bridge the skills gap that exists in the country today. Large skilling start-ups will co-exist with smaller start-ups as this is not a ‘winner takes all’ business unlike the cab-hailing, food delivery and e-commerce businesses. While there will be takers for big ticket, long term professional skilling courses that cost lakhs, there will also be a huge demand for smaller top-up courses that cost much less.”

Sigma launches ‘world’s smallest’, mirrorless digital camera in India

OUR BUREAU

Chennai, October 14

Japan-headquartered Sigma Corporation, a leader global camera and lensmaker, launched what it claims the world’s smallest and lightest full-frame mirrorless digital camera — Sigma fp, in India.

With a weight of 370g (without lens), the camera’s body alone is priced at ₹ 2,15,000, while Sigma fp will cost ₹ 2,50,000 with Sigma 45mm F2.8 DG DN lens.

“Sigma fp is a new generation of camera that will revolutionise digital photography and film-making. There are several modes the camera can be used with, making it highly versatile and perfectly adaptable to different styles of photography or videography,” said Ananth Seshan, Director, Shetala Agencies, which represents Sigma in India.

The Sigma fp is compatible



Ananth Seshan, Director, Shetala Agencies, at the launch of Sigma fp in Chennai on Sunday. BIJOY GHOSH

with a wide range of accessories and with the overall dimensions of 12.6×6.9×4.53mm, the camera is highly portable and can be comfortably used with drones and gimbals, for portraits, 4k streaming, in the field and more, according to a statement.

The back-illuminated 35mm full-frame Bayer sensor with 24.6 effective megapixels

will support a full-fledged video production with 12-bit CinemaDNG external recording and 4K UHD/24fps recording.

Its key features include electronic shutter for a variety of settings, Superior options in artistic picture and video creations, advanced picture and video generating functions, and seamless transition between Still and Cine modes.

For raw video data, the SIGMA fp supports 12-bit CinemaDNG external recording. With 4K UHD/24fps recording, it will produce video data that can be used even in filmmaking.

The camera’s use of the L-Mount standard makes it compatible with a range of lenses from its L-Mount alliance partners such as Leica and Panasonic. The body is built from a die-cast aluminium alloy and is also dust and splash proof.

FB’s Libra faces support test after key backers quit

REUTERS

London, October 14

Facebook’s Libra cryptocurrency faces a pivotal meeting of backers in Geneva on Monday, days after the would-be digital coin project suffered a severe blow as major payment firms quit.

Mastercard and Visa abandoned the Geneva-based Libra Association on Friday, as did eBay, fintech start-up Stripe and payments company Mercado Pago.

Politicians and regulators from the US to Europe said that Libra risks upsetting global financial stability, undermining users’ privacy and facilitating money laundering.

PayPal started the Libra Association exodus this month, leaving Facebook without the backing of any major payments firms for the project, due for launch by June 2020.

Libra said this month it would give details after the

meeting of the 1,500 “entities” that have indicated “enthusiastic interest” to take part in the project.

A spokeswoman did not immediately respond to enquiries on the meeting of the Libra Association, whose remaining members include Vodafone and ride-hailing firms Uber and Lyft.

It also includes non-profit organisations, venture capital groups and blockchain firms, but the departure of major financial firms presents a stumbling block for Libra’s efforts to convince regulators and politicians about the coin’s safety.

France last month pledged to block Libra from operating in Europe, with the Bank of England laying out high hurdles it must meet before its launch. US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell suggested the project could not advance before concerns were met.

Apple’s new iPad hits the shelves

New iPad priced between ₹29,900 and ₹48,900

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, October 14

Apple announced the availability of the new iPad launched at the company’s event held in Cupertino in September this year. The tablet is priced between ₹29,900 and ₹ 48,900, depending on whether it is a Wi-Fi-only variant or a Wi-Fi plus 4G Cellular and depending on the storage on board which starts out at 32GB.

This is the 7th generation of the ‘regular’ iPad as opposed to tablets in the other series: iPad Mini, iPad Air and iPad Pro.

Supporting Apple Pencil

Apple has refreshed the standard iPad in several ways. The tablet now has a larger screen, from 9.7 inches to 10.2 inches, without an in-



Apple iPad now has a larger screen, going up from 9.7 inches to 10.2 inches. REUTERS

crease in the form factor. It also supports the Apple Pencil, the stylus available at an additional cost. The Pencil was, for some years, only the prerogative of the iPad Pro models the surfaces of which allowed for it to be used. Now artists, designers, and anyone who likes to use pen on paper or mark up documents for work can optionally add it to the new iPad.

The iPad also supports the Smart Keyboard that lets users treat the tablet like a basic laptop. This too is an optional additional pur-

chase. The iPad can work with other Bluetooth keyboards but will directly connect only to the one Apple created for it. The iPad now also comes with a USB-C port which means some external devices can be connected to it.

The iPad also moves to iPadOS, the new operating system with features specifically designed for iPad, including multitasking, a new Home screen, and desktop-like browsing. It also has the Files app that makes managing your data and media finally possible.

The iPad variants include Wi-Fi-only and 32GB storage for ₹ 29,900, the Wi-Fi-only variant with 128GB storage for ₹37,900, Wi-Fi + 4G variant with 32GB of storage for ₹ 40,900, and Wi-Fi + 4G with 128GB of storage for ₹48,900. The tablet is available from all Apple retail stores and online on Amazon and Flipkart.