

Telecommunication Services

New cellular subscriptions shot up to 9.32 lakh in March 2003, the highest ever during any single month in any year. The total number of subscribers doubled to 12.69 million at the end of March 2003 from 6.43 million as of the same month in 2002. In less than six months since the launch of its services, BSNL has emerged as the second largest cellular service provider in the country. BSNL raced ahead of Hutchison in the cellular sweepstakes in March 2003. As of this date, BSNL had a subscriber base of 22.56 lakh and accounted for 17.8 per cent of the mobile population of the country.

Calls received on any phone, be it cellular, WLL or basic, from any other phone, would be free from 1 May 2003 as the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's order on tariffs and interconnect usage charges, notified by it in January 2003, is scheduled to come into effect from this date. Interconnect charges will be payable across all kinds of networks from the originating network to the terminating network. Until now, only cellular operators had to pay terminating charges to basic and WLL service providers.

Basic telephone subscribers can now choose from alternative tariff plans, just as cellular subscribers are able to do. BSNL and MTNL have announced new tariff plans for their fixed line subscribers. These plans, to be effective from 1 May 2003, are in addition to TRAI's standard tariff plan. The new tariffs make fixed-to-WLL and fixed-to-cell calls costlier.

The Union Government has hinted that it is moving towards a single licence regime in the telecom services sector. In a statement in the Rajya Sabha, Union Communications Minister, Arun Shourie, said that the government was working towards a universal licensing policy to allow operators to provide services to consumers through any technology.

The move is obviously a fallout of the long drawn controversy over the government's decision to allow basic service providers to provide WLL services. On 25 April, the Supreme Court stayed an order of the Telecom Disputes Settlement Appellate Tribunal, passed on 7 April, directing the government to provide cellular operators copies of certain sensitive documents relating to its decision to allow basic operators to provide WLL services.

Cellular Subscribers
Monthly Additions: Apr-Mar

	'000 nos.	% chg.
All India		
2001-02	2853.73	68.58
2002-03	6256.82	119.25
Metros		
2001-02	1205.16	112.67
2002-03	1871.77	55.31
A Circle		
2001-02	968.56	66.95
2002-03	2230.62	130.30
B Circle		
2001-02	568.48	20.29
2002-03	1873.38	229.54
C Circle		
2001-02	111.53	51.91
2002-03	281.06	152.00

Cellular Services Outstanding
Subscriber Base: March

	'000 nos.	% share
All India		
2002	6430.81	100.00
2003	12687.64	100.00
Metros		
2002	2567.76	39.93
2003	4439.52	34.99
A Circle		
2002	2134.33	33.19
2003	4364.94	34.40
B Circle		
2002	1501.15	23.34
2003	3374.54	26.60
C Circle		
2002	227.57	3.54
2003	508.63	4.01