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## Airtel faces fine of Rs 50 crore for masking calls

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KOLKATA: The telecom department is likely to haul up [Bharti Airtel](#) for allegedly camouflaging its calling-line identification (CLI) mechanism while making promotional business calls to non-Airtel customers. So much so, it plans to slap a Rs 50-crore penalty on the company since tinkering with the CLI mechanism tantamounts to a breach of licence conditions, an official with direct knowledge of the matter told ET.

In an internal note reviewed by ET, the department claims it has received complaints about "Bharti Airtel camouflaging its CLI mechanism in Madhya Pradesh circle for making business promotion calls to non-Airtel mobile customers".

Investigations are underway to detect similar violations in other circles. Under Clause 41.19 (iv) of universal service access licence norms, a mobile operator cannot tamper with its CLI mechanism since this is required for security purposes, and any violation amounts to a security breach.

In a written response to an email from ET, an Airtel spokesman said: "We have not received any communication from the DoT in this regard and therefore cannot comment on the same." But in an internal note of the department, which is with ET, Bharti Airtel had initially claimed the CLI glitch was triggered by "an error by a third party, a call centre" in this case.

"If a third party provides any CLI, then without making any changes, we forward it to the subscriber, which happened in our case," said Bharti Airtel in an internal communication to the telecom department. But following investigations into the case by its vigilance wing, the telecom department found Bharti Airtel's rationale "did not hold good since the call centre in question was not a third party".

In fact, an internal department note claims that when this was pointed out, Bharti Airtel in a communication dated February 7, 2011, said a mistake had been committed by its technical staff. "To manage such a large network we are dependent on our workforce and humans do make unintentional mistakes at times due to work pressure and oversight. This particular incident was also a case of human error and we are taking steps to ensure such mistakes don't happen again by tweaking our process adequately."

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