

IB asks govt to block all net telephony services

ET Bureau

NEW DELHI: The Intelligence Bureau has asked the communication ministry to block all internet telephony (VoIP) services to and from the country until the Department of Telecom (DoT) puts in place a mechanism to track such calls.

The IB is of the view that currently, India does not have the capabilities to track internet telephony calls — both domestic & international — and had asked the DoT find an “early solution to this issue in the interest of national security”.

“In the absence of Caller Line Identification (CLI) parameters of calls landing from abroad, it’s next to impossible to identify the country of location of the caller. Moreover, of late a number of service providers in India have started providing VoIP solutions for making calls both domestic as well as foreign. The calls passing through the VoIP/IP route contain inadequate parameters rendering it impossible to trace the actual callers. As DoT had conveyed that it is not possible to mandate transmission of CLI from abroad, we had approached DoT to block such calls till a technical solution is found,” the IB said in its communication to the DoT, a copy of which is with ET.

If DoT were to implement the IB directive, it will impact hundreds of thousands of consumers who use the internet to make extremely low cost calls to phones and free calls to computers across the globe. Telcos such as MTNL in Delhi and Mumbai and many leading ISPs offer internet telephony services.

In addition, any consumer with internet access can use services from hundreds of companies such as Skype, Google, Yahoo! and Window Live, amongst others.

According to telecom regulator Trai’s latest performance indicators report, consumers over 130 million minutes of internet telephony in the January-March quarter 2009. This report also adds that 34 ISPs in India offer net telephony services in India legally.

Cyber security expert Vijay Mukhi said that IB should have issued such directions immediately after the 26/11 terror attacks. “The terrorists used net telephony as they were aware that India did not have the technological capabilities to do a live trace of such calls.

In the US and Europe, all players who offer VoIP services have provisions that allow governments to track these calls. Many of them have also installed equipment at their premises to monitor VoIP calls upon orders from governments,” he added.

The IB communication to the DoT also addresses a host of other security related issues, including the presence of Chinese equipment vendors such as Huawei & ZTE providing equipment such as routers & switches to private operators and state-owned BSNL.

The IB has pointed out that Huawei is using state-owned Indian Telephone Industries (ITI) to manufacture equipment in India, but did not actually transfer the technology, thus posing a security threat to the country.