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Consumer forums seek transparent telecom tariff plans during meet with Sibal

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NEW DELHI: Telecom minister Kapil Sibal heard consumer grievances in respect to mobile number portability, activation of value-added services and their charges, transparent tariffs in the first round-table with consumers on Tuesday. Several consumer groups turned up to highlight problems and suggest solutions.

Telecom Users Group of India, a non-profit consumer organisation, suggested single tariff plan for all prepaid mobile consumers and make text message charges on par with voice call charges (1 paisa per second).

On the tariff front, the consumer forum asked the ministry to bring in transparency and a one-tariff plan for prepaid consumers that made up to 96% of all mobile users in India. The forums urged Sibal to allow value-added services activation on consumer's consent only.

On mobile number portability, the consumer forum suggested creation of a monitoring cell to check online grievances of consumers and take punitive action against errant operators violating telecom regulations. The roundtable was held in line with the proposed New Telecom Policy 2011, promised by the minister, to empower consumers and bring more transparency. Trai unveiled two draft regulations on protecting consumer interest and redressing their grievances on Monday, in a bid to empower the country's 860 million-odd telecom consumers.

Trai's draft regulations focus on issues like effective grievance redressal system, review of consumer centric quality of service parameters, metering and billing audit and providing information to prepaid consumers, among others. Trai has suggested that mobile phone companies be able to offer only three categories of vouchers - a plan voucher, a top-up voucher and a special tariff voucher, which would have colour bands for easy identification.

Mobile phone companies will also have to ensure the information printed on paper vouchers meant for the pre-paid users is legible and printed in a font size not below eight points. Telcos have also been asked to provide on request, information relating to the itemised usage charges for prepaid consumers limited to preceding six months within 15 days.

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