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UNIFIED LICENSE FOR THE TELECOM INDUSTRY

Q: Please shed some light on the Unified License issued for the telecommunication industry.

Jaishankar Dubey,
Telecom Consultant, New Delhi

Ans.: Over the past two decades, the Indian telecommunications sector has undergone a revolutionary transformation with significant reforms in licensing policies to reflect technological advancements and changing market demands. In the year 2013, Telecom licensing in India underwent a major transformation with the implementation of the “Unified License (UL)” regime with vision of One Nation - One License across services and service areas, in which there are separate licenses for different telecommunication services. In this regime, telecom players can offer all telecommunication services under one license. Service authorization for different telecom services is done separately under UL. The guidelines4 for grant of UL were issued on 19th August 2013 and modified guidelines5 (comprehensive) were issued on 8th January 2014, wherein spectrum allocation has been delinked from the License and it has been mandated to obtain UL.
Unified License offers service-wise authorizations, where licensees establish networks and use them to provide services. Hence, as per the licensing regime under UL, the licensees are envisaged to put passive infrastructure, active network elements and provide services using them. Thus, their role cuts across the infrastructure, network, and service layers. The licensees of UL establish the network, maintain it, provide the service to the subscribers, manage the tariff, billing, QoS, customer care, etc.

Currently, in India, there are players that operate purely in the infrastructure layer. They are Infrastructure Provider -I (IP-I), who are not under UL but are registered with DoT. Infrastructure Providers came into existence in the year 2000 when the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) invited applications for IP-I (Infrastructure Providers Category-I) registrations and IP-II (Infrastructure Providers Category-II) licenses. The scope of IP-I was limited to providing passive assets such as Dark Fibre, Right of Way, Duct space, and Tower on lease/ rent out/ sale basis to licensees of telecom services on mutually agreed terms and conditions. IP-II could establish digital network, provide transmission capacity, and could lease/ rent out/sell end to end bandwidth to the other Licensees of Telecom Services. From 13th August 2000 onwards, IP-II licenses were issued by DoT and IP-II were required to pay license fee.

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