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WiMAX comes to Goa, finally

Andrew Pereira, TNN 30 June 2009, 03:29am IST

PANAJI: Almost six months after it was announced, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) on Monday launched its Wireless Broadband service called WiMAX' with a target of 10,000 customers for the first year. Twenty-five Base Transceiver Stations (BTS) have been installed on mobile towers across the state, mostly in urban and coastal areas, to serve the purpose, said BSNL officials.

"Through our wireless broadband service, we aim to take the benefits of broadband to customers across the state," said Chandra Prakash, chief general manager, BSNL's Maharashtra telecom circle which includes Goa.

"Our partnerships with technology companies such as SOMA Networks will help us deliver affordable and high quality services to enterprises and urban customers and also provide access to low cost education and healthcare services," he added.

WiMAX can be accessed through a simple plug-and-play indoor device called the Customer Premise Equipment or CPE which allows upgrades to future services as well, said its manufacturer SOMA Networks Inc. WiMAX is expected to be extended to Maharashtra soon.

TOI learns that the much-awaited launch was tied up in red tape for the last six months. "Important licences and clearances were being held back by the Centre, it's only after these came through that we could go ahead with launching WiMAX," said sources.

Meanwhile, Sesa Goa recently signed up as the first enterprise customer in Goa for the WiMAX service. BSNL officials said they hope to bring the benefits of broadband to an area serving 100 million people in Maharashtra and Goa over the next three years.

"Broadband is a national priority for India as it has the potential to drive economic growth and enable large scale socio-economic transformation," said Sudhir Kadam, senior vice president, SOMA. The US-based company which has invested in the network rollout will manage the service on behalf of BSNL. Over the next few months, SOMA will launch a host of broadband-enabled interactive services for customers in Goa. These include online shopping, banking, bill-payments, social networking as well as access to news, music, movies and e-learning, said company officials.

New Age Device Soon

Unveiled at BSNL's WiMAX launch, was a personal computer minus a CPU, hard disk etc. All interaction on this device, is on a flat-screen monitor where one can either use a mouse or a touch-screen facility.

Calling it a "WiMAX-enabled internet device", Sudhir Kadam, senior vice president, SOMA Networks Inc said, "It will be cheaper than a PC."

Explaining its features, Kadam said, although it has word processor applications, data will be stored at remote servers through Cloud Computing Technology'. The technology provides for common business applications online that are accessed from a web server while the software and data are stored on the servers. "Through our Multiple Tenancy' policy, privacy will be assured. It's like having a building and renting the rooms. Tenants have their privacy," he said. The product is expected by December, 2009.

What is Wimax?

Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access, WiMAX is a telecommunications technology that provides wireless transmission of data

Where is it available in Goa?

* Launched by BSNL and its technology partner, SOMA Networks Inc, WiMAX is available in Mandrem, Colvale, Siolim, Anjuna, Tivim, Mapusa, Calangute, Baga, Candolim, Pilerne, Porvorim, Panaji, Dona Paula, Corlim, Kundaim, Vasco, Verna, Cuncolim, Chinchinim, Navelim, Mandopa, Margao, Mobor, Varca, Majorda and Colva. Benaulim will be covered under the Colva tower.

* In the second phase, tentatively scheduled for early next year, Bicholim, Valpoi, Sanquelim, Sanguem and Quepem will be covered.

* BSNL does not offer on-the-move WiMAX coverage at the moment. For instance, if you wish to browse the net while travelling you cannot for now.

* Between June 29 and July 13 all walk-in customers at a coffee chain will be allowed 30 minutes of free internet usage with an order value over Rs 199. This is available in Mapusa, Panaji, Candolim, Bambolim, Miramar and Margao.

How to get a WiMAX connection?

- Visit a BSNL customer service centre and ask for a Customer Application Form. You need a passport-sized photo with proof of identity and address.

- A BSNL-SOMA Networks technician will visit your residence and check for feasibility which is subject to frequency of BSNL coverage, aka, the network strength in your area.

- Once BSNL completes the verification process of your identity and address, a payment of Rs 5,000 will have to be made for the CPE (Customer

Premise Equipment, a simple plug-and-play indoor device about the size of a landline handset). The payment will have to be made by cash or cheque in the name of the concerned distributor, as per instructions from the BSNL customer service centre.

- Next will be a one-month security deposit to BSNL. The amount will depend on the plan you choose plus Rs 827 (inclusive of installation charges and service tax). If you choose to make an annual payment instead of monthly, you can pay the tariff for 10 months and payment for two months will be waived off.

- SOMA officials say the entire procedure will take no more than 48 hours.

What are the plans?

- Home users have a choice between 256 Kbps and 512 Kbps. The monthly tariff for 256 Kbps is Rs 1,000, for 512 Kbps it is Rs 1,800 per month.

- Business users have four options: Rs 4,400 for 256 Kbps, Rs 8,000 for 512 Kbps, Rs 12,000 for 1024 Kbps and Rs 20,000 for 2048 Kbps.

- While home users will have to purchase the CPE, business users can avail a free CPE subject to conditions which include a three-year guaranteed subscription. The CPE is priced for all types of users at Rs 5,000.

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