General Studies-3; Topic: Awareness in IT, computers

Net Neutrality

1) **Introduction**
   - The Internet has spread all over the world, so widely that many believe it is now an essential good.
   - The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has come out in strong support of Net neutrality
   - TRAI said, internet service providers should not engage in any discriminatory treatment of content
   - The regulator seeks to bar any practice where selected content is blocked, degraded, slowed down or granted preferential speeds.

2) **What does Net Neutrality mean?**
   - Net neutrality is "The principle that Internet service providers should enable access to all content and applications without favouring or blocking particular websites."
   - Basically, the ethos of net neutrality state that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) should not give preference to certain content over the other.

3) **Background**
   - Last year, the TRAI had ruled for Net Neutrality thus banning Facebook's Free Basics and Airtel Zero.
   - Both Free Basics and Airtel Zero let users access certain apps and websites for free.

4) **TRAI's Recommendations**
   - **Prohibits Discrimination**
     a. Keeping Internet open and prohibits any ISPs from discrimination on basis of content.
   - **Protection of rights of citizens**
     a. The internet use should be facilitated by ensuring plurality and diversity of views, opinions and ideas.
   - **Exemptions**
     a. It excludes specialised services and content delivery networks (CDNs) from scope of any rules on net neutrality.
   - **Setting up Multi-stakeholder body**
     a. Setting up multi-stakeholder body to monitor and investigate whether ISPs are adhering to rules.

5) **Significance of TRAI's Recommendations**
   - The telecom regulator's support for Net neutrality fulfils constitutional promises
   - Preserving the democracy of the internet and users' right to freedom of speech and expression
   - It will ensure a level playing field for services providers to innovate and customize in India
   - It will help build the Internet as a public platform with open access to all
   - It will effectively address the problem of anti-competitive practices adopted by certain providers.
   - Judicious and transparent use of national resources for greater public benefit.
   - The decision based on wide public consultation affirms government stand for people participation in decision making.

6) **Arguments supporting Net Neutrality**
   - Services on the internet must be equally accessible to all and telecom operators cannot discriminate between services.
   - It will end discrimination against innovative internet platforms and application service providers who do not have the financial wherewithal
   - Without Net neutrality, the new start-ups would be at a disadvantage vis a vis an established players.
   - Without Net neutrality it would impact both the right to speak and the ability to receive knowledge, hence impacting our right to freedom of speech and expression.
   - It would be detrimental from the consumer point of view as their usage pattern will be controlled by the telecom companies.
   - While voice revenues have shown a decline, data revenues have shown significant growth for telecom companies.

7) **Arguments against Net Neutrality**
   - Applications which use the voice over internet protocol (VoIP), have led to reduction in voice-based traffic, putting inordinate pressure on telcos'
   - Differential pricing recognises the economic principle of paying differently for different levels of service and experience.
   - ISPs say differential pricing based on differential levels of service will enable them to recover the massive investment made.
   - If net neutrality is enforced, then future investments in telecommunications infrastructure will be curtailed, thereby impacting user experience.
   - It will impact the government's ambitious Digital India initiative.

8) **Way Forward**
   - A proper mechanism needs to be instituted to make sure that the exceptions are not used as loopholes by the big Internet players.
   - To make digital economy a reality telcos' must make adequate investments to cater to the explosion of data traffic.