

PTCL denies to sign accords with ISPs

Abrar Mustafa

ISLAMABAD: Etisalat owned Pakistan Telecommunication Company Ltd (PTCL) has been defying orders of the apex telecom regulator of the country, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), to sign interconnect agreements with private broadband Internet operators for last three and half months.

The move is widening a row between the ISPs (Internet service providers) and the PTCL as it tries to capture major market share of broadband Internet.

The PTA on June 10, 2009 ordered the PTCL and ISPs to sign the approved DSL Interconnect Agreement within seven days. ISPs claim that the PTCL has not done so despite repeated re-

mindings. The PTA on September 2, 2009 after hearing complaints of ISPs gave a two-day deadline to the PTCL to sign the agreement otherwise face legal proceedings, but the PTCL has been delaying the signing since then.

The old DSL agreement contained many anti-competitive clauses, which were removed by the PTA in the new version because the PTCL wanted a preference on certain services thus declining a level-playing field to all operators.

The ISP Association of Pakistan (ISPAK) in an email to PTA Chairman Dr M Yaseen stated that while the PTCL was busy in unfair and anti-competitive practices by selling DSL retail packages much below the wholesale rate for ISPs, the regulator had

not been able to get implemented its previous decision taken after a delay of more than two years.

The ISPs criticised the PTA for having a soft corner for the PTCL. The ISPAK said the industry was forced to believe that instead of dispensing justice, new focus of the PTA was now on might is right.

The ISPs have a bitter relationship history with the PTCL amid repeated complaints about strong-arm tactics and anti-competitive practices by the PTCL to kill the competition.

The ISPAK stated that the PTA had not even served a show cause notice on the PTCL for not enforcing the orders of the authority.

In case of non-compliance of

its orders by its licence holder, the PTA can take punitive action under Section 23 of Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-Organisation) Act, 1996 by imposing a fine on PTCL or suspension/cancellation of its licence.

The PTA is committed to providing quality broadband services. The agreement between the PTCL and broadband companies will be signed as work is being done in this regard.

Spokesperson for PTCL Ali Qadir Gillani was contacted for two days but he ignored giving the company's stance on the issue. Another PTCL official, when contacted, said the PTCL was a commercial organisation having its own interests and these would be taken into account at every cost.