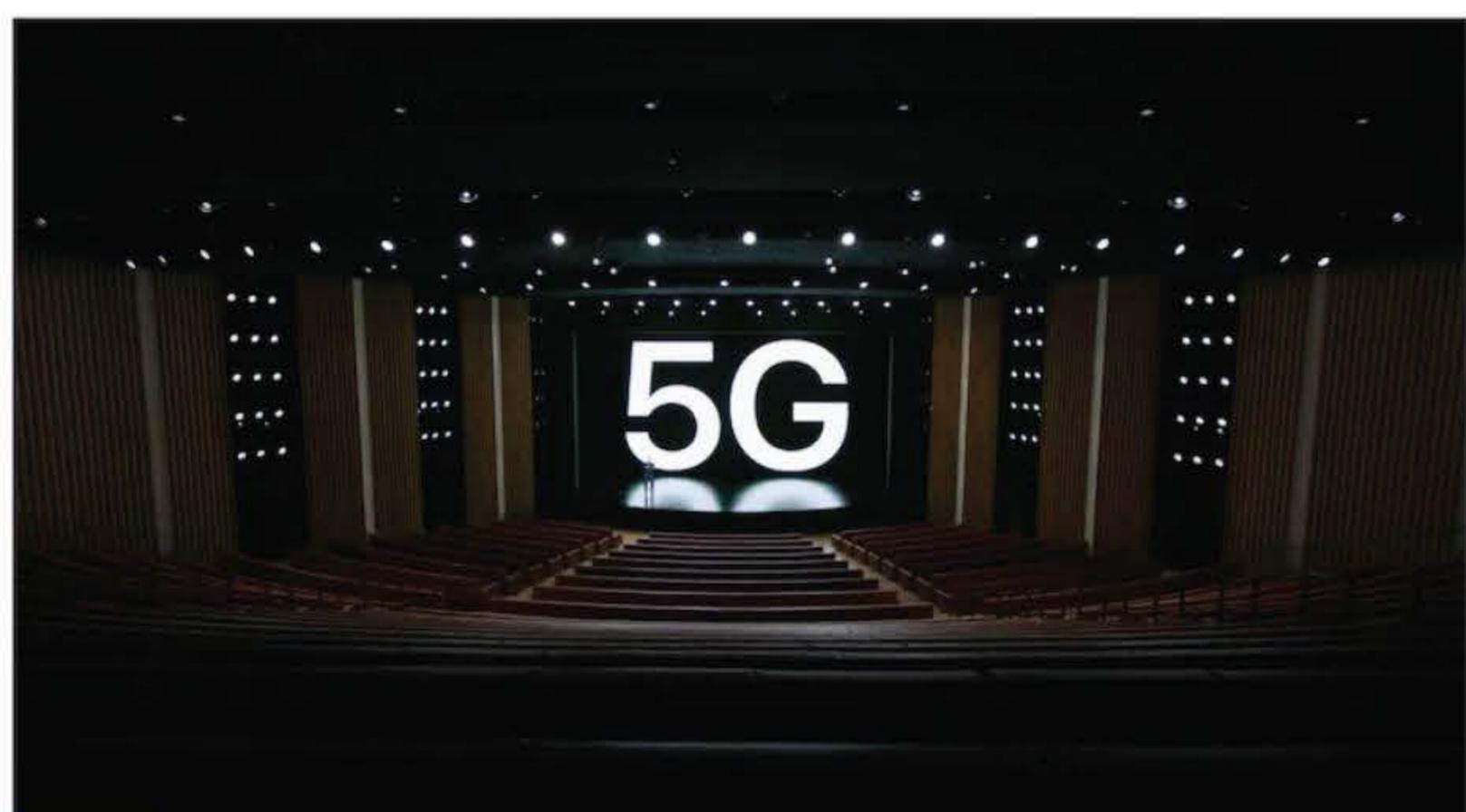


5G auction to be held on schedule, within stipulated timeline: Ashwini Vaishnaw

Ashwini Vaishnaw's affirmation comes at a time when telecom regulator TRAI's 5G recommendations on spectrum pricing and other nuances, which were widely expected to come by March-end, have spilled over by a few days to early April.

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The auction of 5G spectrum will be held on schedule and within the stipulated timeline, Minister for Communications Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Monday.

His affirmation comes at a time when telecom regulator TRAI's 5G recommendations on spectrum pricing and other nuances, which were widely expected to come by March-end, have spilled over by a few days to early April.

Asked if 5G auction will be held as per schedule, Vaishnaw said, "absolutely".

He was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an event – 2nd national conference on cyber crime investigation and digital forensics.

The spectrum auctions are slated to be conducted in 2022, to facilitate the rollout of 5G mobile services within 2022-23, by private telecom providers.

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TRAI's views on 5G auction and related nuances are crucial since they will serve as building blocks, and set the pace for the auctions and subsequent rollout of the fifth-generation services that will usher in ultra-high-speed and spawn new-age services and business models.

On March 29, a senior TRAI official had told PTI that the recommendations (on 5G spectrum pricing and other modalities) will come out within the next 7-10 days.

The telecom regulator, in November last year, had released a detailed consultation paper to discuss threadbare the modalities for auction of spectrum across multiple bands, including pricing, quantum and

other conditions -- preparing the groundwork for upcoming 5G auctions.

TRAI's comprehensive consultation paper ran into 207 pages and posed 74 questions for industry-wide discussion, touching on crucial aspects like valuation and reserve price of 5G spectrum, quantum of the spectrum, block size, eligibility conditions for participation in the auction, rollout obligations, spectrum cap, and surrender of the spectrum.

Norms will also be worked out for new frequencies such as 526-698 MHz and millimetre band that is 24.25 - 28.5 GHz, in addition to bands like 700 MHz, 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1800 MHz, 2100 MHz, 2300 MHz, 2500 MHz, and 3300-3670 MHz.

As the country gears up for the mega auction, the industry players have been making an aggressive pitch for lowering spectrum pricing.

Telecom service providers are conducting 5G trials in Delhi, Mumbai, Jamnagar, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Lucknow, Gurugram, Gandhinagar, Chandigarh, Pune and Varanasi including urban, semi-urban and rural areas.