

Phone, internet subscribers the worst hit

TIMES NEWS NETWORK
TIMES OF INDIA

New Delhi: An indefinite strike by MTNL executives on Monday disrupted phone and internet services as well as operations at the airport and hospitals.

At AIIMS's RP Centre, a minor fire broke out due to short circuit and doctors had to use their personal mobile phones to call the fire department. "All our landlines are down and we couldn't connect to the fire department," said Dr Shakti Gupta, medical superintendent, RP Centre.

While most major educational institutions remained largely unaffected, Delhi College of Engineering faced some problems. According to Naveen Kumar, faculty, DCE, "The internet and telephones were not working and the faculty and students did face some problems." Railways, however, were not affected too adversely.

Individual subscribers were the major sufferers. People couldn't call on or from MTNL phones, internet lines were down throughout the day causing problems at homes and offices subscribing to MTNL. "I went to office leaving my one-year-old baby with a babysitter. I have this habit of calling and checking with the sitter every hour or so to see how the baby is doing. I just couldn't get through to my home. I was so worried that I took a half day and left for home early," said a frantic Gunjan Dhyani, a resident of Tara Apartments. She was not the only one. Shradha Sundaram from Patparganj said, "I had a presentation and had to do some research for that. I had mailed myself the details of the presentation which I was supposed to work on. But I just couldn't open my mail."

The striking executives said their main demand was implementation of the sixth pay commission recommendations. "We have been requesting the management to implement the pay commission's report on increasing our salaries. But for the month of April, our salaries have actually been rolled back between Rs 5,000-Rs 8,000 while the higher ranked officials have got increments. This is despite MTNL showing a huge profit," said A K Kaushik.

The executive unions' joint forum had sent a notice to the MTNL CMD, DoT secretary S Behura and telecom minister A Raja in March 2009 requesting that the pay commission report be implemented for MTNL as was done for BSNL. They had also asked that Sinha and Behura meet them. However, Kaushik alleges that no meeting took place. According to him, employees that have been transferred from BSNL to MTNL stand to lose up to Rs 8,000 every month. "We have 50,000 employees. Our wage bill has increased from Rs 1,000 crore to Rs 2,200 crore in the last five years, which is 45% of our topline revenue. We cannot meet their demands," said Sinha.

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