

Telcos Take Up Tower Repairs on War Footing

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Mumbai: Mobile phone operators such as Bharti Airtel, Vodafone India and Idea Cellular, and tower company Indus Towers are racing to repair and restore their infrastructure which were severely damaged after Cyclone Vardah hit parts of Tamil Nadu, including Chennai city, and Andhra Pradesh on Monday.

Indus Towers, the world's largest tower company, has deployed 500 people for restoring communications in the cyclone-hit parts, a spokesperson for the company told ET on Tuesday.

Indus Towers said it is experiencing total power disruption and damage to its telecommunication infrastructure due to fallen trees and electricity poles, which has impacted about 60% of its towers in Chennai. The company has deployed 60,000 litres of diesel to the affected sites to reduce downtime, it said.

The preparedness comes from lessons of last year when communication came to a standstill in a flood-hit Chennai.

Industry body Assocham estimated that Cyclone Vardah has caused destruction worth up to \$1 billion to the industries in the affected areas.

India's No. 1 telecom operator Bharti Airtel said the severity of the Vardah cyclone damaged one of its international undersea cables, which has partially affected its internet traffic, resulting in slow internet and data speeds. "Our teams are working to normalise the opera-

tions at the earliest possible and making alternate arrangements to divert international internet traffic," said a statement.

Idea said the cyclone has caused damage to telecom infrastructure in Chennai and other parts of Tamil Nadu, leading to disruption of services in some areas. "Idea team is working 24x7 to restore connectivity and support our customers in the impacted areas," the company said. Vodafone said its teams were working on a war footing to restore services, which were "almost back to normal" in most places.

Aircel, a major telecom player in the southern market, said its network service has been temporarily hurt. However, the telco said 75% of its transmission network is up

and it would be working completely by the end of Tuesday.

"Once power is restored, our sites would work and in the meanwhile, we are also filling diesel to the generator sets continuously," said Sankara Narayanan K, head-SBU 1 at Aircel.

Tata Communications said it has mobilised field resources across multiple locations and has restricted movement of field engineers.

The telco said its aerial cables have been thoroughly checked and adequate infrastructure materials and fuel have been distributed across multiple locations.



Lines Down

500 people deployed for restoring communications by Indus Towers

60% of Indus towers affected by the cyclone in Chennai

60,000 litres of diesel deployed by telco to affected sites to reduce downtime

75% of transmission network is up for Aircel; to be complete soon

Bharti Airtel says a global undersea cable is damaged

With no power, it is 'management' time

OUR BUREAU

Chennai December 13

A day after cyclone Vardah battered Chennai, businesses and offices were shut as power supply was down. The government had declared a holiday for schools and colleges.

Public and private sector banks also downed their shutters as there was no power and network connection. It was an added discomfort for many people as there were only a very few functioning ATMs and that too only on arterial roads.

While most of retail shops closed, only super markets were doing brisk business as people queued up to buy things such as vegetables and other essential items. Several shops ran out of stocks for candles and milk packets. With some petrol bunks closed due to damage to property and lack of supply, operational outlets saw long queues.

Boat Club, a posh residential locality of the city, is one of the areas that bore the

brunt of cyclone Vardah that ripped through the city causing damages to this quiet locality's lush green ambience.

Manufacturing hubs

There wasn't any major damage reported at the Sriperumbudur-Oragadam-Maraimalai Nagar manufacturing corridor. Companies had suspended their operations as a precautionary measure.

"To ensure the safety of our employees, we have halted operations at both Chennai plant

and offices of Global Business Services during December 12 and 13, we are carefully monitoring the weather condition and will resume operations as soon as conditions improve," said a spokesperson of Ford India.

Hyundai's factory cancelled its second and third operations on Monday. However, it resumed operations on Tuesday.

Large petrochemical units in the Manali Industrial area to the north of Chennai were

also shut. These units will restart over the next couple of days as power is restored or if they have their captive supply, said an industry representative. Small-scale units in Guindy and Thirumudivakkam were affected as the factory's roof sheets were torn off in the high velocity winds and the equipment became water logged in the rains that followed.

Billion dollar damage

Meanwhile, industry body ASSOCHAM has estimated the damages caused by cyclone Vardah at about a billion dollars: "The hurricane-strength storm caused by cyclone Vardah uprooted trees, overturned cars and caused extensive damage to buildings;; besides it has also significantly hit agricultural sector, destroying banana plantations, papaya groves, paddy and others thereby causing widespread destruction worth up to \$1 billion," DS Rawat, secretary general of ASSOCHAM, said in a statement.



Long queues were seen at petrol bunks a day after cyclone Vardah hit Chennai BIJOY GHOSH

Virtual reality

India needs a robust cyber security law to prevent the surge in mobile frauds as people go cashless

After the controversial demonetisation of currency notes announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on November 8, the government has been recommending that people go cashless and make online payments through e-wallets or plastic money.

But the convenience of digital transactions brings with it the danger of online deception, warns a study on cyber-security conducted by industry body Assocham along with business consultancy firm EY. According to the study, mobile frauds in India are likely to surge by 2017. "Mobile frauds are areas of great concern for companies as 40-45 % of financial transactions are done via mobile devices and this threat is expected grow to 60-65 %." As per the study, a chunk of complaints for online security (46 %) were related to credit/debit card fraud. These were followed by Facebook-related complaints such as morphed pictures, cyber bullying and cyber stalking (39 %). Cheating through mobile contributed to 21 % of cyber complaints. Then came hacking of e-mail ID (18 %); abusive/offensive/obscene calls and SMS (12 %) and others.

The implementation of a cybersecurity strategy in India is still in its infancy. For an IT power of its size, the strength of official cyber security workforce is inadequate. The number stands at a 556 experts when compared to China that has 1.25 lakh experts and the US (91,080 experts). In its current form, the IT (Amendment) Act 2008 deals with extraction, retention, communication and destroying of data. Plus, the Act doesn't cover majority of the crimes committed through mobiles. It needs to be updated and widen its scope to include a legal framework for cyber laws. Another issue to be addressed with such enormous mobile penetration is provocative content on the Web. A balance needs to be struck between infringing on the privacy of citizens and monitoring of cyber crimes. The scrapping of Section 66 A doesn't allow intermediaries like Internet service providers to block or remove provocative information that goes viral on social media. India needs a robust cyber security law that defines the duties of stakeholders, starting from the banker, to users, to intermediaries.

