Pakistan breaks fiber optic cable monopoly

Overview

Pakistan has finalized a plan to transform Pakistan''s optical fiber cable network into a global digital gateway.

Key Takeaways

Pakistan's internet sector has long been dominated by PTCL and TWA, but regulatory and industry efforts are underway to introduce competition and reduce the duopoly's control over international bandwidth.Current Monopoly Situation

Pakistan's international internet connectivity is largely controlled by two companies: Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) and Transworld Associates (TWA), which manage access to seven undersea fiber optic cables and two overland links . These companies act as intermediaries, purchasing bandwidth from global consortia and reselling it to smaller ISPs at marked-up prices . This duopoly has resulted in high internet costs, low broadband speeds (20–30 Mbps), and vulnerability to currency fluctuations, as bandwidth is priced in US dollars . A single undersea cable failure in 2023 caused nationwide disruptions, highlighting the fragility of Pakistan's internet infrastructure .

Proposed Measures to Break the Monopoly

Industry experts, led by the Wireless and Internet Service Providers Association of Pakistan (Wispap), have proposed several strategies to reduce reliance on PTCL and TWA:

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• Establishing new internet gateways in cities like Gwadar to diversify connectivity beyond Karachi, similar to Brazil's model .

• Allowing ISPs to purchase bandwidth directly from global providers, following South Africa's approach, which could lower costs and improve service quality .

• Negotiating bandwidth deals in Pakistani rupees instead of US dollars, reducing exposure to currency volatility, as practiced in Malaysia .

• Expanding fiber backhaul and redundancy, including fiberized towers and alternative routes, to prevent nationwide outages during cable failures .

Potential Impacts

Breaking the monopoly could lead to:

• Lower internet costs for consumers and businesses.

• Higher broadband speeds, potentially matching regional peers like Bangladesh, which offers 50 Mbps at half the price .

• Improved resilience against undersea cable failures and natural disasters, reducing economic losses from internet disruptions, which were estimated at $1.62 billion in 2024 .

• Enhanced competition among ISPs, fostering innovation and better service delivery.

Outlook

While Pakistan has not yet fully dismantled the duopoly, ongoing regulatory discussions and infrastructure projects indicate a shift toward a more competitive and resilient internet ecosystem. The success of these initiatives will depend on government support, investment in fiber infrastructure, and the willingness of ISPs to adopt new procurement models . By diversifying international connectivity and empowering smaller ISPs, Pakistan aims to reduce costs, improve speeds, and strengthen digital resilience, which is critical for its growing IT sector and broader economic development.

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Pakistan To Deploy Fiber Optic Cable to Connect with China

Government said that it will deploy cross border Optical Fibre Cable (OFC) system at a cost of Rs 3.7 billion between

Cross Border Optical Fiber Cable (Khunjrab

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a framework of regional connectivity. CPEC will not only benefit China and Pakistan but will

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PTA attributes internet disruption in Pakistan to

The PTA chairman explained that Pakistan receives 7.5 terabits of data through one of its

Pakistan to expand fiber connectivity to 7.5m homes in five years

According to MoITT, Pakistan currently has over 211,000 kilometers of deployed optical fiber cable, split between

Cybernet and Nokia boost Pakistan''s connectivity with high-speed ...

Nokia today announced that Cybernet, Pakistan''s leading fiber broadband provider, has chosen Nokia''s cutting-edge

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Top 5 Best Fiber Optic Cable Manufacturers in Pakistan As we venture into 2024, the landscape of fiber optic cable

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Pakistan, a country of over 240 million people, relies on just two operators to manage its access to global undersea

USF Has So Far Invested Over Rs. 35 Billion in 26 Optical Fiber Cable ...

The Universal Service Fund (USF) has initiated 26 Backhaul Optical Fiber Cable (OFC) projects nationwide since its

Pakistan-China Fiber Optic Project — Grokipedia

The Pakistan-China Fiber Optic Project is an 820-kilometer optical fiber cable infrastructure extending from Rawalpindi to the

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