

India 3G auction to be held on schedule: minister

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A man talks on his mobile phone in front a government telecommunication billboard in New Delhi in October 2009. India's long-awaited auction for third generation (3G) mobile telecom services will be held on schedule next month, a minister said Friday, dismissing media speculation of a delay.

India's long-awaited auction for third generation (3G) mobile telecom services will be held on schedule next month, a minister said Friday, dismissing media speculation of a delay.

"The ministry has not changed the auction date" set for January 14, Telecommunications Minister A. Raja said in New Delhi on the sidelines of a communications industry event.

The statement came after the ministry missed a deadline earlier in the week for issuing invitations to take part in the auction to allow [3G](#)

service, fuelling media speculation the sale could be postponed.

The ministry said afterward the invitation to take part in the auction was "being fine-tuned" and would be issued soon.

The auction has already been delayed twice.

Asked about the number of 3G slots to be auctioned, Raja replied that a senior panel of ministers "will decide on the number of slots."

The defence ministry has said it is unable to release some of the airwaves needed for the auction, which could reduce the number of slots up for sale.

On Thursday, the Press Trust of [India](#) reported the government had only sufficient spectrum to sell 3G licences to three private operators rather than the four originally planned.

Slots have already been awarded to state-run [telecom](#) firms MTNL and BSNL.

The government has said it aims to raise 250 billion rupees (5.38 billion dollars) from the sale of pan-India 3G spectrum and Wimax wireless broadband.

It hopes to use the money to help plug a fiscal deficit that is the biggest in nearly two decades.

The auction is set to put India's [mobile phone market](#) -- the fastest growing in the world -- on track for a new level of wireless telephony, experts say.

Third-generation [mobile services](#) would allow high-speed Internet, video

downloads and other sophisticated media services on cellular telephones.

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