

Iraq finally gets 3G telecommunications

BAGHDAD, IRAQ: Iraq's cabinet announced that it has authorised mobile phone firms to use third-generation frequencies, after years of promises amid the frustrated pleas of cellular operators.



Asiacell's Chief Executive Amer Sunna has welcomed the announcement that 3G is now available in Iraq. Image: [Positions & Promotions](#)

It was not immediately clear how 3G would be licensed or sold, and a cabinet statement did not elaborate on when any such decision would be fully implemented.

But the announcement was quickly welcomed by the country's second-biggest mobile operator.

"The General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers announces the approval of granting mobile phone companies working in Iraq the right to use third-generation frequencies," a cabinet statement said.

"The purpose of this is to provide services of high quality," the statement said.

Iraq's three major mobile phone operators have for years complained that the government has not moved fast enough to allow upgrades to the country's cellular services, which still use second-generation technology.

In Iraq, however, users have been stuck on 2G networks, despite mobile penetration reaching a high level of nearly 90%, and the government having launched a consultation in 2011 on implementing 3G services.

Three service providers

Customers can choose primarily between Zain, the Iraqi arm of the Kuwaiti operator of the same name, Asiacell, which is

majority-owned by Qatar Telecom, and Korek.

"We have been waiting for it," Asiacell Chief Executive Amer Sunna told AFP by phone from the company's base in the Kurdish city of Sulaimaniyah. "This is exciting news for us."

"We are really eager to know the terms and conditions because until now, it's just an announcement," he said.

Older 2G technology allows mobile phones to make and receive calls and text messages and browse basic websites, but 3G dramatically increases the capacity, or bandwidth, of a network, allowing users to browse more complicated websites more rapidly.

While mobile phones in much of the Western world and several countries in Asia and the Middle East largely operate on 3G technology, some countries have moved on to even faster 4G wireless standards.

These allow customers to download still larger files and view videos on demand, all at varying fees.

Sunna said that the delays in approving 3G usage meant Iraq was far behind much of the rest of the world.

"I mean, 3G? You know, 5G is under testing and there are rumours that it will be commercially launched in China," he told AFP.

"It's been a while. I think frustration is there. Today, you see the penetration rate hitting 90%, and we're still on 2G," Sunna added.

With 3G-capable phones able to handle data and applications, popularised first by Apple's iPhone and increasingly in use by other smartphones, mobile operators are able to charge for a wider array of services than simply calls and text messages.

Spokespeople for Zain and Korek and the communications ministry did not respond to AFP when asked to comment.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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