

<p>Makrketing strategies rule markets page 4</p>		<p>Child beggars abound in Bangalore city page 5</p>		<p>Intense fighting continues in Sri Lanka page 6</p>	
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Illegal iPhones hit Indian markets

GAYATHRI VAIDYANATHAN

Apple iPhone sales are booming in the gray market in Bangalore, months before its legal launch on January 2008 in India.

The first hole-in-the-wall inside the National Market in the Majestic area yielded the much sought after iPhone, the latest status symbol offering from Apple Inc. After a quick appraising glance, the man at the counter offered the phone for Rs. 24,500 (US\$ 630), about Rs. 10,000 greater than its retail price in the United States.

Apple products are assembled in China, but on their way through Indian customs, they become several times more expensive. Ultimately it is cheaper for shop owners to smuggle Apple products illegally from neighbouring countries. In the iPhone case, a late release date has ensured that the only phones available in India are the illegal ones.

The phones at the gray market in the Majestic area are imported from Hong Kong and other Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Dubai.

Apple Inc. has not really bothered about the booming gray market in India, never having registered complaints with the police. It has little reason to do so; the added import duties the customers pay go to the government, and since Apple



Apple i-phones being sold illegally in Indian markets
Courtesy Google Images

only keeps track of worldwide sales figures, whether the iPhone is bought in India or abroad makes little difference to their bottom line.

To the customer though, it just might make a difference. The iPhones are locked to a particular wireless service provider abroad. Unlocking to make them work with Indian SIMS requires an additional Rs. 3000 and several risks.

A deeper walk into the market yielded a shop ready to unlock the iPhone for Rs. 3000. The man was ready to crack the software, and said that all features would be available for use. The phone would work with any Indian cell phone service provider, he claimed.

Though this might be true, a retail clerk at Apple Inc. cautioned against buying hacked phones. Once unlocked, the serial number will be damaged and the warranty become invalid, he said. Unlocking may also damage the software.

The stores in the gray market, needless to say, do not offer any warranties. In fact, they come with the disclaimer that once the phone downloads any updates, they will automatically get locked again.

Such considerations are not hampering the appetite consumers have for the latest prestige symbol. An Internet based poll of 2736 users on Indian technology blog 'Apple Iphone' shows a whopping 59.4% of people ready to buy an iPhone, with another 34.1% ready for the purchase if the price drops. The booming gray market in India accounts for 60 to 90 per cent of sales.

Such eagerness means that by the time the iPhone hits the market legally, it will certainly not be the newest tech toy on the block.

BMTC's security surveillance on the go

Sniffer dogs, mock drills and plain-clothed security prepared for emergencies till equipment is installed

PRIYANKA CHOWDHURY

Major bus stations of Bangalore Mahanagar Transport Corporation (BMTC) like Kempe Gowda, Shivajinagar, Shantinagar and Satellite bus station have yet to install proper security surveillance equipments in the stations.

Karen Solomon, a frequent commuter of BMTC buses said, "Security cameras should be there at all the bus stations, as they are not only necessary for security purposes, but they are also useful to find children who get lost in the crowd." Another commuter, Pooja Gautam said, "Considering the fact that all the metropolitan cities of India are under a constant terrorist threat, all major bus stations should have surveillance equipment for better security."

In 2006, the BMTC had taken the initiative to install various security equipments, after a crude country made bomb was detected in a BMTC bus in Kempe Gowda bus station. The BMTC then decided to install the cameras at all major bus stations within a month of the incident. However, it has been more than a year since and the cameras have still not been installed.

On this issue, Dastagir Shariff, Chief Transport Officer for BMTC said, "The plan will be implemented shortly. At present, we have beefed-up the security at all major bus stations. We have increased the number of security guards and have also arranged for sniffer dogs to patrol the stations." He said that the BMTC had collaborated with the



BMTC buses to get more secure bus stations
Courtesy Google Images

police to provide sniffer dogs for the stations. The police at all the nearby stations would send in police officers with sniffer dogs twice a day to patrol the bus stations.

Shariff said, "We have also kept a lot of plain-clothed security guards in all the bus stations. These guards constantly keep a track on all the people who are coming to and going from the stations." He later said, "We have taken all security issues in to serious consideration. Along with CCTVs,

we are also going to put up metal detectors to check the baggage of the commuters and passengers." He said that the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) and the BMTC regularly hold mock drills at all their offices and stations that prepares all their employees on how to act and handle emergency situations like bomb threats, bomb blasts, fires etc, if any such incidents occurred before installment of the security equipment.

After the 2006 incident, BMTC had employed Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) to conduct a survey on the security threat and the requirements for security equipments on all bus stations in Bangalore. CISF plan not only includes the installation of security cameras, but also the setting up of control rooms at all the stations and offices and providing all the employees with their own individual magnetic identity cards.

Mr. P.S.Sandhu, Director of Security, BMTC said that the CISF had conducted a comprehensive survey on the security threat on all the bus stations and have provided all the necessary details for implementation. "The process is taking time, since we have to look through all the equipments in the market. This is not only a security issue, but also an expensive project." He said.

He implied that it was for this reason that they could not make any hasty decisions. He also said that they were looking for cameras that had more longevity unlike the Taiwanese and Chinese models. A plan was being formed for the companies to install cameras and maintain them for a period of time. The mode of payment would be based on the total cost divided by the number of months they will maintain the equipments. "We are calling for tenders and the plan will be implemented as soon as the contract is allotted." He said. The officials say that they are in the process of implementing the plans soon.