

Musings on the eve of World Telecommunication Day:

An efficient telecommunications network is the foundation on which information society is built. In this digital age we cannot imagine a day without electronic gadgets, let alone imagining how life would have been without the evolution of a robust telecommunication system connecting the farthest corners of the world. We truly appreciate the growth and advancement of telecom in the world. But this advancement will be of little value unless we ensure its benefits reach every individual, whatever be the age or social profile. Communication tools aided by AI, IOT, machine learning etc are geared to handle every conceivable subject matter known to mankind – Now there is a need to ensure the user is similarly empowered to utilise the tools for their own betterment. In keeping with the theme for the year, ITU has released a ‘first-of-its-kind’ report “Ageing in a digital world - from vulnerable to valuable” to raise awareness in the ICT sector on the importance of being prepared to respond to the needs and requirements of ageing populations.



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The discussion must be expanded exponentially and encompass businesses to contemplate ways and means by which satellite technology can help an aging population and allow easy access to modern medical systems and systems to aid older persons.

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India continues to face challenges in connecting the remote and far-off places. A long coastline, the hostile mountainous regions, the vast swathes of inhospitable deserts need to be connected; for people for access and for the Govt for defence purposes. Scores of Indian citizens across many villages in India continue to remain digitally unconnected. That is an urgent task cut out for

the policy framework and there is a need to use all possible tools to connect the unconnected at the earliest.

The fastest way to connect rural India, and also the remote and underserved areas, is via satellite broadband. The Govt of India has recently opened up the sector for private industry participation and this opens up huge avenues for the sector. The Indian SatCom industry is coming of age and is now waiting for the gates to open so they can run untethered. India has a vibrant ecosystem being currently serviced by satellites; 900+ TV channels, 70 mn Cable/DTH operators, 1,25,000 VSAT enabled ATMs, over 50,000 automated gas stations, locos using gagan navigation, equity markets valued at US\$ 2 trillion and nearly 40,000 villages powered by satellites.

Yet, this is just the tip of the iceberg. The satellite systems are capable of much more. To unleash the true potential the SatCom industry a few key elements must be addressed to benefit from its value, utility and capacity. Policy initiatives that are in alignment with the international best practices must be brought in. A few recent moves by the Regulator, though trying to address these challenges, have unfortunately overlooked key aspects of satellite connectivity.

ITU played an important role for development and rollout of communications infrastructure and set up a rigorous process through WRC where the frequency bands were allocated for terrestrial and satellite services, keeping in mind global harmonization. Enabling access to the right spectrum, with the required bandwidth, is crucial for the growth of satellite services in India. Non availability of required bands will have adverse effects on growth of business and thereby have a negative impact on the economy. Spectrum is a limited natural resource critical for a wide range of terrestrial and space services on land, at sea and in the skies. Internationally spectrum harmonization is crucial for stability of investments and for allowing businesses to thrive. A huge number of satellites are currently in orbit covering India and Asia-Pacific and many more are ready to be launched- all offering a bouquet of services. By the nature of the sector, massive investments have already gone into various stages of planning. The investments need to be protected to allow a continuous inflow of capital into the country.

Wishing everyone a very happy World Telecommunication and Information Society Day.