



COAI

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I-DIGEST

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LT. GEN DR. SP KOCHHAR (RETD.)

Director General, COAI

From DG's Desk

The year 2023 witnessed significant developments in India's telecom sector. India has risen to become a global 5G leader with the nationwide rollout of 5G, setting unprecedented benchmarks. Indian TSPs completed their minimum 5G rollout obligations in each of the 22 licensed service areas in India in just ten months, leading to positioning India as the second largest 5G network in the world. This showcases the industry's commitment to technological advancement in alignment with the vision of Digital India. Our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's release of India's 6G vision document further outlined the nation's ambitious goals, including a targeted deployment of 6G by 2030.

The telecommunications industry is facing a fundamental strategic challenge common among utilities and other mature industries. While India's telecom sector continues its upward journey, it must grapple with the challenges of sustaining ARPU growth, maintaining consistent service quality and adapting to ever shifting consumer preferences. One of the major challenges faced by the sector revolves around the lack of contribution to network infrastructure costs from Large Traffic Generating platforms/applications. The industry is experiencing a mix of declining revenue and increasing investment costs.

The recent bill introduced in the US Senate is also an acknowledgement of the need for high traffic generating 'Edge Service Providers' to contribute to the cost of delivering affordable broadband to all citizens and corroborates the stance of the Indian telecom sector.

The 6 GHz spectrum band emerges as a valuable asset for enhancing mobile networks quality and coverage of mobile networks in India. Allocation of the same for IMT would not only align with the need to cater to the rapid growth of data consumption, but also position 5G as a pivotal technology for wide area applications including drones, tele-medicines and small cities, while also strengthening India's digital infrastructure for future advancements. The landmark decision taken at the recent World Radio communication Conference 2023 held in Dubai, to open this spectrum band for International Mobile Telecommunications, vindicates the demand by Indian TSPs to allocate this potential band for vital use in 5G, 5G advanced and the future 6G.

The introduction of the Telecommunications Bill 2023 marked another landmark moment for our nation. The government has made enabling provisions in RoW towards ensuring a robust telecom infrastructure and availability of uninterrupted digital connectivity for the citizens.



Other remarkable developments in 2023, such as the TRAI's recommendations for enhancing telecom infrastructure in the Northeastern States and progressive RoW rules introduced by the Ministry of Defense, indicates a collective momentum towards addressing challenges and fostering sustainable growth in the sector.

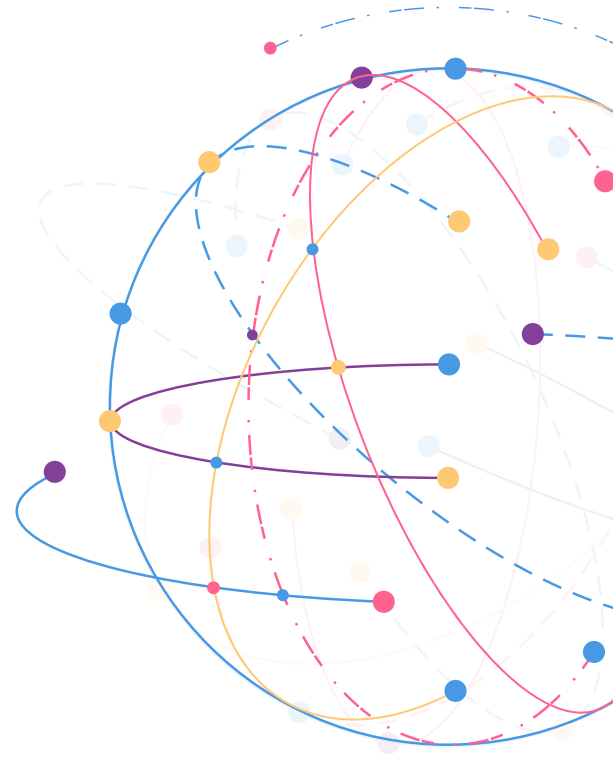
The industry's expectations revolve around leveraging 5G for a multitude of applications and fostering an environment that takes India towards a digitally empowered future. Industry stakeholders also look forward to a collaborative effort with LTGs to develop high quality networks and a responsible fair sharing model, ensuring sustainable growth for the entire digital ecosystem.

– LT. GEN DR. SP KOCHHAR (RETD.)
Director General, COAI



COAI

Latest Updates:



TRAI Consultation paper on "Digital Transformation through 5G Ecosystem":

- TRAI released this consultation paper on 29.09.2023.
- Draft response has been prepared by COAI on the same and circulated to members for inputs.
- Last date for submitting the response to TRAI is 22.01.2024.

TRAI Consultation paper on "Encouraging R&D in Telecom, Broadcasting and ICT Sector":

- This consultation paper was released by TRAI on 29.09.2023
- The draft response for the same has been prepared by COAI and circulated to members for inputs.
- Last date for submitting the response to TRAI is 13.01.2024.

TEC Standard for Assessing and Rating Robustness of Artificial Intelligence Systems in Telecom Networks and Digital Infrastructure

TEC released the said Standards on 18.10.2023 and the response to the same was submitted by COAI on 15.12.2023, highlighting the following:

- TSPs deploy AI for improving network security and efficiency, better spectrum management, 5G efficiency, among others.
- Such AI deployment by TSPs have minimal interaction with consumer data but offer high value to users through better network operations.
- Any AI assessment model should be focused on safeguarding against high-risk AI deployment cases which can lead to significant harm to consumers through discrimination and loss.
- For high-value low-risk AI use case like telecom, a light touch regulatory approach should be adopted to promote technology and innovation for better service to consumers. There is no requirement for any additional standards to be drafted for low-risk high value AI use cases of TSPs which have minimal interaction with consumer data.

TRAI Consultation Paper on "Review of Terms and Conditions of PMRTS and CMRTS Licenses"

This consultation paper was released on 29.08.2023 and COAI submitted its Comments/Additional Comments on the same on 04.12.2023.

Successful identification of 6 GHz band for region 1 at WRC-23 without undue conditions blocking affordable macro deployments:

In reference to the WRC-23 discussions on the 6 GHz spectrum band, COAI submitted a letter on 06.12.2023, highlighting the importance of 6 GHz band for IMT.

Media articles propagating misinformation on 6 GHz band:

COAI submitted a letter on 6.12.2023, countering the misinformation being propagated on the 6 GHz band via media articles and requesting that the complete 1200 MHz of spectrum in the band be allotted for IMT services.

Mandatory Testing and Certification of Telecommunication Equipment (MTCTE) Certification:

- COAI submitted a letter to DoT on 09.12.2023, seeking an extension on implementation of the MTCTE (Phases 3 & 4) till 31.12.2023.
- A meeting was held under the chairmanship of Member (S), along with Sr. DDG TEC and DDG (MTCTE) on 26.12.2023.
- TEC issued the following 2 notifications on 27.12.2023 :
 - Extension for the Communication Security Certification (ComSec) scheme for Wi-Fi Customer Premises Equipment (CPE) and Internet Protocol (IP) routers from 01.01.2024 to 01.04.2024.
 - Re-categorization of notified products as General Conditions of Supply (GCS) and Specific Conditions of Supply (SCs) categories. Additionally, reduction in the fee charged for Equipment Registration (ER)-based applications under MTCTE effective from 01.01.2024.

Communication Security Certification Scheme (ComSec):

- a. COAI submitted a letter to DoT on 23.10.2023, highlighting the concerns related to ComSec Scheme
- b. Meeting was held under the chairmanship of Member (S), along with Sr. DDG TEC and DDG (MTCTE) on 26.12.2023.
- c. DoT issued a new notification, dated 26.12.2023, providing an extension for security testing (ITSAR) by 03 months for WI-FI CPE and IP Routers, i.e., from 01.01.2024 to 01.04.2024.

DoT committee constituted to suggest policy initiatives under the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for the manufacturing of telecom and networking products for:

- a. Enabling Telecom Components manufacturing -
 - i. Issues faced in localisation of components in production of Telecom and Networking Products
 - ii. Present ecosystem of Telecom and Networking component manufacturing in India and its challenges.
 - iii. Present incentive schemes for manufacturing of electronic components and semiconductors, and additional steps required for manufacturing of components for Telecom and Networking Products.
 - iv. Identification of the specific requirement of components for Telecom and Networking Products which can be manufactured locally and be part of a PLI scheme
 - v. Policy interventions/incentives required to promote manufacturing of components for Telecom and Networking Products
- b. Incentivizing export of Telecom Products manufactured in India
 - i. Factors to increase the competitiveness of products manufactured in India under (PLI) scheme for the manufacturing of telecom and networking products in the Global market
 - ii. Policy interventions/incentives to promote export of telecom products manufactured in India under Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for the manufacturing of telecom and networking product.

Consultative Committee (CC) constituted for adoption of TSDSI adopted ATSC 3.0 standards into National Standard by TEC

- a. TEC shared the draft Recommendations of the Committee along with the minutes of the 3rd meeting of the "Consultative Committee" (held on 01.12.2023) vide its mail received dated 01.12.2023
- b. In this regard, COAI provided inputs to TEC on 13.12.2023.

TRAI Consultation Paper on Open and De-licensed use of Unused or Limited Used Spectrum Bands for Demand Generation for Limited Period in Tera Hertz Range:

- a. This TRAI Consultation Paper was released on 27.09.2023 and COAI submitted its counter comments on the same to TRAI on 13.12.2023.

TRAI Consultation Paper on "Review of Quality-of-Services Standards for Access Services (Wireless and Wireline) and Broadband (Wireless and Wireline) Services"

TRAI issued the Consultation Paper on 18.08.2023 and COAI submitted its response to the same on 14.12.2023. It was submitted in our response that TRAI should adopt a glide path towards de-regulation of QoS.

TRAI Consultation Paper on "Digital Inclusion in the Era of Emerging Technologies"

TRAI issued the Consultation Paper on 14.09.2023. COAI held meeting with members and circulated the draft response on 21.12.2023. The final response was submitted to TRAI on 29.12.2023, wherein the stellar role of TSPs in enhancing Digital Inclusion was highlighted.

TRAI Consultation Paper on "Regulation on Rating Framework for Digital Connectivity in Buildings or Areas"

The Consultation Paper was issued by TRAI on 27.09.2023. The draft response for the same was circulated to members on 21.12.2023. It is proposed to highlight in the response that property managers play a key role in ensuring digital connectivity and their participation in the Consultation process is a must.

Letter to DoT and Ministry of Finance (MoF) on abolition of USOF levies

Letters were submitted to both DoT and MoF on 24.11.2023, on the abolition of USOF levies - giving examples of 45 countries and comparing the rate of similar fee levied by them.

Industry meeting held with Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister, Karnataka on 01.12.2023

Discussion of industry representatives happened with Shri D. K. Shivakumar on the ongoing coercive action of Fiber cuts in Bengaluru. The Dy. CM listened to the industry challenges and provided assurance to look into the matter. Possible solution(s) currently being considered by the state government were shared during the meeting.

Internal Meeting with the members of Karnataka on Fiber cuts in Bengaluru

On 05.12.2023, an internal meeting with circle representatives and national SPOCs of members was held to discuss the ongoing fiber cuts issue of Bengaluru and various options to mitigate the challenge were evaluated.

COAI Letter to MD, BESCOM, the electricity distribution company in Bengaluru

A letter to MD, BESCOM was written on 07.12.2023, requesting for an industry meeting to discuss the challenges being faced and to stop all kinds of coercive actions of Fiber Cuts in Bengaluru.

COAI letter to Secretary Telecom on the industry concerns related to Bengaluru fiber cuts

A submission was made to Secretary (T) dated 16.12.2023, requesting to engage with the concerned state government officials in order to stop coercive action of fiber cuts in Bengaluru.

COAI letter to Chief Secretary, Government of Karnataka

A letter was written to Chief Secretary, Government of Karnataka on 16.12.2023, requesting to stop coercive action of fiber cuts in Bengaluru.

COAI letter to Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister, Karnataka

A letter was written to Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister of Karnataka, Shri D.K. Shivakumar on 16.12.2023, reiterating the industry request to stop coercive action of fiber cuts in Bengaluru.

COAI letter to Chief Secretary, Government of Karnataka

COAI wrote to the Chief Secretary, Government of Karnataka on 20.12.2023, regarding the Public Notice from BBMP wherein Self-Declaration of Underground and Overhead Cable Network by Telecom Operators was to be submitted. It was requested to the Chief Secretary to grant extension of time. Further, it was conveyed that the TSPs are evaluating the Duct routes that are already available with BESCOM and BBMP, to lay their cables to the best extent possible. A request for support to expedite the announcement of the revised Karnataka State Right of Way Policy was also made.

COAI letter to Additional Chief Secretary, UDH, Government of Karnataka

A submission was made to Shri R.K. Singh, IAS, on 22.12.2023, regarding the Public Notice from BBMP on Self-Declaration of Underground and Overhead Cable Network by Telecom Operators, requesting his support in stopping of fiber cuts by the agencies.

COAI letter to Chief Commissioner BBMP (Bengaluru)

A submission was made to Shri Tushar Giri Nath, IAS on 22.12.2023, regarding the Public Notice from BBMP about the Self-Declaration of Underground and Overhead Cable Network by Telecom Operators, requesting extension of the deadline for submission.

COAI Letter to Hon'ble Minister of Industries, Government of Maharashtra

COAI made a submission to the Hon'ble Minister of Industries, Government of Maharashtra on 04.12.2023, requesting implementation of the State Right of Way (RoW) Policy at field level and supporting the expansion of

Telecommunications Network in Maharashtra.

COAI letter to Principal Secretary (IT), Government of Tamil Nadu

Via this letter dated 22.12.2023, the Principal Secretary (IT) was requested for inclusion of Telecom in the Tamil Nadu IT/ITeS Policy, whereby all incentives would be extended to the sector accordingly.

COAI letter to Principal Secretary (IT), Government of Chhattisgarh

A letter to the State Principal Secretary (IT) dated 22.12.2023, requested for inclusion of Telecom in Chhattisgarh's IT/ITeS Policy. This will support the industry by extending all incentives and promoting digital infrastructure in the state.

COAI letter to Principal Secretary (IT), Government of Karnataka

This letter dated 26.12.2023, requested for inclusion of Telecom in the Karnataka IT/ITeS Policy, so that all incentives can be extended to the sector accordingly.

9th SBC Meeting of Rajasthan

The 9th State Broadband Committee meeting of Rajasthan was held on 19.12.2023. The meeting was chaired by the Chief Secretary, Government of Rajasthan. Issues related to industry were highlighted by COAI, which were duly acknowledged and noted by the state government.

Meeting organised by Mumbai LSA for discussion on draft Byelaws of Maharashtra Urban bodies

A meeting was held by Mumbai LSA, chaired by Shri Pramod Sapkale, Director Mumbai LSA on 11.12.2023. DoT deliberated on the draft Byelaws with the industry and noted all the suggestions and objections.

Internal Meeting with the members of Uttarakhand

An internal meeting with members was held on 05.12.2023 to deliberate on the actions to be initiated for mitigating the damage caused by coercive action of electricity department on overhead OFC, owing to the investor summit held by the Uttarakhand state government on 08.12.2023 and 09.12.2023, which was attended by the Hon'ble PM as well.

COAI letter to Chief Secretary (Delhi) on Pole charges alignment

A submission was made on 11.12.2023 to the Chief Secretary, Delhi, requesting the government to get the Pole charges aligned with the Delhi RoW Policy, 2023.

COAI letter to Chairman (CAQM) and Member Secretary, DPCC

Submission was made on 12.12.2023, to seek immediate relaxation extension on usage of DG sets by telecom

industry beyond 31.12.2023.

Chandigarh 5G Working Committee meeting

Meeting of the committee was held 04.12.2023, under the chairmanship of IT cum Home Secretary, Chandigarh Administration. Discussions took place regarding industry RoW issues, challenges and faster roll-out of 5G services.

Issuance of new rules by Forest department

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) notified regulations called "Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Rules, 2023" dated 29.12.2023. The new rules are expected to ease out permissions in the forest area for the members.

Revised RoW Policy of Haryana (CCIP-2023)

The revised RoW policy by the state of Haryana was notified on 30.12.2023. The policy is mostly aligned with RoW Rules, 2016 and its amendments.

Meeting held by Delhi LSA

A meeting was held by the Delhi LSA on 12.12.2023, to review the action points of the 06th Delhi SBC meeting. COAI and members attended the meeting and updated on the MoM points of the SBC.

Meetings held by National Broadband Mission (NBM)

A meeting was held with NBM on 11.12.2023, to review NDMC issues. A meeting was also held with the NBM team on 19.12.2023, to review the network deployment readiness in Ayodhya.

Meeting held by Ministry of Road Transport and Highways

A meeting was held with the Joint Secretary (Highways) on 20.12.2023, to review the MoRTH RoW pendency on NH/NHAI

COAI letters to Secretary, Development of Northeastern Region (DoNER)

Submissions were made regarding infrastructure sharing and possibility of an alternate route to connect the northeastern region.

COAI letters to Principal Secretary (IT), Governments of West Bengal and Odisha

Submissions were made requesting inclusion of Telecom in the State IT/ITeS Policies, under the definition of IT/ITeS companies, and all incentives be extended to the sector accordingly.

7th State Broadband Committee meeting of Assam

The 7th SBC meeting took place on 15.12.2023, under the chairmanship of Additional Chief Secretary, Government

of Assam. COAI highlighted the current industry concerns as per the inputs provided by members.

State Broadband Committee meeting of Manipur

The SBC meeting of Manipur took place on 15.12.2023, under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary, Government of Manipur. COAI highlighted the industry concerns and support desired.

Pre Budget-Recommendations for the year 2024-25 were submitted with concerned senior officers in the Ministry of Finance

Key issues included in the representation -

- a. Regulatory Levies
- b. Direct Tax issues
- c. Indirect Tax issues
- d. Service Tax
- e. Custom Duty
- f. Key issues related to GST

Basic Customs Duty (BCD) Exemption to Submarine Cable Laying/repairing ships

Representation made to the Government on 14.12.2023, highlighting the following -

- a. Any vessel brought into India for laying and/or repairing of cable within territorial waters (0 to 12 Nm) of India, is treated as import of cable ship into India and thereby, must comply with the Indian Customs Law, including filing of Bill of Entry, assessment to customs duty, etc.
- b. Prior to introduction of the GST regime, import of cable laying ships were exempted from BCD in terms of Sr. No. 466 of Notification No. 12/2012-Cus., dated 17.03.2012.
- c. After the introduction of GST, w.e.f. 01.07.2017, BCD continued to be exempted under Sr. No. 555 of Notification No. 50/2017-Cus., dated 30.06.2017. However, CBIC amended the notification on 01.02.2023, vide Notification No. 2/2023-Cus., according to which, nothing contained in the said entry against serial number 555 shall have effect after 31.03.2024, or BCD exemption on cable laying/repair ship will be withdrawn w.e.f. 01.04.2024.
- d. Ministry has been requested to reconsider its decision to withdraw exemption vide Serial No. 555 of Notification No. 50/2017-Cus. We have also suggested that the Ministry works with other Government of India entities to streamline the regulatory and customs regimes applicable to the submarine cable industry, to facilitate submarine cables activities and associated investments therein.

MoF-Representation to CBIC on denial of ITC of OFCs, ducts and Manholes

A submission was made to CBIC highlighting the following

- a. OFC networks being a vital component of the telecom infrastructure, GST departments in some states and even some Central units are taking a regressive stand by disputing availability of input tax credit (ITC) on almost every component of telecom infrastructure without which the telecom services cannot be provided.
- b. Some authorities have gone a step further by proposing to deny ITC on elements of OFC network including the OFCs, the ducts and the manholes, on the grounds that these being embedded in earth are immovable in nature and hence, ITC is blocked under section 17(5). Consequently, the authorities are also disallowing the ITC on services availed for laying of OFC, ducts, and manholes.
- c. COAI has requested the Government that the matter be examined and appropriate clarification be issued so that the telecom industry is not subject to unwarranted litigations of high values. Also suggested that if required, the matter may be taken up in the GST Council for clarification.

Levy of SUC on Sale and Lease of Bandwidth

A representation was made to the Government, highlighting the following -

- a. As per notification dated 26.12.2022, levy of SUC on the revenues from wireline service has been exempted. However, as per letter dated 29.03.2023, DoT has issued instruction to:
 - i. Show revenue from "Sale/lease of Bandwidth, links, etc." at Sl. No. 8 of the statement instead of Sl. No. 1A(ix) from FY 2022-23 onwards, and
 - ii. Deposit the SUC payable with interest on the said matter for previous years.
- b. SUC is now being imposed on the revenue from the sale/lease of bandwidth, which is a wireline service provided under the access license. The issue has now arisen primarily for the reason of the AGR format.
- c. COAI has requested DoT for issuance of a clarification mentioning that there should not be a levy of SUC on Sale and Lease of Bandwidth provided through wireline, as the same is essentially a wireline service. Follow up Letter on the same has also been sent.

Proposed US Bill to charge fees from large apps should be adopted in India: COAI

Telecom operators want the government to adopt a bill, similar to a proposal in the US congress, that would make large internet apps contribute to infrastructure costs to help lower broadband costs for consumers.

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COAI applauds progressive telecommunications bill 2023

COAI has expressed its welcome to the Telecommunications bill, 2023, presented in the parliament. A key highlight of the bill is its emphasis on creating robust telecom networks. The inclusion of a well-defined chapter on Right of Way (RoW) is particularly noteworthy.

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Lack of contribution to network costs from large traffic generating digital players a challenge: COAI

The telecom industry faces a “major challenge” as large traffic generating digital platforms do not contribute to network costs.

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Use of spectrum in different technologies and verticals

The Indian scenario, with its unique challenges and opportunities, reflects a microcosm of the global landscape. From defence to Wi-Fi, satellite, broadcasting and RF mesh, the spectrum utilization represents a complex and dynamic interplay of technology, regulation and strategic imperatives.

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NAAS: The future of networks

This cloud-based networking paradigm is here to stay and transform modern IT, enhancing flexibility, security, and efficiency for businesses global.

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The Triple 'A' strategy for success

Affordability, accessibility and technological advancements are the critical aspects that India needs to take care of in its digital mission journey.

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Indian telcos urge immediate action over 6 GHz spectrum band

Indian telcos are alarmed at the country's delegation interventions regarding the 6GHz spectrum band at the ongoing World Radiocommunications Conference (WRC), which they say are contrary to the originally agreed upon position.

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A look-back at 2023 for Indian telecom

India's telecom sector witnessed significant developments in 2023. At the forefront of this narrative is the remarkable growth propelled by the nationwide rollout of 5G, setting unprecedented benchmarks.

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DoT West Bengal holds awareness workshop on Electromagnetic Radiation and Telecom Tower

The DoT West Bengal LSA organized an "Awareness on EMF Radiation" at Krishnanagar, West Bengal. The session was organized as part of DoT's public advocacy program to dispel myths around EMF radiation.

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