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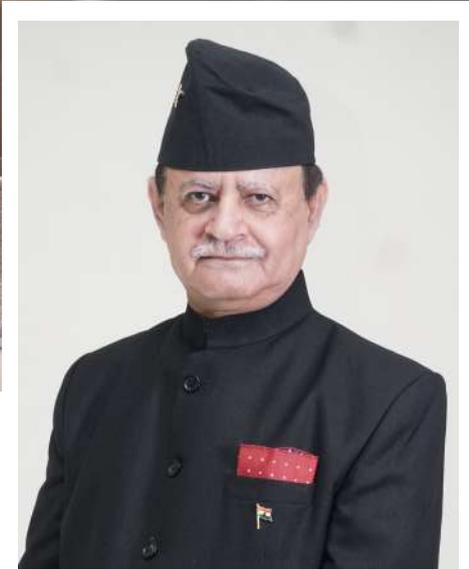
LT. GEN. DR. S.P. KOCHHAR (RETD.)
Director General, COAI

From DG's Desk

February has been a defining month for India's digital and telecom ecosystem, marking an important milestone with the India AI Impact Summit 2026. The Summit, held in New Delhi from February 16–21, crystallised a critical realisation: AI cannot scale without robust, resilient and intelligent telecom networks. The event brought together thought leaders, policymakers and industry pioneers to deliberate on how artificial intelligence can accelerate India's transformation. COAI was proud to co-organize the summit's telecom-focused panels, reinforcing the sector's central role as the digital infrastructure powering the AI revolution.

The first session, titled "Generative AI and Future Networks," brought together a constellation of policymakers and industry titans to map out how 5G-Advanced and emerging 6G frameworks will handle the exponential data demands of generative AI. The session spotlighted how India's networks, already carrying 32 GB per user per month and projected to reach 65 GB by 2031, are rapidly evolving into cognitive infrastructure capable of not just transmitting AI-generated data, but actively participating in AI-driven operations.

The second session, "AI-Powered Bharat through Universal Digital Connectivity," featured the keynote address by Dr. Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani, Minister of State for Communications and Rural Development. The conversation pivoted crucially on satellite communications integration, with experts highlighting how AI is reshaping this sector into cognitive infrastructure, networks that learn from their own telemetry, use machine learning to predict congestion, and automate troubleshooting in real-time.

During the discussions, COAI shared their perspective that "AI needs strong telecom foundations to deliver real impact." The future of AI is inextricably linked with the quality, reach, and intelligence of our networks. Whether it is edge computing, IoT ecosystems or large-scale data models, the reliability and responsiveness of telecom infrastructure will determine the real-world success of AI applications across sectors such as healthcare, logistics, and governance. As an industry, COAI continue to advocate that India's AI ambitions must rest on a sustainable and future-ready telecom ecosystem. This includes rationalizing levies, ensuring predictable policies, and enabling robust infrastructure deployment at strategic public locations.

This month also brought to light two critical infrastructure issues, the Noida International Airport and Navi Mumbai International Airport telecom readiness challenges. COAI has actively engaged with relevant authorities and the Department of Telecommunications (India) to ensure that telecom operators are permitted to install network equipment well ahead of operational timelines. Seamless digital connectivity at airports and major transport nodes is no longer a luxury but an essential service expectation.

On the policy front, COAI continued to highlight the need for flexible mechanisms in areas such as subsea cable repair, modernization of net neutrality frameworks for the 5G era, and cleaning of legacy data repositories like Aadhaar, which will enhance digital authentication reliability and network trust.

As we look ahead, COAI remains steadfast in its mission to ensure that telecom continues to power India's digital economy. Our message remains clear, the future of AI, smart infrastructure and digital inclusion is inseparable from the strength of our telecom networks.

COAI
Latest Updates:

REGULATORY AND STRATEGY

TRAI Consultation Paper on Review of Tariffs for Domestic Leased Circuits (DLCs): TRAI issued a Consultation Paper on 23.01.2026. In our response to the Pre-Consultation Paper, COAI submitted that the market for Domestic Leased Circuits in India is competitive and functioning efficiently, warranting no regulatory intervention. In this regard, COAI submitted a letter on 13.02.2026 requesting TRAI for an extension of four weeks for submission of our comments. The Authority has subsequently extended the timeline for comments till 02.03.2026.

Letter to TRAI letter regarding conducting of Consumer Education Workshops (CEWs) in online mode: COAI believes that digital mode has now emerged as a more efficient means for engaging with customers. Hence, a letter was submitted to TRAI on 06.02.2026 requesting the Authority to (a) Authorize TSPs to conduct CEWs via online/digital platforms; (b) Permit TSPs to conduct one Consumer Education Workshop (CEW) in physical mode per LSA every year and the remaining CEWs be allowed to be conducted in an online mode.

Letter to TRAI regarding NHAI observations on network connectivity on National Highways: NHAI has written to TRAI on the issue of coverage gaps on highway stretches. Subsequently TRAI has sought information on this issue from the member TSPs. In this regard, COAI submitted a letter to TRAI on 13.02.2026 requesting the following: (a)That the methodology adopted by NHAI and the readings, in terms of signal strength, obtained by NHAI for our member TSPs be kindly shared with our members and (b) Considering the magnitude of the data and analysis involved, a minimum period of two months be granted to our members to respond, from the date of receipt of the relevant information from NHAI.

TELECOM INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

State Broadband Committee (SBC) Meeting of Madhya Pradesh: The 3rd SBC meeting of Madhya Pradesh was convened on 04.02.2026. The meeting was chaired by

Chief Secretary and COAI attended in-person. Important issues like On-Ground Implementation of Right of Way (RoW) Rules 2024, Issues related with new PWD circular, property tax, industrial tariff for electricity, among other issues shared by Industry were raised.

State Broadband Committee (SBC) Meeting of Telangana: The 9th SBC meeting of Telangana, chaired by Chief Secretary of Government of Telangana was held on 10.02.2026. COAI participated and highlighted industry issues like Acceptance of the Right of Way Rules 2024 by Autonomous Bodies, DISCOMs Pole Leasing Charges, Online Portal Implementation among other important concerns shared by our members.

State Broadband Committee (SBC) Meeting of Rajasthan: The 16th SBC meeting of Rajasthan held on 13.2.2026 was chaired by Chief Secretary, Rajasthan. COAI raised issues related to Onboarding of all Permission Providing Agencies on the online portal, for e.g. RIICO, Krishi Upaj Mandi, PHED, PWD etc, enhancement of Online Portal and its operational issues, apart from industry concern related with Pending refunds etc., were taken during this meeting.

State Broadband Committee (SBC) Meeting of Andhra Pradesh: The 9th SBC meeting of Andhra Pradesh was convened on 25.02.2026. This meeting was chaired by Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh. Right of Way (RoW) Rules 2024 and portal implementation, Pending Refund of Security Deposit, Delay in issuance of FRA Certificate were the major issues raised by COAI.

Submission to Secretary, Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC): A submission was made to Secretary, KERC on 24.02.2026, requesting the commission not to increase Tariffs for the period FY 2-26-27. Also, to classify telecom services and infrastructure under the Industrial tariff category, clearly define the Green Energy Open Access transmission and distribution charges and losses for LT consumers connected at 11 kV and below.

Letter to Commissioner, Pune Municipal Corporation: A letter was submitted to Commissioner of Pune Municipal Corporation on 23.02.2026, requesting to rationalize the disproportionately high charges applicable to deployment of telecom infrastructure. Also, it was requested to give directions to the local bodies to adhere to the laid down procedures duly prescribed in the Telecommunications Act 2023 & Right of Way Rules 2024, while initiating any coercive action.

Submission Request to Telangana Electricity Regulatory Commission (TERC): A Submission was made to Telangana Electricity Regulatory Commission on 18.02.2026, requesting that Telecom Services and Infrastructure be classified under the Industrial tariff category.

Submission to Secretary, Chhattisgarh Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC): COAI made a submission to Secretary, CERC on 16.02.2026, wherein a request was made to: i) Not increase the Tariffs, ii) Classify telecom services and infrastructure under the Industrial tariff category, iii) Clearly define the Green Energy Open Access transmission and distribution charges and losses for LT consumers connected at 11 kV and below in Chhattisgarh.

Letter to MD, Bengaluru DISCOM, BESCOM: A Letter was submitted to the MD of BESCOM (Electricity Distribution Company in Bengaluru) on 09.02.2026, requesting to review and revise their current charges of ₹2,400 per pole per annum, to ₹100 per pole per annum as envisaged under the applicable schedule in Right of Way (RoW) Rules 2024.

Industry Meeting on RoW Issues for Punjab: An industry meeting was held on 02.02.2026 under the chairmanship of DDG, Punjab LSA, to deliberate on Right of Way (RoW) issues in the State, in preparation for the upcoming Punjab State Broadband Committee (SBC) meeting for consolidation of industry inputs.

Pre-SBC Industry Meeting for Haryana: An industry meeting was held on 03.02.2026 chaired by Citizen Resources Information Department (CRID) Haryana, with participation from Haryana LSA, Delhi LSA and TSPs/IPs members to deliberate upon inputs submitted by members for the forthcoming Haryana SBC meeting.

NBM Meeting on 'Single Tower Multiple Utilities' (Weather Stations & Wi-Fi): A meeting was convened on 03.02.2026 and 27.02.2026, by National Broadband Mission (NBM) to deliberate on the framework of 'Single Tower Multiple Utilities', with specific reference to installation of Weather Stations and Wi-Fi on telecom towers.

Punjab State Broadband Committee (SBC) Meeting: The Punjab SBC meeting was held on 06.02.2026 under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary. Key industry issues, like on-ground implementation challenge to our members, were taken up by Punjab LSA and COAI highlighted the industry's views on specific agenda points before the Chair.

Submission to Municipal Corporation Chandigarh (MCC): Submission was made on 06.02.2026 and on 20.02.2026, to the Commissioner, Municipal Corporation Chandigarh (MCC), seeking a stakeholder meeting for resolution of concerns regarding alignment of annual compensation charges as per the MCC's new guidelines.

Himachal Pradesh State Level Coordination Committee (SLCC) Meeting: An online State Level Coordination Committee (SLCC) meeting of Himachal Pradesh was held on 11.02.2026 wherein all key industry issues were taken up by the Himachal Pradesh LSA and industry views were highlighted on specific agenda points.

Meeting with MD, Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Ltd.: TSP/IP members from Uttar Pradesh participated in an in-person meeting with the Managing Director, Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Ltd., along with UP LSA on 11.02.2026 to deliberate on electricity-related industry issues in the State.
Submission to Haryana Electricity Regulatory Commission (HERC) – A submission was made on 12.02.2026 to the Secretary, HERC, seeking support for reduction in electricity tariff and defining Open Access charges for the telecom sector.

LSA and Industry Meetings on Energy-related Issues: LSAs of Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand conducted separate industry meetings on 14.02.2026 and 15.02.2026, to understand members' viewpoints on energy-related issues including Composite Billing implementation, Smart Meter deployment, GEOA implementation and availability of 24x7 electricity.

Submission to Secretary (Telecom): A submission was made on 14.02.2026 to Secretary (Telecom), highlighting challenges related to non-implementation of Right of Way (RoW) Rules, 2024 by the Government of Gujarat.

Communication by Jammu & Kashmir LSA to State Secretary (IT): On 17.02.2026, Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) LSA wrote to Secretary (IT), Government of J&K seeking support on priority deployment of Smart Meters and status of Composite Billing implementation in the State.

DLTC Meeting in South-West District (Kapashera), Delhi: The South-West District (Kapashera) of Delhi conducted its DLTC meeting on 18.02.2026 with the agenda of creating awareness regarding the 'Call Before u Dig (CBuD)' initiative across various departments of the Administration.

Submission to Ministry of Power on Extension for submitting Industry inputs on Draft Electricity Policy, 2026: A submission was made on 19.02.2026 requesting extension of timeline for providing industry inputs on the Draft Electricity Policy, 2026. The Ministry has given one month's extension basis our request.

Submission to Uttar Pradesh DISCOMs: A submission was made on 23.02.2026 to Uttar Pradesh DISCOMs, seeking support for ensuring uninterrupted power supply to telecom infrastructure in the State.

Himachal Pradesh State Broadband Committee (SBC) Meeting: The Himachal Pradesh SBC meeting was held on 24.02.2026, under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary. COAI highlighted industry's request to waive-off the restoration charges for routes damage due to flash rains/floods/landslides.

Meetings on Operationalizing of Possible Use of Towers of Other Utilities: Basis the earlier and ongoing discussions with industry and other Government Entities, like Disaster Management and Indian Meteorological Department, the DoT had discussions during the month with the industry, on arriving at commercial arrangements among the various stakeholders

TRAI has issued its Direction regarding institutionalization of AI/ML-based UCC_Detect intelligence for inter-operator sharing and regulatory action against UCC senders on 27th February 2026.
Vide these Directions TRAI seeks to :
a. Enable detection of spam/UCC at network level.
b. Establish industry-wide intelligence sharing among Access Providers.
c. Prevent migration of spammers across telecom networks.
d. Introduce graded regulatory enforcement based on AI-generated intelligence.
e. Accountability of senders beyond complaint-based triggers."

Amendment to the Direction regarding updating of Location Routing Number (LRN) on the DLT platform during the port out window under the provisions of the TCCCPR, 2018 issued by TRAI on 16.02.2026. Vide these amendments TRAI has directed TSPs to ensure that the Location Routing Number (LRN) of the Recipient Network, for the ported-out customers, is mandatorily updated in the DLT systems by Recipient Operator, within twenty four hours of successful porting transaction, and submit to the Authority, on monthly basis, the complaints received regarding non-updation within twenty four hours; "intelligence for inter-operator sharing and regulatory action against UCC senders on 27th February 2026.

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"COAI letter dated 06.02.2026 to DoT & MeiTy on accelerated DPDP timelines requesting
(i) rentention of the original 18-month compliance timeline,
(ii) Continue stakeholder engagement and allow an opportunity to our member TSPs to submit further technical or sector-specific input on the implementation of compliance timelines. "

Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB) recently convened a Stakeholder Consultation on Accessibility Standards in Television Programmes on 24.02.2026. MIB has indicated its intent to notify these standards in March with mandatory compliance, in view of judicial pressure from the Hon'ble Supreme Court to expedite implementation. Accordingly, MIB has sought detailed inputs and a status report from the broadcasting and other relevant industries by 03.03.2026.

Exemption on levy of Basic Custom Duty for Vessels and ships under CTH 89 for laying and reparation of subsea cables: In Budget 2026-27, the Government has granted exemption of Basic maintenance and reparation of vessels required for special purposes such as maintenance and reparation of subsea cable. The Government would review the exemption on 31.03.2028. This would provide benefit to the Telecom sector for enhancement of subsea cables in the country.

COAI constituted an in-house reporting team of cub reporters for the AI Impact Summit, aimed at capturing diverse perspectives from across the AI ecosystem. The team conducted interviews with a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including corporate leaders, think tanks, industry associations, and startups from India and abroad. The initiative generated significant engagement and visibility across COAI's social media platforms, including LinkedIn, Instagram, and X.
To further strengthen their capabilities, the cub reporters underwent a dedicated training session conducted by senior journalist Shelley Singh, who visited the COAI office and provided valuable insights into the nuances of reporting and journalism.
This dynamic reporting team will continue to support COAI and the broader telecom industry at future events by conducting interviews, amplifying key narratives, and reinforcing the presence and voice of the telecom sector across digital and technology forums.

COAI
News Wires:

My Budget Wishlist With LT Gen SP Kochhar | NewsX Budget 2026 Special.
NewsX

AI Summit: "AI needs strong telecom foundations to deliver real impact," says S P Kochhar, Director General, Cellular Operators Association of India.
PTI

Telecom will power India's AI future: COAI at India AI Impact Summit 2026.
ANI

TOI Budget Dialogue 2026: From digital infrastructure to no tax changes - the pillars for Viksit Bharat.
Times of India

COAI

Contact Us

Address : 14, Bhai Veer Singh Marg, New Delhi – 110 001
Phone : +91 - 11- 23349275 | Fax: +91 - 11 - 23349276
Email : contact@coai.in | Website: www.coai.in

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