

## **PM WANI will provide tremendous impetus to Digital India, Atma-Nirbhar Bharat, and Employment Opportunities for Citizens: BIF**

*"Potential for over 20 million employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, besides boosting local manufacturing and broadband proliferation," TV Ramachandran, President, BIF*

**17<sup>th</sup> Dec 2020, New Delhi:** Broadband India Forum (BIF), the leading independent Think-Tank and Policy Forum for Digital Communications in the country, lauds the historic step taken by the Union Cabinet in approving the PM WANI Public Wi-Fi Policy based on the excellent and far reaching recommendations by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India. BIF agrees with the government's position on Public Wi-Fi being a critical, viable and progressive vehicle for unleashing affordable broadband connectivity for the masses, which would provide immense benefits for the citizens, the economy, and the nation as a whole.

The usage trends of data services are witnessing a rise in heavy consumption, including video content streaming/downloads to the order of 70-80%, which necessitates higher broadband capacities. Recent analysis of **Quality of Experience (QoE)** requirements for distinct use cases reveal - minimum upload and download speeds of 14 Mbps as essential for ensuring reliable video streaming and conferencing, which make up a significant proportion of Indian internet traffic today.

While the prevalent technology has added much value to the digitalization of India, when it comes to the critical aspects of capacity and performance, our Mobile Broadband speeds are barely 31% of the global speeds (<https://www.speedtest.net/global-index>, Oct 2020). **Wi-Fi, in conjunction or as a complement to Mobile Broadband, would help offload high data capacity requirements, deliver better QoE and higher broadband speeds. Hence it would be essential when catering to the surge in demand and these evolving QoE requirements** imposed by new applications/services.

While there have been a few misinformed concerns as reflected in some media stories regarding the viability of PM-WANI Public Wi-Fi model, it needs to be realised that **the Union Cabinet, led by The Hon'ble Prime Minister, has approved the PM WANI Policy after due deliberations and suitable assessment of its need, applicability and long-term utility.** Numerous proofs of concept have been performed by the Government for several years. This activity was spearheaded by TRAI and the trials were carried out extensively during this period involving the government's own premier R&D institution - C-DoT, in conjunction with startups and entrepreneurs in the small & medium enterprises sector, with support from ISPs. TRAI made its recommendations on the liberalisation of the Public Wi-Fi Policy in 2017, after two extensive rounds of open public consultations, followed by field trials to demonstrate the effectiveness of the new Policy framework. Subsequently, it emphatically reiterated its recommendations in June 2020, to assuage the decision makers about the relevance of the recommendations, after considering all aspects in a holistic manner.

*"Despite being an affordable option today, mobile data tariffs are rising continuously with media reports indicating a further 30-40% possible rise in the near future. At the same time, the demand for floor tariffs on data services by the concerned players to ensure sustainability of operations, would also increase the cost differential further. Wi-Fi hotspots would therefore continue to offer a more cost-effective option for the common man and could emerge as an affordable means for mass public connectivity,"* stated **Mr. TV Ramachandran, President, Broadband India Forum.**

Given the NDCP objective of creating 10 million Public Wi-Fi hotspots by 2022, and with the present number being merely at 0.35 million (all captive in nature), **the PM-WANI Policy will result in creation of enormous demand and scope for developing the components for this crucial, pan-India activity. This presents a great opportunity to the local manufacturing and supply chain sectors for producing indigenous Wi-Fi equipment to cater to these millions of hotspots, providing a massive impetus to our national mission of 'Atma-Nirbharta'.**

The Policy will result in the creation of millions of WiFi hotspots through unlicensed entities without need for registration, payment of licence fees and having onerous statutory obligations thrust upon them. This will proliferate across the country and especially in rural, remote and unconnected areas - thereby **propelling socio-economic growth by providing employment opportunities for small, local and village-level entrepreneurs (VLEs), the kirana stores, tea-shops and the likes, besides driving inclusion and rural digital connectivity.**

*"Even by a conservative estimate of each hotspot enabling 2-3 direct and indirect employment opportunities, the creation of 10 million hotspots as per the NDCP Target by 2022, could potentially generate 20-30 million job opportunities in the small and medium scale sectors. This would be a great succour to people in the Covid affected scenario, which has resulted in massive job losses. At the PDO, PDOA and App Provider level, this is likely to encourage large scale entrepreneurship and innovation. Additionally, the sprawling manufacturing units which would be needed to produce the millions of Wi-Fi Access Points, are going to boost the Atma-Nirbhar mission of the Government and lead to more job creation. This will also help attract valuable investments into the sector, besides boosting indigenous manufacturing,"* Mr. Ramachandran added.

The expected **arrival of Wi-Fi 6 in the very near future further reinforces the need for a robust public Wi-Fi network in the country, as it will help deliver extremely high capacity, high speed, and highly secure broadband services to the consumers by synergizing with the PM WANI model.** This will offer the potential to complement the future 5G rollout in the urban areas by offering similar services and amenities to the masses at large.

In the present scenario, with Work-from-Anywhere (WFA) having emerged as the new normal globally, **the creation and availability of millions of Public Wi-Fi hotspots will also facilitate remote working for multitudes** of citizens.

Similar to the UPI interface in digital payments, the PM WANI Policy would enable democratisation of the Public Wi-Fi process, facilitate 'liberalisation of access' and great outreach and utility for the public, helping expedite the achievement of the Government's 'Digital India' and 'Broadband for All' objectives.

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#### **About Broadband India Forum**

Broadband India Forum (BIF) functions as a policy forum and think-tank that works for the development & enhancement of the entire broadband ecosystem in a holistic, technology-neutral and service-neutral manner. BIF has established itself as a thought leader and a credible and effective voice, to help propel the nation to achieve the country's ambitious vision of creating a Digital India. To achieve this, BIF works to promote the rapid development of policies, so as to facilitate affordable and high-speed ubiquitous broadband throughout the country.

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