

*Press Release*

## **Fibre-based Technologies to be a Key Enabler for Digital India: Broadband India Forum**

*India's quantum of wired broadband needs to increase – Instead, India has over-relied on wireless broadband*

*'Fibre like spectrum is a national resource. Not just Centre, fibre rollout should be on states' agenda as it will enhance their economic competitiveness'*

*'Challenges such as taxes and levies on the industry, and the potential high pricing of spectrum may prove a hindrance towards Telcos' efforts to invest in fibre': Aruna Sundararajan*

**Friday, 27 September 2019, Mumbai: Broadband India Forum (BIF)**, a think tank for Digital Transformation today, at the backdrop of the flagship **Fibre to the Home (FTTH)** event held in Mumbai today, said that India's digital communications progress will be impacted adversely without the immediate roll-out of fibre across the country. India lags on this front currently and urgent steps are required to redress the situation. The challenge as regards to enhancing fibre investments is due to the infrastructure providers' inability to secure right of way to lay the broadband fibre network across states and local municipalities.

One of the key goals of the **National Communications Development Policy (NDCP)** is ensuring universal broadband connectivity at 50 Mbps to every citizen, providing 1 Gbps connectivity to all gram panchayats by 2020, and 10 Gbps by 2022, and ensuring connectivity to all uncovered areas. Fibre will play a key role in enabling this. So far 362,350 km of optical fibre have been laid (till August 2019) connecting 123,840 Gram Panchayats as part of the government's ambitious BharatNet programme to provide high-speed Broadband connectivity.

Fibre-based backhaul has still not mainstreamed in India. Only ~30% of mobile towers have fibre enabled backhaul today as compared to 65-70% in South Korea, or 75-80% in the US, Japan and China. The government intends to increase India's fibre footprint to 7.5 million fibre kilometres by 2022. In addition, the NDCP aims to fibreise at least 60% of telecom towers by 2022.

Speaking at the FTTH event, **BIF President Mr. TV Ramachandran** said, *"Although India's mobile broadband story is second to none, it has not been adequately mirrored by a similar increase on wired broadband. Finally, all mobile traffic has to be hauled back through fibre which is happening very slowly. This is even more important because mobile traffic is becoming increasingly data heavy and mobile spectrum will not be sufficient to address this. Prioritising and accelerating rights-of-way to ensure quick*

*fibres rollout as per the NDCP agenda is imperative. I look forward to all stakeholders including the centre, the states, the Telcos and affiliated industries, making a concerted effort towards enhancing the fibre network roll-out across the country to complement our Digital India aspirations."*

Mr. Ramachandran also highlighted that the investments India makes in increasing and optimising its fibre network will play a significant role in enabling India to get ready for the next generation of communications technologies.

In a prolific speech, the Chief Guest at the flagship FTTH event, **Ms. Aruna Sundararajan, former Secretary-Telecom & Chairman, Digital Communications Commission** said, "*Fibre, like spectrum is a national resource. The Centre has given it high priority and is committed to complete fibreisation of the country. It is now up to the states to realize the importance of a continued and time-bound rollout and that this will be critical to enhancing their economic competitiveness. We need to look no further than how China has addressed this – in terms of its relentless focus on prioritizing big-ticket investments in fixed infrastructure. The NDCP clearly highlights the importance of speeding up the fibre rollout and we need to operationalize this on priority to enable faster uptake of 5G in India or else we risk being left behind.*"

**Ms Sundararajan** further added, "*The telcos in India fully realise the need to develop the fibre network infrastructure in the country to at least 5-6 times of the present capacity, in order to propel the digital communications infrastructure and services development in the country. While the telcos are clearly intent on investing in the fibre network development, certain challenges such as taxes and levies on the industry, and the potential high pricing of spectrum that is essentially needed to be acquired, may prove a hindrance towards their efforts.*"

Making her keynote address at the inaugural ceremony of the event, Ms. Sundararajan, also laid emphasis on the fact that the extent of availability of fibre to the towers, fibre in the last mile and fibre to the home would be a key factor in shaping the efficiency of the digital communications infrastructure in the country. Delving on how FTTH can help India, Ms. Sundararajan spoke about the role FTTH can play to help reduce the Digital divide, improve customer experience in delivery of broadband enabled services, job creation and overall inclusive growth.

The factors required to unleash full potential of Digital Economy 2.0 are - (a) Large availability of affordable fibre with ease and simplification of procedures for deployment, (b) Availability of adequate harmonised spectrum at an affordable price, (c) Reduced and rationalised taxes for the sector, and (d) strengthened competition and pricing regulation to prevent the mobile & internet companies from turning into monopolies.

Broadband India Forum and Bharat Exhibitions had come together to organise this flagship event on FTTH (Fibre-to-the-Home) that was titled, “**Vision of FTTH in India and Current Trends of FTTH Technology across the Globe**” in Mumbai today. The conference entailed discussions and deliberations on critical topics such as the Role of Fibre-based Technologies as a Key Enabler for Digital India, Key Business Drivers & Successful Future Business Models, and the role that FTTH has played to serve a host of start-ups who range from building products, solutions & applications to solve niche problems typical to India. The event witnessed participation from a galaxy of CEOs, CTOs from leading international and local organizations who spoke about the relevance of FTTH in propelling India’s digital growth story and how it can complement the wireless technologies by making optimum utilisation of its resources.

**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 seeks to be 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 to promote affordable and high-speed ubiquitous broadband throughout the country.

**Registered as IPTV Society**, its brand - BIF was formed in October 2015, and is a fairly nascent but dedicated forum with participation from all stake holders, including Technology Providers, Telecom Operators, Internet Service Providers, Value-Added Service Providers, Satellite Operators and service providers, MSOs, startups and professional entities, as well as seasoned Industry professionals who are familiar with different technologies, operations, regulations and policies.

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