6 February 2025
ITU-APT/L/2023-24/933

To,
Shri Jyotiraditya Scindia
Minister for Communications
Department of Telecommunications
Government of India
Sanchar Bhawan
New Delhi-110001

Subject: Urgent Need for Spectrum Assignment and Regulatory Clarity for Satellite Services

Hon'ble Shri Scindia Ji

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to you on behalf of the ITU-APT Foundation of India (IAFI) to urge immediate and decisive action regarding the assignment of spectrum for satellite communication services, particularly in light of the rapid advancements in satellite technologies.

Context and Urgency

Our previous communications have highlighted the critical need for clear regulatory frameworks and spectrum allocation processes to support the burgeoning NGSO satellite segment. The Telecom Act 2023 has paved the way for administrative allocation of spectrum for a range of satellite-based services, including radio backhaul for telecommunication services, in-flight and maritime connectivity, teleports, television channels, Direct-To-Home, Headend-In-The-Sky, Digital Satellite News Gathering, Very Small Aperture Terminals (VSATs), Global Mobile Personal Communication by Satellites, National Long Distance, International Long Distance, and Mobile Satellite Service in L and S bands. However, in the absence of a pricing mechanism recommendation from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), assignment of spectrum for numerous NGSO satellite networks is held up in the Department of Telecom.

The Urgency of licensing of Satellite Communications Services for Connecting the Unconnected in India

In today's digital age, access to reliable and high-speed internet is no longer a luxury but a necessity for economic growth, social inclusion, and overall development. India, with its vast and diverse geography, faces significant challenges in extending connectivity to remote and underserved areas. Satellite communications offer a transformative solution to bridge this digital divide. The deployment of advanced satellite systems, can provide ubiquitous and high-speed internet access to even the most remote regions, including remote areas in the North-East of the Country. This is not just about bringing internet access to the unconnected; it is about empowering communities, enabling education, fostering entrepreneurship, and enhancing governance. The urgency of leveraging satellite communications cannot be overstated, as it holds the key to unlocking the full potential of India's digital future and ensuring that no citizen is left behind in the race towards a connected and inclusive society.

Impact on Industry and Services

The delay in spectrum approvals is causing significant disruptions to the industry. Operators are facing prolonged delays in obtaining necessary approvals, which in turn are impacting their service launch timelines. This not only hampers the growth of the satellite communication sector but also delays the realization of India's ambitious digital connectivity goals. We urge the Ministry to expedite the licensing norms for satellite services and to fast-track pending satellite spectrum allocation requests, while awaiting the TRAI recommendations. This is essential to prevent further service delays and to ensure that India remains at the forefront of global satellite communication advancements.

Global Developments and India's Position

Satellite technology has witnessed remarkable advancements in recent years, driven by innovations in both hardware and software. One of the most significant trends is the rapid deployment of Low Earth Orbit (LEO) and Medium Earth Orbit (MEO) satellite constellations by companies such as SpaceX's Starlink, Amazon's Kuiper, OneWeb, and Telesat. These constellations aim to provide global broadband coverage, addressing the connectivity needs of underserved and remote areas. Technological advancements include the miniaturization of satellites, leading to the rise of small-sats and cube-sats, which are more cost-effective and easier to deploy and offer several opportunities for Indian startups and technology developers. These developments are not only improving the performance and capabilities of satellites but also making space-based communication more accessible and reliable, paving the way for a new era of global connectivity.

Indian companies and international operators investing in NGSO systems require clear regulatory guidelines to ensure seamless integration with India's telecom ecosystem. India must adopt a strategic stance in global spectrum harmonization efforts to safeguard its interests in emerging satellite technologies and to position itself as a leader in the satellite sector.

Convergence of Satellite and Terrestrial Networks

The convergence of satellite and terrestrial networks through direct-to-device communication holds immense potential for bridging the digital divide. As NGSO systems enable ubiquitous connectivity, policies must accommodate their seamless integration with terrestrial mobile networks. This will not only enhance connectivity but also drive innovation and economic growth.

Call to Action

We urge the Ministry to prioritize these concerns and take favorable action to address the urgent need for spectrum assignment and regulatory clarity. Your leadership in this matter will be instrumental in positioning India as a leader in the NGSO satellite sector and in realizing the full potential of satellite communication technologies for the benefit of all citizens.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We remain committed to collaborating with the Ministry of Communications and other stakeholders to facilitate a robust satellite ecosystem in India.

Yours sincerely,

Bharat B Bhatia
President, ITU-APT Foundation of India
Vice Chairman - Asia Pacific, World Wireless Research Forum (WWRF)
Chairman, ITU-R WP5D SWG IMT Applications
Chairman, AWG Task group on Wi-Fi and RLAN
Phone: +91 9810173737