Regulatory certainty to drive Satcom as an affordable mainstream option for India: BIF

- *TRAI's well-balanced recommendations provide regulatory certainty, cost efficiencies and ease of doing business, besides plugging connectivity gaps for remote/rural areas*
- *Liberal Licensing provisions to permit optimum utilisation of satellite capacity irrespective of source, enabling competition and benefits to the end consumer*

27th August 2021, New Delhi: Broadband India Forum (BIF), has highly commended the recently released recommendations on "Licensing Framework for Satellite based connectivity for low bit rate applications" by TRAI, as greatly liberalising and forward-looking, for they would propel exponential growth in the sector, and in turn, garner socio-economic benefits for the nation. The recommendations, when implemented, would enable cost reductions, remove supply constraints, and allow ease of doing business, helping bring this highly efficient and advanced technology into the mainstream as a viable, cost-effective connectivity means to power India's digital dreams.

Permitting the Service Licensees to obtain satellite bandwidth from foreign satellites in all the permitted satellite bands to provide satellite-based services would greatly enhance capacities for catering to the country's digital connectivity needs, which are growing at a rapid pace. Further, the provision to lease satellite capacity directly from pre-authorised foreign satellites for operations will help make it a cost-effective means for proliferating broadband across the country, and also through faster deployments/implementation of services.

Removal of legacy regulations permitting only short term contracts between the buyer and supplier without any intermediaries, removal of facilitation charges by the government for hiring foreign satellite capacities, removing the prevailing NOCC charges, reduction of SUC to 1%, and migration from administrative formula based charging to AGR based charging, are all greatly progressive steps that will definitely help make satcom an economically viable technology option.

Promoting technology neutrality by use of all types of satellite in any of the permitted satellite frequency bands for providing myriad satellite-based IoT applications is a masterstroke, as it would help bring out the maximum efficiencies of the technology into play, translating into optimum output and benefits.

A single window transparent system for all approvals/permissions/allocations processes from all the authorizing agencies like DoS, DOT, WPC and NOCC, will help time-bound processing of all formal requirements. Making all the guidelines, application forms, fee details, processes, timelines and application status on the online portal would further aid ease of doing business.

Mr. TV Ramachandran, President, Broadband India Forum, shared on the development: *"These historic recommendations by the Regulator have generated tremendous excitement and enthusiasm in all sections of the industry, as they offer much-needed regulatory certainty to the sector, and are completely aligned to its critical needs. These impeccably balanced recommendations address the interests and requirements of all the stakeholders, across the Digital Communications as well as Space verticals. They would aptly resolve the long pending issues of scarcity of satcom capacity, significantly reduce regulatory costs, and would lead to increased efficiency in delivery of services."*

"*Putting in place a comprehensive, simplified, integrated, end-to-end coordinated, single window online common portal for grant of various procedural formalities is aligned to best international practices and would promote regulatory certainty, which would invite new and long term investments as well as new players into the sector, thereby helping promote competition, which would eventually benefit the customer. The suggestion for a Government road map detailing the availability of the domestic satellite capacities in India to facilitate the service licensees to plan and optimize their capacity procurement is also an excellent and judicious one,*" he added.

The TRAI recommendations come as a logical step following such enabling measures as reforming the TEC specifications to suit modern satellite technologies, and provisioning use of satcom for cellular and Wi-Fi backhaul, which will greatly transform the satcom landscape in India by ushering in both competition and technological innovation, thereby benefiting both the network operators and the consumers. The government is intent to use the best and most advanced technologies like satcom in providing the most efficient, reliable and affordable digital connectivity to the Indian citizens, and the industry is committed to provide its utmost support for realising the same.

About Broadband India Forum
Broadband India Forum (BIF) functions as an independent policy forum and knowledge-based think-tank that works for the development and 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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