

BIF Calls for Dedicated Satellite Service Authorisation to Accelerate Connectivity and Bridge the Digital Divide

New Delhi, 1 June 2026: Responding to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India's (TRAI) ongoing consultation on the Framework for Satellite Communication Network (SCN) Authorisation and Assignment of Spectrum to Satellite Communication Network Providers, the Broadband India Forum has urged the Authority and DoT to adopt a regulatory framework that recognises the distinct nature of satellite communications. It has reasoned why Satcom deserves a dedicated and independent service authorisation category under Section 3(1)(a) of the Telecommunications Act 2023, and how such a framework supports the larger objectives of universal broadband access, digital inclusion, disaster resilience, connectivity for remote regions, and growth of the space economy.

BIF submitted that satellite communications differ fundamentally from terrestrial networks in terms of technology, market size, network architecture, spectrum assignment methodology, deployment economics, international coordination requirements and service delivery models. It noted that these characteristics warrant a specialised regulatory framework aligned with the unique operational realities of satellite services.

BIF's concerns regarding the Satellite Communication Network (SCN) Authorisation framework, a construct proposed by DoT are:

- a. The new SCN proposal, derived from the Telecommunications Act 2023, aims to "delink the service and network layers," permitting infrastructure providers to hold spectrum without being the service provider themselves. This breaks the established practice where the Access Service Provider/TSP who provides telecom services to the end consumer, holds the spectrum and is responsible for its usage.
- b. The proposed framework suggests SCN entities could hold spectrum directly or through partner providers, which could blur lines as regards who shall control the usage of spectrum and who shall be responsible for regulatory compliance (roll out obligations) particularly in the situation where spectrum is directly assigned to the SCN provider. This may create ambiguity in ownership, control and accountability, especially since service rollout obligations are typically linked to spectrum usage.
- c. Such a framework may push satellite services into a dependent structure requiring business/commercial arrangements with Service Licensees, potentially raising entry barriers for specialised satellite players and affecting competitive neutrality vis-à-vis terrestrial operators.
- d. The framework relies heavily on commercial agreements between SCN provider and the service licensees which, based on past experience (e.g.,

VNO models) may be ineffective as a business model without strong alignment of drivers on both sides and without regulatory oversight and enforcement. Additionally, in case of spectrum sharing between the SCN Provider and the Service Licensees (particularly in case of spectrum in IMT bands for provision of D2D services), issues such as service-area-based IMT spectrum versus pan-India SCN authorisation could create operational and regulatory complications.

Specifically on the spectrum provision, BIF wants spectrum for both the Feeder and the User Link to be made available to the SCN provider. This will enable the SCN provider a choice to provide service both to other access service licensees or provide direct services to the end consumer. BIF has recommended that the SESEs/SNPs established in India should be permitted to be used for providing feeder-link connectivity to satellites that provide connectivity to customers outside of India – under an enabling framework with no unnecessarily onerous requirements, subject to their respective and applicable licensing/regulatory frameworks.

Raising concerns about the SCN authorisation, **Mr. T.V. Ramachandran, President, Broadband India forum stated:** "The proposed SCN authorisation appears to be in dissonance with both the Indian Space Policy and the legislative intent of the Telecommunications Act, which view and treat Satellite Communications as a "Service" and not merely as a "technology". At a time when satellite communications are expected to serve as the last and most critical link for connecting India's unconnected and underserved regions, introducing structural dependencies of this nature could retard the efforts to bridge the digital divide and slow the expansion of affordable broadband connectivity."

He added, "The stakes extend far beyond the satcom sector. The impact on India's ability to achieve universal connectivity, and unlock the full potential of its space economy are in question and the cost could be the common man's ability to access meaningful connectivity."

About Broadband India Forum

Broadband India Forum (BIF) is an independent policy forum and knowledge-based think-tank that works for the development and enhancement of the entire broadband & broadcasting 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, to facilitate affordable and high-speed ubiquitous broadband throughout the country.