

Speech of Thiru A. Raja Hon'ble Union Minister of Communications and Information Technology at The Curtain Raiser of "India Telecom 2009" at The Ballroom, Hotel Oberoi, New Delhi on 30th October 2009 at 11:30 a.m.

My colleague in the Ministry, Thiru Sachin Pilot;
Thiru P.J. Thomas, Secretary, Department of Telecom;
Thiru Saroj Poddar, Former President, FICCI;
Dr. Amit Mitra, Secretary General, FICCI;
Dignitaries from the Industry;
Eminent persons of the Media;
Distinguished guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is a pleasure for me to inaugurate the Curtain Raiser of "India Telecom 2009" which has now established its position on the world stage. The theme "Telecom for Inclusive Growth" has been chosen aptly as it signifies the urgent need for expanding telecom services to reach each and every citizen even in the remotest rural areas, so that even the poorest will benefit from them.

The growth in Indian telecom sector continues unabated. About three years back we envisioned to achieve 500 million connections by the end of 2010. The conducive Government policies and the zeal of industry in this sector have helped to put the name of Indian telecom sector on the world map as we have crossed the milestone of 500 million connections in the month of September 2009 and achieved an over all teledensity of 44%. I congratulate the industry in joining hands with Government in achieving such a stupendous feat much before our set time line. With the current pace of growth in mobile sector we are well poised to achieve 500 million wireless connections in December 2009 which will coincide with our event India Telecom 2009.

The consistent efforts both by the Government and the industry have helped in reducing the high imbalance of rural urban divide ratio from 1:10 to 1:5 in a short span of 3 years and the rural teledensity jumped from 4.5% to 19%. To further give impetus to telecom infrastructure in rural areas, USO Funds are being leveraged extensively. 6500 mobile towers out of 7500 towers of phase-I with subsidy support from USOF have already started radiating. USOF is also coming with various schemes including laying of dark fibre in a big way for creating adequate backhaul infrastructure in rural area. I am happy that the private sector has started participating in rural sector in a much bigger way and they now account for 80% of the rural telecom market. I am sure that the continued participation by the private sector will help us in achieving the Government target of 40% rural teledensity well before the set timeline of 2014.

As per the Telecom Policy, we are ensuring that the world class telecom facilities are available to the commonest person at affordable price. Efforts made in this direction have yielded fruitful results and currently we have the lowest tariff in the world. The tariff plan as low as 50 paise per minute are available to the user for making call from any where to any where in the country. To make the tariff more affordable particularly for the rural subscribers, policy enablers like mobile number portability, introduction of more number of service providers for infusing competition, mobile virtual network operators etc. are being planned. Once implemented these will induce fierce competition and will result in substantial reduction in per minute tariff.

India has been regarded as a country of knowledge since our ancestral times. Earlier the knowledge from a person was passed through shruti and smriti. However, the advent of internet and broadband has changed the entire scenario in the domain of knowledge. Huge treasure of knowledge is now available at the click of a mouse. However unfortunately, this is largely confined to the urban area. In our effort to proliferate broadband, we have been able to achieve 7 million broadband connections so far as against our set target of 20 million connections by 2010. The growth in the last year has been encouraging and will further increase this growth of mobile broadband.

The stage has finally been set for auctioning of spectrum for 3G and BWA services. The process of auction of spectrum has started and is slated for completion by February 2010. This will lead us to the next generation of telecom technology. 3G and BWA services will be able to provide the benefit of voice, broadband connectivity, high speed data downloading and computing, audio and video streaming to the common man on their mobile devices. 3G and BWA services will also pave the way in crossing the hurdles currently being experienced in laying of broadband network in rural area like last mile connectivity, higher cost of customer premise equipment including personal computers, issues related to right of way and availability of poor power supply.

I am happy to learn that the seven Telecom Centres of Excellence and the Coordination Centre created some two years back in Public Private Partnership mode are working very well and have started working on the cutting edge technologies for India specific applications. It is also heartening to learn that these Centres are participating in an important evaluation programme of ITU. I am sure they will make significant contributions to this endeavor of international cooperation while taking care of Indian interests and concerns.

India Telecom Expo has become the flagship telecom event not only in India but also made its mark across the globe. India Telecom 2009 is building upon the previous events and is offering the enormous opportunity and potential of this great country before the world. I am told that the number and range of participation in terms of exhibitors and conferences is being increased significantly. I will urge all the participants to share this platform which will provide the glimpse of opportunities, potential of Indian market, the exposure of new and emerging technologies and solutions to Indian service providers and manufactures. The organizers of the event have been doing an excellent job in planning, promoting and organizing this event. Being the final leg, I hope that all the partners of this event will not spare any effort to make "India Telecom 2009" a perfect show of telecom sector.

I wish all the success for India Telecom 2009.

Thank you.