

Ready to Take Off



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India is on the cusp of a satellite-driven digital or broadband revolution with the advent of hi-throughput technology and latest satellite systems. The technology would be a drastic improvement in the satellite industry, similar to the transformation from 3G to 4G in the telecom industry. It has recently been introduced in India and is expected to further the objectives of *Digital India* initiative. We at Hughes India provide an ecosystem for delivering satellite projects in India.

Our Current Projects

In one of our projects, we have partnered with IPSTAR International, a premier Asia-Pacific telecommunications company, a wholly owned subsidiary of satellite operator THAICOM Public Company Limited. IPSTAR will operate Hughes' JUPITER System over the THAICOM 4 high-throughput satellite (HTS) in India, enabling the government-owned service provider BSNL (Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd.) to offer fixed and mobile services as part of the government's *Digital India* initiative.

As a matter of fact, we are just able to provide a speed of 2–4 Mbps. Once this network gets operational, we will be able to provide a 100 Mbps service. Today, there is 3G and 4G coverage for the armed forces, national disaster force, and banks. Satellite is a dream solution for India as it offers fully encrypted, reliable, and secure communications. Earlier, there was just one aspect where it was lacking, i.e., speed in comparison with fiber, broadband, and cable. However, with our high-throughput technology, we have overcome this challenge as well.

The other project we are working on is for Reliance Jio. Jio has taken the nation by storm by acquiring a customer base of 100 million subscribers in a short span of 6 months. Statistically, they have extended their network to 80–85 percent of the country in terms of population, and 65 percent of the area geographically. They have been able to alter consumer habits as well. The data usage in terms of MB and GB has gone up three times in the last 6 months. However, the company wants to reach the 100 percent

coverage mark, and has, therefore, chosen us to provide that extension using satellites.

Challenges

In India, we are not just in equipment business; we provide bandwidth services as well. One of the major challenges is that there is only one HTS satellite. More HTS satellites are being introduced but there is a need for greater acceptance of these newer satellites. The government must act as a facilitator in terms of its policies, for example, open skies policy, so that we have greater flexibility in implementation of newer technologies which presently is very difficult. For us, working with IPSTAR for BSNL was the only way to showcase this technology.

Apart from being a facilitator, the government will also need to exercise regulatory control.

Growth Prospects

Hughes Communication India Limited has been growing at 15–20 percent every year. This year will perhaps be the best year in the last 5 years. And this can be attributed to the conducive environment provided by the government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Earlier, projects used to get deferred and canceled very frequently. But under this government, projects are being reviewed and implemented. After a proper scrutiny, the government even allocates additional budgets, if required. Since the government is in its third year, and there is no election pressure or party politics, it is actually a great time for enhancing productivity and pushing through reforms. The government is pro-technology and the implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) will revolutionize broadband. As a buyer, I would not work with a supplier who is not able to load invoices on the GST website, so the need for connectivity for this segment has arisen like never before.

The government has mandated every gas station and petrol pump to have retail automation. Currently, only 15 percent of the 50,000 pumps have connectivity. With a mandate that in the next 2 years all 50,000 will get automated, there is a tremendous need for connectivity at these points. ■