

For Immediate release

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

TRAI responds to DoT's back-reference regarding TRAI's earlier Recommendations of July 2014 on Improving Telecom Services in Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep

New Delhi, 23rd March, 2016- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has today issued its response to the reference received from DoT regarding its earlier recommendations of July 2014 on **'Improving Telecom Services in Andaman & Nicobar Islands (ANI) and Lakshadweep'**.

Through its reference dated 7th January 2014, Department of Telecommunications (DoT) had requested TRAI to provide its recommendations on a Comprehensive Telecom Plan for Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI) and Lakshadweep after making a gap analysis and investment required for providing quality telecommunication services in these islands. The Authority after consultation with the relevant stakeholders had sent its recommendations on 'Improving Telecom Services in Andaman & Nicobar Islands (ANI) and Lakshadweep' on 22nd July 2014.

In its back references DoT has intimated that in accordance with the TRAI recommendations, Telecom Commission had accorded 'in principle' approval for Comprehensive Development Plan for A&N Island and Lakshadweep in its meeting held on 07th November 2014 and the work of augmentation of satellite bandwidth and the work of augmentation of Intra-Island OFC network in Andaman & Nicobar Islands was awarded to Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) on nomination basis. Accordingly, DoT, through its letter dated 8th February 2016 and 9th March 2016, forwarded a copy of the Detailed Cost Estimates of (a) augmentation of satellite bandwidth in Lakshadweep and (b) and augmentation of Intra-Island OFC network in Andaman & Nicobar Islands. DoT requested TRAI to give its views regarding the technical requirements and detailed cost estimates, prepared by BSNL for these particular projects.

After examining the issues involved, TRAI has sent a reply to DoT on 23rd March, 2016. TRAI has in its response reemphasized that:

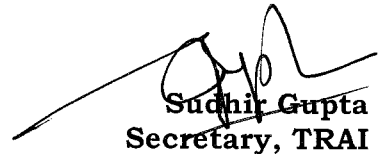
- a. Providing sufficient bandwidth is the key element of the Comprehensive Telecom Plan of ANI and Lakshadweep. Providing connectivity through submarine cables is a primary and integral part of the TRAI's recommendations dated 22nd July 2014. As laying of submarine cable is a resource intensive and time-consuming task,

augmentation of satellite bandwidth should be carried out as an immediate and short-term solution.

- b. Since providing telecom facilities in Union Territories of ANI and Lakshadweep is not a viable commercial proposition for the telecom service providers, it is necessary for the Government to step-in and utilize the Universal Services Obligation Fund (USOF) for augmentation and development of telecom infrastructure and connectivity in these islands on a priority basis.
- c. DoT has not spelt-out clearly whether it has approved the recommended Comprehensive Telecom Plan for ANI and Lakshadweep in its entirety. Keeping in view the strategic importance of these islands, entire Telecom Plan for ANI and Lakshadweep, must be implemented without any further delay.
- d. Decision about the BoQ (Bill of Quantity) based on factors such as the availability and suitability of existing telecom infrastructure, their residual life etc and the detailed cost implications can be taken by DoT keeping in view that the broad objectives outlined by the Authority in its recommendations on the Comprehensive Telecom Plan of ANI and Lakshadweep are fulfilled even if the estimated costs of the project(s) is somewhat more than the costs estimated by the Authority.

The views given by the Authority have been placed on TRAI's website www.traigov.in.

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