

Govt keen on interoperable Wi-Fi network: DoT Secretary

'India can leapfrog with the right investment in digital infrastructure'

OUR BUREAU

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Broadband will have a far bigger impact on India compared to other countries, said Aruna Sundararajan, Secretary, Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and Chairperson, Digital Communications Commission. She was speaking at the launch of the Broadband India Forum's (BIF) White Paper on de-licensing of spectrum in the 5Ghz band.

Sundararajan said that the government hopes to deploy an interoperable Wi-Fi network. "If the interoperable Wi-Fi architecture comes in, the cost of devices will be driven down," she said, observing that this will also boost the Internet of Things ecosystem.

The government, in October last year, freed spectrum in the 5Ghz band for public Wi-Fi and 5G. Sundararajan also cited an

earlier BIF study that said India's GDP could expand 3.3 per cent if there is a 10 per cent increase in the use of mobile apps.

"The digital dividend for India is at a completely different level altogether," she said. "If we make the right investments in digital infrastructure, India could leapfrog to a different level."

Network and connectivity

The BIF paper notes that the global benchmark for Wi-Fi hotspots is one public for every 150 persons. Going by that yardstick, India should have around eight million hotspots. However, the paper says that the country has only a little over one lakh. Given these numbers, de-licensing will help create more hotspots. The National Digital Communication Policy 2018 aims for five million Wi-Fi hotspots by 2020.

Speaking to *BusinessLine*, MF



India only has one lakh public Wi-Fi hotspots, says the BIF paper

Farooqui, former Secretary, DoT, and current chairman of BIF, stressed that public Wi-Fi will co-exist with 4G and 5G connectivity. "Public Wi-Fi will have its own space, as 5G could be dependent on the number of towers and the capacity of each tower," Farooqui said. He said there is space and need for both, 5G and public Wi-Fi, given the pace of data consumption in India.

"5G will be rolled out in urban areas to begin with, and in particular, areas with a particular consumption pattern; so, in rural

and remote areas, public Wi-Fi has a great role to play. It will unleash a lot of innovation because it is de-licensed," Farooqui added. He also noted that according to TRAI, cost per megabyte of Wi-Fi is one-tenth of mobile data.

"Wi-Fi was always known to be the low-cost option for delivering broadband to the masses. With the opening up of this de-licensed spectrum, the congestion with existing Wi-Fi networks is likely ease," said Debashish Bhattacharya, Senior Director at BIF.