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dear Ravishankarji

Sub: **5G is not just a spectrum auction– it is a transformation of Telecom / Internet.**

Govt needs to Reimagine Telecom/Internet as part of a comprehensive 5G Policy framework.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji, India in the last few years has made significant strides in its tryst with digitization under the vision of Digital India. Specifically, during the Covid Pandemic, Digital policies and decisions taken in his first term have significantly helped nation, the Government, Citizens and Enterprises weather the unprecedented shock and be resilient in the face of this global Pandemic.

I had earlier written to you in November 2018, advocating the need for larger discourse and debate on the Data protection bill which you had responded to positively. In this letter, I am requesting you to look comprehensively at the 5G opportunity.

It is obvious that post this Covid storm, there will be significant and tectonic changes in the global Economic order – this is also true for the Global technology order and future of Technology and the Internet itself.

You are very aware of background to today's Technology policy making – a background that has at its core, Efforts of Authoritarian country's like Chinas attempts to wrest control of the Internet and its technologies or at very least balkanize it to ensure that biggest island is the Chinese piece of the Internet. This effort started in 2010 with the China backed UN-CIRP initiative, supported by the then Indian Government to replace ICANN, which was stymied by my efforts then.

It is with this background that I wish to draw your attention to many issues that need to be considered whilst finalising policies, and policy roadmap for 5G.

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1. 5G is the 5th Generation wireless technology for Consumers, but at the same time it is 1st generation for Machines.

2. 5G will create deep structural changes to the Internet in India and the world and therefore requires comprehensive assessment of the opportunities and issues beforehand than simply approaching this as a Spectrum auction exercise.

3. The Eco-system will evolve and transform and it's not easy to predict or foretell the shape and nature of it. Therefore, this requires Governments policy approach to be smart, flexible and Evolving.

It is clear that with this background, there are important issues that require deliberation as part of the Governments approach to introducing 5G and kicking of this transformation. I outline some of the issues here for your consideration.

1. Dominant power of Carriers & Competition Landscape

Governments around the world are struggling to cope with the power and influence of Big-Tech platforms that are dominating access to and content/services on the Internet. India too is behind the curve on this issue.

Given that most of Indias Internet connectivity depends on wireless, the 3 current Private sector wireless operators represent tremendous concentration of power. Non wireless ISPs are very few and represent a very small percentage of Internet connectivity. If these 3 operators end up also delivering 5G services, that represents further increase in their dominance of Access. A clear discussion on the nature and type of competitive landscape in Internet access needs to be had to decide the future of Internet access in India – as part of the larger policy framework to strongly regulate Big-Tech

2. ReImagining Legislation and Regulation thru new laws, amending old ones.

As I have pointed out, 5G represents not just faster speeds for consumers, but is also first generation of Machines on the Internet – creating new M2M, M2C and M2B type entities.

Almost all the legislation and regulation covering the Internet, Telecom and IT sectors are dated and have huge gaps vis a vis needs to regulate this sector today. The TRAI act, IT act, Telegraph act and even the proposed Data protection Act are behind the curve and need to be updated and amended to be contemporaneous with the requirements of 5G world. Current Competition law are also inadequate in dealing with the complex and speedy issues of dominance in the Technology sector.

Further, Telecom today is the Internet Access Sector-as much part of the technology and Internet space as any other activity. The administration of this technology sector, in part by the DOT and MeiTY is also problematic and a discussion on how to harmonize and ensure one coherent regulatory and administrative framework is in place, is required. Regulators too need harmonizing and their capacities and capabilities being expanded to efficiently regulate this new Reimagined Internet.

3. IOT Ecosystem M2M,B2M, M2C Carriers

The 5G Internet will see an explosion in the presence of Machines on the Internet and Machine to Machine communication and Data. This is the 1st Generation of technologies for machines on the Internet. The proliferation of Internet of Things (IOT) ecosystem on the Internet is expected to be rapid and accompany the application innovations arising from 5G. Important questions arise, questions like how will these machines be regulated? Who will be the carrier for the M2M services and communication? Should there be different carrier types? B2C vs B2M type carrier class? Should BSNL be Indias first B2M carrier?

4.Safe and Trusted Internet, Non-Proprietary technology Architecture (OpenRAN etc)

The world has woken up to the importance of having Trusted networks that their businesses and consumers use to access the Internet. Our government has in recent months created a focus on Trust wrt to the Internet and Access networks. To make our PMs vision of a Trusted Internet a reality, the DoT and MeiTY needs to work to expand the current programs and support/encourage/enable a comprehensive medium to long term Technology strategy – that encourages domestic Technologies, Open source, Inter-operable platforms like OpenRAN – all aimed at creating real Technology capabilities in India AND protect against dominance of proprietary Technologies/Platforms in Indian Internet access or core networks.

5. Role of BSNL

The future of BSNL needs to be strategically thought through and finalized. BSNL is an important strategic asset for the Government of India. Post the recent VRS scheme, BSNL can now be relaunched as a lean, efficient, well managed Public sector Company with a clear Mission. This clear mission needs to be finalized and could include a role as Indias M2M or IOT carrier – delivering 5G access to IOT and Non-Consumer customers. This is an idea that can be developed and will position BNSL as a strong innovator in the emerging IOT era of the Internet.

This is by no means a comprehensive list of issues, but I think it's a good place to start.

There are many theories and scenarios of what 5G Internet Ecosystem and environment would end up looking like. No clear picture today exists, and no one really knows for sure - but this much is certain that there would be deep transformational changes.

India can and must play a defining role in how the world rolls out 5G and so I urge you to consider these and other important issues whilst formulating the Governments 5G policy framework and roadmap – making this another milestone in Prime Minister Modis Digital India and AtmaNirbharBharat vision.

Yours sincerely,

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CC: Honble Prime Minister of India