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India risks $185 billion by bifurcating satellite bands for 5G auction: SIA

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BENGALURU: Warning that offering excessive spectrum resources in the upcoming 5G auction will result in citizens being denied benefits of high-demand, advanced satellite broadband services, the SatCom Industry Association (SIA) India has estimated that the move could cost India's economy up to $184.6 billion by 2030 aside from impact on FDI and employment generation benefits.

Stating that it was important to ensure that 5G operations do not interfere, impact or hamper the existing operations of satellite services, a statement read: "The impact of the loss of C-band spectrum in the 3.6-3.67 GHz band alone will be felt across the entire Rs 700 billion Indian broadcasting industry carrying around 900 registered channels to 21 crore households in India through approximately 1,730 digital platform operators and 50,000 cable operators, who provide direct and indirect employment to 1.8 million people."

According to the association, providing excessive spectrum for 5G poses the risks of the spectrum being unsold or, even worse, underutilised by terrestrial players at the expense of other players such as Satellite Operators.
"These outcomes will result in a costly regulatory failure for India through loss of substantial overall economic opportunities," the statement reads.
SIA-India, in its submission, has urged TRAI "to limit inclusion of mm Wave spectrum in any 5G auction to the internationally harmonized 24.25-27.5 GHz spectrum."

Pointing out that the 3.25 GHz of spectrum available is more than adequate to meet the nascent, still uncertain 5G requirements for mm Wave spectrum, the association said the 300 MHz of spectrum in the 3.3-3.6 GHz band identified in the NFAP (National Frequency Allocation Plan) in 2018 provides enough spectrum to satisfy India's mid-band 5G requirements.

With three private mobile network operators (MNOs) accounting for 90% of the market, each of them would be able to secure 80-90 MHz while leaving 30-60 MHz for state-owned MNOs.

Anil Prakash, director general SIA-India said: "We consider it important to recognise the current situation in terms of spectrum supply and demand and to adopt a more balanced approach in auctioning of the spectrum bands, taking into consideration the needs of various sectors as well as to ensure efficient take-up whilst generating a reasonable value to the government."

SIA-India added that more than 120 countries expressing their intentions to follow the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) decisions and preserve the 27.5-31 GHz and 17.7-21.2 GHz bands for satellite broadband services reaffirms maintaining the 27.5 GHz and above for fixed satellite services.

Further, it said that Europe's 5G Roadmap, recognising the critical nature of this spectrum for satellite broadband, has harmonised the 27.5-29.5 GHz band for broadband satellite.

"It is important to ensure that the 5G operations do not interfere, impact or hamper the existing operations of satellite services. Mitigation measures like band pass filters are NOT a standalone solution and are effective only when applied with a suitable guard band and emission limits on the high levels of 5G transmissions compared to the earth station receiving signals," the statement read.