Bharti ties up with global firms, kicks off ORAN tech plan

SURAJEET DAS GUPTA
New Delhi, 14 October

Bharti Airtel has tied up with global technology companies to develop products to power 4G and 5G networks based on Open Radio Access Network (ORAN) technology.

These companies include Rakuten, a Japanese e-commerce giant and 4G operator which is the first to launch commercial 5G services in Japan based on the new technology.

The others are Japanese hardware giant NEC, Taiwanese major Sercomm, cloud player Red Hat in the US, and startups like Texas-based Mavenir. Confirming the development, a top Bharti executive said: "We are passionate about ORAN and our strategy is to collaborate with the best in the world and help them in orchestrating products for 4G and 5G. We have set up our own R&D centre. Someone has to put together these disaggregated solutions so that they can be used together in the network. Our R&D team will perform that function."

In simple terms, ORAN is based on open platforms rather than the traditional proprietary technology offered by incumbent gear makers.

Instead of depending on both software and hardware from one vendor, telcos can now buy them from various players, reducing costs substantially. However, telcos require integrators to combine the various products to make a network run. That is what Bharti will do.

However, the executive made it clear that the company will also continue to work with incumbent gear makers such as Nokia and Ericsson who in turn will be competing with the new technology players in the game.

GAME PLAN

- The company has set up an R&D team to function as an integrator between different products and software
- Main aim is to ensure quality and lower price – not, like Jio, to provide technology to the world
- Firm has already developed small cells which are being deployed based on ORAN technology
- Globally, over 40 operators have shown interest in opting for the technology

For instance, Nokia has already joined the ORAN alliance. "Our aim is simple. We want to get the best quality and the lowest cost. We are not looking at becoming a R&D provider for the whole world," added the Bharti executive. The move is significant, as Bharti's strategy is clearly different from its key rival Reliance Jio which recently announced that it has developed an indigenous 5G network which it would like to export and sell to the world.

Bharti's aim, instead, is to collaborate with its partners for its own networks which, apart from India, extend across Africa, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. It has already tasted success in this collaborative approach. Bharti has developed small cells in collaboration with start-up Altiostar which can be used indoors and in enterprises as well as outdoors. It has already deployed them across the country with a view to enhancing the capacity of the network.

The advantage of the new technology is immense. It is expected to reduce 5G deployment costs by around 40 per cent, offer huge flexibility in the functioning of the network (making it easier to move capacity from one area to another) and reduce operators' dependence on incumbent gear makers.

Globally, over 40 operators have shown interest in opting for the ORAN technology but they are all waiting to see the results of Rakuten's launch of the first commercial 5G network based on ORAN in Tokyo and Nagoya. The new technology has also attracted the attention of many Indian tech firms. Tech Mahindra is one. Analysts say it has positioned itself to become an integrator.

Wipro and HCL Technologies are also in talks to enter the field. Companies like Sterlite Technologies which have tied the knot with Rakuten are helping in the development of the hardware.

OnePlus to invest ₹1,000 cr in India R&D

T E NARASIMHAN
Chennai, 14 October

Unfazed by the surge in anti-China sentiment, smartphone maker OnePlus is committed to investing around ₹1,000 crore on research and development (R&D) and another ₹100 crore on retail expansion in the country, said a senior company official.

Additionally, the executive said that all of its TVs, including the Q and U series, will be manufactured in India from next year.

Speaking to *Business Standard* after launching the OnePlus 8T 5G, Navnit Nakra, vice-president and chief strategy officer, OnePlus India, said as part of its 'Make in India' initiative all of its smartphones are being manufactured here. "OnePlus is dedicated to investing towards its manufacturing capabilities in India and will certainly be leveraging opportunities to build a robust manufacturing ecosystem in the country," said Nakra.

OnePlus has over 5,000 offline stores, including partnered stores, across the country, and plans to scale this up to 8,000 stores in the coming quarters. The ₹100 crore investment will help achieve this, the firm said.

Its biggest experience store, OnePlus Nizam Palace in Hyderabad, will be launched later this week, and 14 stores will be launched in the next six months. By next year, the company plans to cover 100 cities against 65 currently.

On the anti-China sentiment, Nakra said, "Socio-political factors are always affecting those around us. We as a brand prefer to speak with our product. India continues to be a key market for OnePlus since our entry in 2014 and we remain committed towards the region. Over the years, we have worked hard to strengthen our manufacturing capabilities in line with the 'Make in India' initiative and continue to expand our local presence".

The firm will invest ₹100 crore more to expand retail presence to 8,000 stores

In July, OnePlus expanded its smart TV portfolio with the launch of OnePlus TV's U and Y series, followed by OnePlus Nord for the mid-range smartphone segment, and OnePlus Buds for accessories.

Nakra said OnePlus regained the top spot in the premium smartphone category in the second quarter of 2020 with 29 per cent market share, according to Counterpoint data. In that quarter, it recorded its best-ever smartphone shipments. The contribution of OnePlus' ultra-premium segment to the overall portfolio grew to 25 per cent in 2019, from a mere two per cent in 2018.

Centre mandates all ministries, public depts & CPSUs to use BSNL, MTNL services

The Centre has mandated all ministries, public departments and public sector units to use telecom services of state-run Bharat Sanchar Nigam (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam (MTNL).

"The government of India has, inter-alia, approved the mandatory utilisation of capacities of BSNL and MTNL by all ministries/departments of government of India, CPSEs, central autonomous bodies," a memorandum issued by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) said. The memorandum dated October 12, was issued to all secretaries and departments under the central government following consultation with the finance ministry.

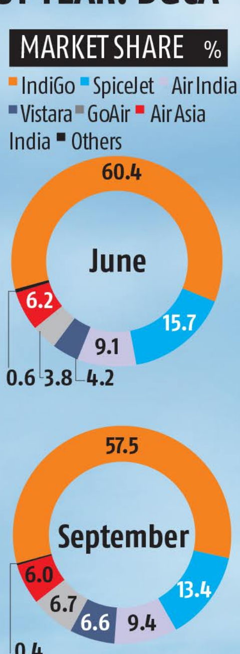
The Department of Expenditure's note accompanying the memorandum mentioned that the decision to mandate the use of BSNL and MTNL telecom service was taken by the Cabinet. PTI

3.9 MN FLYERS IN SEPT, 66% LOWER THAN LAST YEAR: DGCA

A total of 3.94 million domestic passengers travelled by air in September this year, 66 per cent lower than the corresponding period last year, the country's aviation regulator DGCA said on Wednesday. With Go Air and Vistara slowly adding more flights, India's largest airline, IndiGo's market share came down to 57.5 per cent from an all-time high of 60.4 per cent in July. GoAir doubled its market share from 3.8 per cent in July to 6.7 per cent in September, while Vistara's market share increased from 4.2 per cent in July to 6.6 per cent. Starting October, both GoAir and Vistara have further increased flights. GoAir announced an addition of over 100 new flights in its domestic network, including from its base Mumbai, besides other cities such as Delhi, Bengaluru and Chennai. India resumed flights in domestic circuit on May 25 after a gap of two months.

Airlines are allowed to operate a maximum of 60 per cent of their pre-Covid domestic flights.

ARINDAM MAJUMDER



"WE WILL WATCH FOR ANOTHER WEEK OR 10 DAYS AND THEN WE WILL HAVE NO HESITATION TO INCREASE THE CAPACITY TO 75%

HARDEEP SINGH PURI
Civil aviation minister