



Given that it has the second largest population in the world, it's not surprising India is tipped to become a jewel in the crown for many investors. This, however, wasn't always the case. Until the 1990s, telecommunications in India were state-run with companies simply unwilling to invest in an industry where there might not be any return for several years. "The state monopoly was the main reason why the telecoms industry failed to grow," claims Amrish Kacker, senior consultant of Analysys Consulting. "The Government-owned Telco simply did things at its own very slow pace."

#### Facing the competition

In February 2002, deregulation was achieved when VSNL's (Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited) monopoly for the provision of international telecommunications ended. Although the Indian government still owns approximately 26 per cent of VSNL, other companies also have a share. VSNL also faces competition for international telephony from Bharti and Data Access, with Reliance in the process of launching its own service. Given the limited submarine cable into the country for telecoms (only VSNL and Bharti have licences) Inmarsat plays a key role in routing international calls to and from

#### CHANGING NATION

The Indian telecoms market moves slowly, but potentially it is a huge one

India on behalf of service providers. But while India's fixed telecoms infrastructure remains poor with around 36 million fixed lines installed over a period of 80 years, its mobile communications continue to grow rapidly.

According to Analysys only around one per cent of Indians (around 10 million) currently own a cellular phone. However, the level of growth is phenomenal with around 750,000 new subscribers added each month. "At this rate of growth, we expect the number of mobile phones to exceed fixed telephones within 18 months," claims Analysys' Amrish Kacker. The government has awarded four to six wireless local loop licences in each region with most companies favouring Japan and America's CDMA technology, rather than Europe's GSM system.

#### Mobile communications

Even if cellular does exceed fixed line telephony in the near future, there will still be huge areas of the country outside the cities where telecommunications simply do not reach. In addition there's a huge market for high speed data services that can't yet be delivered by mobile telephones. Fortunately, India isn't short on satellite services. "India is



## Telemedicine from Sabarimalai

*Visited by 20 million pilgrims each year, the Sanctum Sanctorum of Lord Ayyappa is a Hindu temple located in the hills of Sabarimalai. As spiritual laws prevent anyone from driving any closer than 10km, pilgrims have to walk the final stage. With the increasing number of pilgrims (over 100,000 on some days) the need to provide healthcare services for exhausted visitors is growing.*

*With the help of Elektronik Lab in India and TelemedicSystems in the UK, a remote telemedicine link has been provided that includes a Thrane & Thrane mini-M satphone and a VitalLink 1200 telemedicine unit. This monitors heart rate, blood pressure, temperature and blood oxygenation levels and sends information to experts at the Apollo Hospital's 24-hour telemedicine centre at Chennai. Teleconsulting is carried out using Inmarsat GAN connected to ISDN videoconferencing equipment. "In conjunction with VitalLink, mini-M can transmit vital signs of a suspected cardiac patient in less than three minutes for less than US\$5. That can be the difference between life and death," says Dr Reddy, Chairman of the Apollo Hospitals.*

probably one of the very few countries in the world with an array of choices for mobile satellite communications," explains Nanda Kumar of Bombay-based company Elektronik Lab, a distributor of Thrane & Thrane equipment. Although other mobile satellite companies do exist, Inmarsat remains the official mobile satellite service provider for India.

Like other regions, popular Inmarsat applications in India include the shipping industry, defence, oil and natural gas and mining. Inmarsat is also used on the Indian railways as well as community phones in villages. "The market in India is a bit slow to react – typically a few years slower than Europe. But it's a large market and has huge potential," adds Kumar.

Given the strength of India's Information Technology and software industry, Kumar believes that data services via satellite will prove increasingly popular. "Indian buyers want mostly mobile to mobile data," he adds.

Shipping remains one of the biggest Inmarsat applications in the Indian sub-continent. Through local

company Station Satcom, Xantic has been a player in the Indian maritime market for the last five years. It's a market, which the company claims, requires 24 hour local attention with 24 hour global support. Xantic works with commercial shipping lines, government companies and energy related operations to provide a diverse range of services in the region. And, like Elektronik Lab, Xantic believes there is particular interest in new IT related developments including online e-mail packages, such as Xantic's AmosConnect service. Private crew calling is also beginning to gain acceptance, reckons Xantic, with Indian crew members demanding Chat Card-reload and Crew Connect services for making private calls away from the ship's bridge.

**Thrane & Thrane** [www.tt.dk](http://www.tt.dk)

**Telemedic Systems** [www.telemedicssystem.com](http://www.telemedicssystem.com)

**Xantic** [www.xantic.net](http://www.xantic.net)

**Analysys** [www.analysys.com](http://www.analysys.com)

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