



COAI announces its leadership for the year 2019-20 at the AGM

New Delhi, 3rd June 2019: COAI, the apex industry association representing leading Telecom, Internet, Technology and Digital Services companies, concluded its Annual General Body Meeting for the Financial Year 2018-19, with the announcement of its leadership for the term 2019-20.

Mr. Balesh Sharma, Chief Executive Officer, Vodafone Idea Limited, will now hold the position of Chairman while Mr. Ajai Puri, Chief Operating Officer (India and South Asia), Bharti Airtel Limited, will continue to be the Vice Chairman of the association.

Mr. Balesh Sharma has rich experience of over two and half decades spanning across cultures and geographies, building a strong track record of transformational leadership, successful turnarounds and leading for impact. Previously, Mr. Balesh had been the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Vodafone India Ltd., Director on the board of Vodafone India Ltd. and a member of its Executive Committee. He was responsible for leading the Circle operations, Service Delivery, Marketing, Commercial and Enterprise functions including development of new business initiatives and driving innovation across the organization. He has earlier also held several senior management positions in India and internationally including as Business Head and was the Chairman and CEO of Vodafone Malta. Prior to returning to India, he was the Chairman and CEO of Vodafone Czech Republic, where he successfully transformed the business and delivered strong market share growth with net promoter score leadership and strong employee engagement.

Mr. Ajai Puri is the Chief Operating Officer (India and South Asia) at Bharti Airtel Ltd. He has been with Bharti Airtel since 2004 and has held several senior leadership positions including Director – Market Operations, Director and CEO – DTH, and CEO – Kolkata & West Bengal, Odisha. Prior to joining Bharti Airtel, Mr. Puri served as the Business Head - Foods at Cargill Foods India. He began his career with VST India Ltd, an associate company of British American Tobacco (UK).

Mr. Rajan S Mathews, Director General, COAI, extended his heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Sunil Sood and Mr. Ajai Puri, for their bold and courageous leadership over the last year. The year 2018 has been one of the most eventful and challenging year for the Indian telecom sector, replete with new developments, major disruptions and severe challenges, financially and operationally.

However, COAI remains optimistic about the future of the industry and looks to the new government to address many of the pending issues of the industry.

Mr. Balesh Sharma, Chief Executive Officer, Vodafone Idea Limited and Chairman, COAI, commented, *“I am honoured to take on the role and responsibility of the Chairman of COAI. The COAI and the telecom industry have worked shoulder to shoulder with the government, policy makers and regulator to ensure that the benefits of the connectivity are accessible to all. Today, we have a billion connections, broadband availability across the country, over half a billion mobile internet users. An ambitious National Digital Communications Policy sets the course forward for the sector holistically. The focus now should be on driving an intense collaborative effort amongst all stakeholders to deliver on India’s ambitions, aspirations and potential. At COAI we will drive a more concerted and collaborative effort towards this for we are deeply committed to translate the dream of Digital India into reality.”*



Mr. Ajai Puri, Chief Operating Officer (India and South Asia), Bharti Airtel Limited, and Vice Chairman, COAI, said, *“The telecom sector is going through challenging times, replete with major consolidation, influx of emerging technologies, technological advancements, as well as impending opportunities. I look forward to closely work with the members and bring about positive reforms that will not only uplift and strengthen the financially distressed sector but also bring in sustained benefits to end consumers.”*

Mr. Rajan S Mathews, Director General, COAI, said *“The telecom sector is the backbone of the Indian economy and with the Modi-led Government getting re-elected for the second innings, we hope the ambitious Digital India and Smart Cities program, will now gather further momentum. The Industry and the Government had been working in tandem to digitally connect & empower each and every citizen and we are confident that this partnership will strengthen in the future as India continues to achieve ever more significant milestones.”*

The AGM was followed by an informative High Level Leaders Panel Discussion on “5G in India – When and How?”, which saw contribution from senior delegates from the Government and the industry leaders, including Shri Anshu Prakash, Additional Secretary (T), Ministry of Communications; Shri Sunil K Gupta, Secretary, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India; Mr. Balesh Sharma, Chief Executive Officer, Vodafone Idea Ltd.; Mr. Jay Chen, CEO, Huawei Telecommunications (India) Co. Pvt. Ltd.; and Mr. Ankit Agarwal, CEO-Connectivity Solutions, Sterlite Technologies Ltd.

About COAI:

COAI, was constituted in 1995 as a registered, non-governmental society. COAI’s vision is to establish India as the global leader of mobile communications infrastructure, products and services and achieving a national tele density of 100 percent, including broadband. The association is also dedicated to the advancement of modern communication and towards delivering the benefits of innovative and affordable mobile communication services to the people of India. To know more please visit: www.coai.com

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