



## COAI Press Release

### ***Affordable mobile telephony services made India 'more democratic'***

***- Dr. Robin Jeffrey, author of "Cell Phone Nation"***



New Delhi, April 30, 2014

- *By 2011, India had more than 900 million phone connections in a population of 1,200 million. The arrival of inexpensive mobile phones in large numbers smashed many walls that limited the quick and reliable way of communication to a tiny percentage of the most privileged citizen.*
- *"Phones in India were meant for important people with important work to do. Not for the 'aam aadmi' or 'aam aurat'." Affordable mobile phones have made conditions "faster, more efficient and – and here is what I think is so important for India – 'more democratic'."*
- *Talking about the social (equality) effects of the mobile phone, Dr. Jeffrey gave an interesting analogy with the shoes. "If you want to limit someone's mobility and take away their dignity, you deprive them of shoes. 'Today, owning a phone' brings a strong sense of status, even dignity."*



Unimaginable things became imaginable. The changes – like those brought by the inexpensive mobile phone and service – made conditions “faster, more efficient and” – and here is what I think is so important for India – “more democratic,” observed **Dr. Robin Jeffrey, Visiting Research Professor, Institute of South Asian Studies, Singapore** and co-author of the first major book on the social changes made by mobile telephony in India, **“Cell phone Nation”**. The book is co-authored by another Australian scholar - **Dr. Assa Doron**.

Stating that mobile telephony is the most significant thing that has hit mankind since the arrival of shoes, Dr. Robin Jeffrey observed that in India mobile telephony even changed the way democracy functions, empowering the people to better information about the events around them.

“Until about 10 years ago,” observed Jeffrey, “phones in India were meant for important people with important work to do. Not for the ‘aam aadmi’ or ‘aam aurat’”. Affordable mobile phones have made conditions “faster, more efficient and – and here is what I think that is so important for India – ‘more democratic’”, Dr Jeffrey observed.

“The 2007 state elections in Uttar Pradesh were India’s first ‘mobile phone’ elections, when Mayawati managed a huge victory – thanks to her dedicated cadre armed with mobile phones to connect with voters. Current Parliamentary elections’ high turnout is surely linked with mobile phones,” observed Jeffrey. In Jeffrey’s opinion, mobile telephony has been playing an important role in India’s Lok Sabha

elections providing candidates access to their supporters, the Professor, a veteran India expert with many a book on India, pointed out.

The Professor described the mobile phone as a device that has brought fisher folk in Kerala, boatmen in Banaras, great capitalists in Mumbai and power-wielding politicians and bureaucrats in New Delhi on the same platform, ensuring a democratic equality in communications.

**Dr. Robin Jeffrey was speaking** today at the inaugural chapter of his three city lecture series “**Cellphone Nation - How mobile phones changed India**”. In New Delhi, the lecture is hosted by India International Centre (IIC). COAI has organised the lecture series to showcase the importance and critical role played by mobile phones and related communication systems in our day-to-day lives.

Speaking on the occasion, **Mr Rajan Mathews, Director General of COAI**, said, “Mobile telephony has not just emerged as the showcase sector of Indian economic reforms, but has also initiated changes in society, the way no other technology or device has done in the history of India. We, in the industry are happy to know that Dr. Jeffrey and his co-author Assa Doron have captured these unprecedented changes in their book, “Cell Phone Nation”. With the three city lecture tour of Dr Jeffrey, covering New Delhi, Chennai and Mumbai, we are sure the citizens of India will provide the mobile telephone sector the rightful place it deserves in the history of the country’s economic and social progress”.

Discussing the importance of more than 900 million mobile phone connections in a population of 1,200 million, Dr. Jeffrey said, “Even if we allow for double-counting and the fact that mobile phones are not evenly distributed, these figures mean that the mobile phone is a commonly known device and that most citizens could get access to one.”

“Why is that important? Because knowledge is power, and putting a little knowledge-Power in the hands of hundreds of millions of citizens for the first time is immensely disruptive.” he added.

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### **About Dr. Robin Jeffrey**

Dr. Robin Jeffrey is a Canada-born professor. He studied at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, from where he graduated with a BA degree. He was awarded a D. Phil in Modern Indian History by the University of Sussex, England in 1973. Dr. Jeffrey had previously worked as a school teacher in Chandigarh, India, for the Regional Institute of English and the Canadian University Service Overseas between 1967 and 1969. He is now a, Visiting Research Professor, Institute of South Asian Studies, Singapore.

### **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 innovative mobile communications infrastructure, products and services and achieving a national teledensity of 100%, 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.

[www.coai.in](http://www.coai.in)

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