

On March 21, 2011, key telecom professionals, company heads and analysts gathered at the Hyatt Regency ballroom in New Delhi for *tele.net's* Telecom Operator Awards 2011.

The evening acknowledged and applauded the telecom industry's achievements and performance during the year, which saw the sector cross the 770 million mobile subscriber mark, despite many challenges and controversies.

More than 200 guests from the industry attended the event and made it a success. Chief guest Shyamal Ghosh, former secretary, Department of Telecommunications (DoT); chairman, Telecom Commission; and former administrator of the USO Fund presented most of the awards. The Best VAS Provider and Best Infrastructure Provider awards were presented by the sponsors of the event - Jyoti Handa, regional sales director, South Asia, Dialogic and Hans Le Sage, president, SPAA05.com respectively.

Some of the prominent industry leaders present were Sanjeev Aga, managing director (MD), Idea Cellular; Anil Sardana, MD, Tata Power and former MD, Tata Teleservices Limited (TTSL); Partho Banerjee, president and MD, Hughes Communications; Vineet Taneja, executive director, mobile services, south, Bharti airtel; Drew Kelton, president, enterprise services, Bharti airtel; Sanjoy Mukerji, director, business operations, Vodafone north and east; Deepak Gulati, executive president, mobility business, TTSL; Christopher Almeida, senior vice-president, global voice solutions, Tata Communications; Rajesh Wadhwa, director, consumer fixed access, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL); B.S. Shantharaju, chief executive officer (CEO), Indus Towers; and C.V. Kane, chief operating officer, GTL Infrastructure. Also present were D.P.S. Seth, president, IPTV Forum; Kuldeep Goyal, former chairman and MD, BSNL; R.K. Agarwal, director, consumer mobility and enterprise, BSNL; Dr Mahesh Uppal, director, ComFirst; and S.C. Khanna, secretary general, AUSPI.

The winners in 14 categories were selected through an extensive survey conducted among a carefully selected group of industry professionals, sector experts and key consumers. This enabled the selection process to be fair, transparent and conclusive.

In certain categories, it was decided to present two awards as the competition was close. The CEO of the Year 2010 category, for instance, was jointly won by Aga and Sardana. Speaking on the occasion, Sardana noted, "Though I have left the telecom sector and moved back to power,

I have given three years to this sector which have been very exciting and educational. More exciting for me was the way our team came together and launched 3G in a record time of two months from the day we got spectrum.”

Bharti airtel and Vodafone Essar emerged as the winners in the Best National Mobile Operator category. In a video recording, Marten Pieters said: “Vodafone Essar is very proud to see recognition in these awards of our hard and good work.” He also quipped that the super zoozoos would always be there to help.

Another tie was between Indus Towers and GTL Infrastructure, which jointly won the Best Infrastructure Provider Award. B.S. Shantharaju of Indus Towers and Kane of GTL Infrastructure accepted the awards.

Bharti airtel emerged as the clear market leader, winning awards in five major categories - Most Admired Telecom Operator, Best National Mobile Operator, Best Enterprise Services Provider, Best VAS Provider, and Operator With Best Rural Performance. BSNL won in two categories - Best National Fixed Line Operator and Best Broadband Operator. Tata Communications bagged the award for the Best Long Distance Operator while Hughes Communications emerged as the Best VSAT Operator.

The awards function closed with Aga receiving the Outstanding Contribution to the Sector Award, which had been instituted for the first time this year. Accepting the award, Aga, a man of few words, noted, “All operators, whether big or small and including the new players, although in competition with each other, are all part of the same juggernaut to bring about change and provide telecom services to the masses. Looking at our overall performance, especially in the rural areas, I think we have achieved this. And this should give everyone in the room a sense of immense satisfaction.”

In the end, it must be said that though the award winners were few, the accomplishment of all the other players in making the Indian telecom sector the world’s fastest growing market is no less.

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