

Telecommunications Consultants India Limited (TCIL) is marked by a growing presence in the sector. In the past few months, in particular, the telecom consultancy and engineering company won a number of domestic and foreign projects.

Incorporated in 1978 by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), TCIL is today working in almost 45 countries, mainly in the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Africa, Southeast Asia and Europe. It is engaged in providing consultancy services to all these countries in fields like telecom, IT, architecture and civil. It is also involved in executing turnkey projects and providing training in IT- and telecom-related fields.

Major projects

One of the major projects undertaken by the company is the Pan-African E-Network project. This entails rolling out and running an e-network in 53 countries in Africa from India. This network is currently being used to provide e-medicine and e-education services in 47 African countries. About 12 superspeciality hospitals in India, including the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Apollo and Fortis, are connected to the countries through this network.

Besides these, there are four educational institutions in India – the Indira Gandhi National Open University, Amity, Birla Institute of Technology & Science, Pilani, and the University of Madras – where more than 6,500 students have registered from Africa and are availing of regular classroom lectures on this network. These are virtual classrooms where students can access all the lectures and ask questions. If a student misses a lecture, he can find the entire session stored in the company's web portal.

In India, TCIL is undertaking the National Internet Backbone (NIB) project for Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL). In the NIB project, the company is responsible for system integration, for which its personnel are stationed all over India, including Bengaluru, Pune and Mumbai.

For the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, TCIL is undertaking a quality of service check in the west, north and south zones. It is also commencing audit-related programmes for all leading operators like Loop Telecom.

Other initiatives

The company is busy on other fronts as well. For instance, an alliance with BSNL, Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited, the Centre for Development of Telematics and India Telephone Industries may be on the cards soon. DoT hopes that the alliance will bring about operational synergies amongst these companies. If the alliance comes through, these companies will share their telecom assets, and buy products and services at preferential rates to optimise central sector resources and withstand competition from their private sector rivals.

Meanwhile, TCIL has been looking to exit Bharti Hexacom, its joint venture (JV) with the Bharti Group in Rajasthan, for some time. However, since current market conditions do not seem to be conducive to disinvestment, this plan has been deferred. Bharti Hexacom offers mobile services in Rajasthan. Bharti holds a 70 per cent stake in the JV and the remaining 30 per cent is held by TCIL.

TCIL had asked the Bharti Group to pay a dividend, but the latter did not agree to this on the ground that Bharti Hexacom had been using internally generated resources to expand its networks to keep pace with competition. TCIL had also suggested listing Bharti Hexacom but the group had rejected this offer as well, because its flagship company, Bharti Airtel, was already listed. Hence, TCIL neither received any return on its Rs 1.06 billion investment nor did it have an effective say in the company.

Financially, the company is on a reasonably strong footing and has been able to hold its own despite severe competition. Its total income for 2010-11 stood at Rs 18.33 billion and profit after tax at Rs 1.63 billion.

Conclusion

While TCIL is doing well in its areas of operation, there are concerns that against competitors like GTL and Nu Tek, the company's PSU image may prove to be its undoing. According to analysts, bureaucratic inertia, delays in decision-making and high manpower costs could hold the company back from executing its plans swiftly.

However, industry experts agree that TCIL's extensive experience in executing turnkey telecom projects, and the healthy demand for telecom as well as information and communication technology products will help it to expand its footprint in India and abroad.

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