Forum: Views of key industry stakeholders

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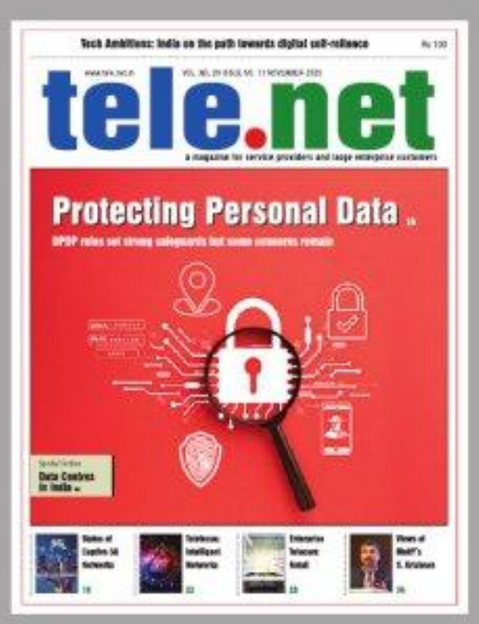

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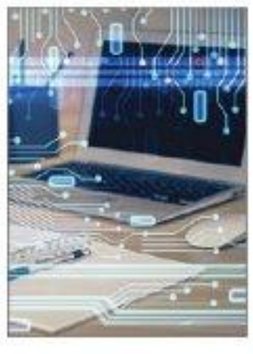

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Interview with Manish Agrawal

"We are building resilient, scalable and sustainable digital infrastructure for India"

Manish Agrawal
Chief Executive Officer,
Conductor and Telecom
Businesses,
APAR Industries Limited, and
Managing Director,
APAR T&D Projects Private Limited

The demand for robust, next-generation digital infrastructure has reached an unprecedented scale. Manish Agrawal, Chief Executive Officer, Conductor and Telecom Businesses, APAR Industries Limited, and Managing Director, APAR T&D Projects Private Limited, shares his insights on the evolving digital infrastructure landscape and how APAR is transitioning from a product vendor to a full-stack infrastructure partner amid the rising demand for high-density fibre.

India's digital infrastructure is evolving rapidly, with telecom, data centres, railways and defence increasingly converging. How is APAR Telecom positioning itself to stay relevant across such diverse and mission-critical segments?

India's digital evolution is no longer confined to consumer connectivity – it is becoming deeply embedded in critical infrastructure, enterprise operations and national security systems. This shift demands digital solutions that are not only high-performing, but also resilient, scalable and sustainable – engineered for very specific operating environments. At APAR Telecom, we have aligned our strategy to address this convergence by strengthening both our technology depth and our execution capabilities.

We are expanding beyond traditional cable manufacturing into integrated infrastructure solutions that support telecom networks, rail safety systems, data centres, defence communications and utility-backed fibre deployments. Our work with Indian Railways on safety-critical telecom infrastructure, our growing engagement in defence connectivity, and our focus on fibre asset monetisation through utility partnerships reflect this broader role.

Going forward, our emphasis will be on engineering-led solutions, turnkey execution and long-term partnerships that allow us to support India's digital infrastructure not just as a supplier, but as a trusted, end-to-end solutions partner.

"India's digital evolution is becoming deeply embedded in critical infrastructure, enterprise operations and national security systems."

With the successful execution of turnkey projects in tough terrain during 2025, how has APAR's role shifted from being a product vendor to a full-stack infrastructure partner?

As mentioned earlier, APAR's role has evolved decisively from that of a product supplier to a full-stack infrastructure partner.

Our end-to-end turnkey capabilities span design, engineering, deployment, testing and lifecycle support, enabling private telcos to rely on a single accountable partner for network outcomes. We have not only executed underground projects, but have also delivered aerial projects, demonstrating versatility across deployment environments.

Beyond this, we have partnered with Indian Railways, for which APAR is building robust telecom infrastructure – including fibre networks and towers along railway corridors – to support the safety-critical Kavach system. This requires precision execution, high reliability and deep engineering coordination across multiple stakeholders.

This expanded role reflects our broader strategy to move up the value chain and support India's digital and transport infrastructure not just with products, but with integrated, outcome-driven solutions. With respect to railways, our focus is on strengthening connectivity frameworks that enhance rail safety, enable real-time communication and create a more secure, resilient and future-ready railway ecosystem.

A year ago, you advocated for leveraging the existing infrastructure of power, oil and gas utilities for projects such as BharatNet. Following the recent awards for BharatNet Phase III, to what extent has this synergy model been adopted in 2025?

There has been growing recognition that leveraging existing power and oil and gas utility corridors can offer a more efficient pathway to expanding rural broadband while helping address right-of-way and deployment challenges. The use of utility-owned optical ground wire (OPGW) networks is increasingly being evalu-

ated as a practical and scalable approach to support broadband roll-out in underserved regions and offer reliable connectivity.

Building on this momentum, APAR has taken a structural step forward by creating a dedicated business vertical, GridComm, focused on operating and monetising existing OPGW dark fibre assets through public-private partnership frameworks. As part of this initiative, we secured our first order from Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited for the operation and monetisation of approximately 6,100 km of fibre network over a 15-year period.

This model unlocks latent value in utility infrastructure while creating a robust backbone for telecom operators and digital service providers. It also demonstrates how power and telecom infrastructure can be integrated to deliver scalable, cost-effective connectivity, particularly in remote areas, and enable data centre connectivity.

Given India's growing role as a data hub in 2025, how is APAR preparing its manufacturing facilities for underwater communications projects?

India's emergence as a data hub has significantly strengthened the strategic case for indigenous submarine cable manufacturing. There is growing recognition within the ecosystem of its critical role in national digital infrastructure, data sovereignty and global connectivity.

At APAR, we are systematically upgrading our manufacturing infrastructure, strengthening quality and process controls, and aligning our facilities with international submarine cable standards and qualification requirements. Our approach is deliberate: to build long-term, globally competitive capability rather than short-term capacity expansion.

As a tangible milestone, APAR has successfully designed and manufactured its first batch of submarine fibre optic cables in India, which has been delivered to an eminent client after clearing stringent factory acceptance tests at our advanced production facilities and securing third-party approvals. This achievement demonstrates not only manufacturing readiness, but also engineering depth and process discipline aligned with global requirements.

We view this as an important step in strengthening India's indigenous capabilities in subsea communication and energy infrastructure, and in positioning the country as a credible participant in global underwater connectivity systems.

Hyperscale data centres and artificial intelligence (AI) are the next big drivers for fibre demand. As we move into 2026, how is APAR responding to the need for high-density fibre?

As hyperscale data centres and AI-driven applications expand rapidly, fibre networks are facing unprecedented demand for density, reliability and scalability. Over the past year, APAR has been investing in innovative and advanced cable designs suited for congested urban environments and data centre interconnects. Moving into 2026, our response is focused on enabling system operators to deploy more fibre and power with improved thermal performance, bend resilience and long-term reliability. These solutions are designed to support both current requirements and future upgrades without repeated civil interventions.

How is APAR's R&D sharpening its renewable energy focus to ensure that India's 6G infrastructure is not only technologically advanced but also meets global environmental goals?

APAR's telecom cable portfolio includes products and technology innovations that are aligned with sustainability principles and environmental stewardship. The company's approach blends efficient design, reduced environmental impact and long-life performance, which together support greener network deployments. A key example is APAR's GigaVolt hybrid cable, which integrates fibre and power into a single solution, simplifying deployment and reducing duplicated infrastructure.

In addition, APAR's cables are engineered for durability and long-term performance, minimising the need for frequent replacements and lowering the overall carbon footprint over their lifecycle. Supported by the company's broader sustainability initiatives across cables, conductors and renewable energy products, APAR's telecom offerings contribute meaningfully to environmentally responsible, digital infrastructure development. ▲