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This year, our focus is on maximising 3G revenues

Aircel, which was relatively quiet during the recently concluded spectrum auctions, hopes to get more customers on its 3G platform before further expanding in the country. Its chief technology officer (CTO) Sameer Dave tells Rhik Kundu that while the telco is bullish on the data business, it is optimising its network to handle the enormous pressure likely to be exerted by both data and voice. Excerpts

Aircel was not seen as a major player in the recent auctions. Will this affect your expansion plans?

We are yet to utilise our existing 900MHz and 1800MHz spectrum fully. We bought 1,800MHz spectrum in five circles — West Bengal, Jammu and Kashmir, UP (East), Rajasthan and North East — in 2014, where services have already been rolled out. Going forward, Aircel will look to get more

customers on its 3G platform, which will pave the way for further expansion. We are also growing very fast in east and south India, which will allow us to expand further in these areas.

At a time when telcos are very bullish on data, and with Reliance Jio expected to roll out 4G services pan-India by the end of the year, how is Aircel positioning itself to benefit from the data surge?

Aircel, which has 4G licences in eight circles and 3G licences in 13, doesn't see R.Jio as a threat. From the technology standpoint, 3G services haven't yet been fully utilised in India. However, based on the demand for data services from our customers, we are confident of achieving huge growth. During calendar year (CY) 2014, our revenues from data grew by almost 75% over the previous year.



We expect our data revenues to grow by 75-100% in CY 2015 compared to the year before. We are very bullish

on the data business, which stands at about 75 petabytes (PB) per month for the industry.

How much data do your customers consume? What's the outlook like?

In December, our subscribers consumed 5.5-6 petabytes (PB) per month. Consumption by the industry is set to increase to 700 PB in the next seven years, which will position data as a major engine of growth. All operators, including Aircel, will ride on the data wave, aided by the development of the data ecosystem. Aircel's focus this year will be on maximising revenues from 3G services.

What are your expansion plans?

We are expanding and adding new capacity in some circles in south India such as Tamil Nadu, Chennai,

Bangalore and Mysore, apart from areas in east and north-east India, such as West Bengal and Assam.

Besides, we are optimising our network in these areas for both data and voice. These exercises will help our network handle the enormous pressure that is expected to be exerted from both data and voice in near future.

What's the basis of your ambitious subscriber addition plan?

Our plan is largely two-pronged: increase the business from the enterprise segment and attract a lot of youngsters. At present, we have about 1,200 customers in the enterprise segment, which is expected to increase by about 20% in 12-18 months' time. Our strategy also includes attracting the youth by keeping pricing very competitive.