

Internet use rose 25pc during pandemic-induced lockdowns

ISLAMABAD: There seems to be a shift in consumer behaviour from voice to data usage and the telecom sector may require cost-cutting measures in infrastructure and meet the growing demand of the internet. More submarine cable companies may soon enter the Pakistani market.

These views have been expressed by Edotco Pakistan's managing director Arif Hussain.

Talking to media, he said that recent lockdowns and the Covid-19 pandemic had exposed the need for reliance on data and internet use, which had increased by 25 per cent whereas the revenues from the voice traffic declined by around 10pc.

Mr Hussain said the year 2020 had been a year of learning for the telecom sector. It created new opportunities for providing better services in existing network areas.

Edotco is a multinational company that provides integrated telecommunications infrastructure services such as sharing of telecom infrastructure and maintaining it as a third party. Edotco has worked with all the four telecom operators of the country.

As the demand for internet use grows rapidly in the country, there are two existing submarine cables while the infrastructure development continues for the third cable that is expected to come online by 2021. A fourth company is planning to bring a submarine cable with its landing station in Gwadar. It will run along the coastal highway to Karachi.

Official sees more submarine cable firms entering local market

According to Mr Hussain, there will be a serious competition in internet prices which will eventually benefit users. But, he added, the ISPs needed to adopt cost-cutting measures mainly in non-technical fields.

According to official data, around 25pc of the population which is close to 50 million people do not have access to basic telephonic services, and the government is planning to provide access to telecom network along with internet services across Pakistan.

While Mr Hussain is of the view that the use of broadband services is not just reserved for entertainment programmes or corporate works for the elite, the industry has realised in the postpandemic scenario that people have significant data needs so the next stage should be about improving coverage.

He referred to various social media platforms which are watched by even workmen to improve their skills, and a large number of housewives have launched micro-level businesses at such platforms.

"Since these people, including the plumbers etc, are earning from the internet, they are willing to pay for it too," he said.

At the same time, he suggested, the future of the telecom sector is in reducing cost in various fields such as adopting the tower and other infrastructure sharing models.

"The shareable infrastructure could reduce capital expenditure as well as the operating expenditure for telcos and would allow them to penetrate into wider markets, including Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and erstwhile Fata."

He expressed the confidence that auction unsold 1,800 and 2,100 MHz band spectrum would help expand 3G and 4G services, and eventually 4G subscribers would increase.