Hughes Communications India gets flight and maritime connectivity licence

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Hughes Communications India (HCIL) Thursday said it has received Flight and Maritime Connectivity licence from the government, that authorises it to offer high-quality broadband services in ships and aircraft, within Indian territory.

With this, HCIL becomes the first company to be granted the Flight and Maritime Connectivity (FMC) licence in India by the telecom department, after the government notified rules for in-flight, maritime mobile phone services in December last year.

HCIL is a majority-owned subsidiary of broadband network and services provider Hughes Network Systems.

"The first company to be granted the FMC licence in India, HCIL is now authorised to provide in-flight connectivity and high-quality broadband services to Indian and foreign airlines and shipping companies operating within Indian territory," HCIL said in a statement.

The company has already set up a base mobility platform and is in talks to enhance the services in India, it added. The statement did not divulge details about potential tie-ups with specific airlines, likely tariffs, or timeframe in which the services could be available.

A source however said the connectivity could be in place in about three months for in-flight services, and before that for ships.

Once the alliances with airlines are in place, travellers will be able to stay connected during a flight with internet access and possibly also have voice services through apps during air travel within Indian territory, the source said.

The FMC licence has been granted for a period of 10 years, and HCIL will pay spectrum charges based on revenue earned from providing these services, which can be delivered using both satellites and telecom networks on the ground.

HCIL will provide FMC services in India operating over domestic and foreign satellites permitted by the Department of Space, the statement said.

Since the policy was first published by regulatory authorities in mid-December 2018, it has generated a lot of interest from India's maritime and airline industries and HCIL looks forward to supporting them in the rapidly growing opportunity for in-flight and maritime connectivity services, the statement said.

Commenting on the development, Partho Banerjee, President & Managing Director at Hughes Communications India said: "We stand ready operationally to initiate high quality broadband services for both airlines and maritime operators, including having the availability of ubiquitous satellite coverage across Indian airspace and territorial waters".

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Northern Sky Research's Aeronautical SatCom Market's 2017 report predicts that by the end of 2019, broadband VSAT connectivity will be installed on one out of every three commercial passenger aircraft and will rise to two out of every three by the end of 2026.

Fuelled by rising demand for broadband connectivity, this installed base is estimated to generate over USD 32 billion in revenue over the next decade, as air travel continues its rise around the world.

The connectivity needs in maritime industry are also growing leaps and bounds.

An increasing number of vessels are looking to stay connected to provide their crew and passengers high-speed internet access, monitoring weather patterns to cut fuel costs, filing regulatory documents, ordering supplies from sea to save time in port, and generating

business intelligence.

Over 44,242 ships are equipped with Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) in 2018, double the last recorded number in 2013, the Hughes statement said citing data by Comsys.